European Social Survey
European Research Infrastructure Consortium

ESS Round 12 Survey Specification for ESS ERIC Member, Observer and Guest Countries

v3
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This Specification has been developed by the European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC) Director, in collaboration with the Core Scientific Team (CST).

It outlines the national requirements for each ESS ERIC Member (or Observer or Guest) participating in the twelfth round of the ESS, in accordance with Article 5.c.i in the ESS ERIC Statutes (or the procedure for Guest countries) and drawing on experience from the previous rounds of the ESS.

1. Introduction

The European Social Survey (ESS) is a biennial cross-national general social survey run by the ESS European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC).

The ESS ERIC Headquarters are located at City, University of London, UK where the Director is located. The ESS ERIC has a Core Scientific Team (CST) that comprises Headquarters and other institutions in Europe. The institutions in the CST are listed on the ESS website: https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about/structure-and-governance **Headquarters and the seven CST institutions will henceforward be referred to as the CST.**

According to the Statutes of ESS ERIC[1] and its updated description of work, its principal objectives and tasks are to establish and operate a research infrastructure with the following main objectives:

- operate a Research Infrastructure providing high quality data measuring change (and stability) over time within and between European countries in their living conditions, social structure, public opinion and attitudes;
- practise and promote the highest scientific standards in cross-national comparative research in the social sciences;
- continue the development of the ESS infrastructure through ongoing methodological research and innovation;
- facilitate training in the effective use of ESS data;
- ensure the visibility, accessibility and reach of ESS data among researchers in the social sciences and beyond, policy makers and the wider public, at both the national and international level.

The present document, called the Specification for short, outlines the tasks and responsibilities of the ESS ERIC Members, Observers and Guests regarding the implementation of the twelfth round of the European Social Survey (ESS Round 12).

As noted in the next section, ESS Round 12 will be a mixed-mode round. Countries are required to deliver half their effective sample using face-to-face fieldwork and the other half using self-completion (web and paper) data collection. Most sections of this document have been combined to cover both approaches together. However, separate standalone sections are included for fieldwork/data collection activities associated with each approach (section 10 for face-to-face and section 11 for self-completion).

This is version 2 of the Round 12 Specification. A small number of changes have been made from version 1, which was released on 10th January 2024. Section 14 of this document summarises these changes.

[1] https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/ESS_ERIC_Statutes_230922_0.pdf

2. Changes over time

2.1 Major changes compared to ESS Round 11

The biggest change from ESS Round 11 is a move from a fully face-to-face data collection approach to a mixed-mode approach, comprising half face-to-face interviewing and half self-completion (web and paper). In earlier rounds (Round 1 through to Round 11) all data collection from respondents took place face-to-face (including video interviews)[2]. The mixed-mode approach at Round 12 will act as a bridge to ESS's full self-completion approach, which will commence from ESS Round 13.

The sections below outline the change in data collection approach for Round 12 and the implications of this for NCs. Information on the important design differences for the self-completion part of the sample is also included in this section. However, this is not exhaustive and the full specification should be reviewed in detail.

Data collection approaches

ESS Round 12 will be a mixed-mode round. Countries should deliver half of their effective interviews using face-to-face interviewing and the other half using self-completion. The minimum sample size targets per approach and overall are as follows:

- For countries with eligible (15+) populations of at least 2 million: 1,600 effective achieved interviews, divided into 800 face-to-face cases and 800 self-completion cases.
- For countries with eligible (15+) populations below 2 million: 860 effective achieved interviews, divided into 430 face-to-face cases and 430 self-completion cases.

Sample(s) should be drawn to cover the face-to-face and self-completion approaches. Sample units should be randomly assigned to either approach, ideally within PSUs. If it is not possible to randomly allocate cases within PSUs for practical or budgetary reasons, it is acceptable to allocate full PSUs to either mode in a manner agreed with the CST in advance.

The self-completion approach comprises web and paper questionnaires. Countries are required to offer both web and paper options to respondents, though they may choose to take a sequential approach where paper questionnaires are sent with a later reminder.

For self-completion, countries can choose **either** to follow a **postal first approach** (where contacts with sample units are made initially using written communications sent in the post) **or** a **fieldworker assisted first** approach where initial contact with sample units is made in-person by a fieldworker. The choice made on this issue impacts the approach to be followed at different stages of the survey life cycle.

No questionnaires should ever be administered using interviewers for cases allocated to self-completion.

Fieldwork period

The Round 12 fieldwork period will open on 1 September 2025. **All countries should aim to start their face-to-face fieldwork as close to this date as possible.**

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[2] The only exception was ESS Round 10 where self-completion (web and paper) was allowed during the pandemic. Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Israel, Latvia, Poland, Serbia, Spain and Sweden collected Round 10 data using self-completion.

Countries that are unable to start their face-to-face fieldwork by 1 November 2025 should not take part in the Round.

The self-completion data collection can start later than the face-to-face fieldwork. This reflects an expectation that face-to-face fieldwork will take longer than self-completion data collection in most countries. Self-completion data collection should start and finish within the period allocated for face-to-face fieldwork.

All Round 12 data collection must be completed by 15 May 2026.

Time allocation for NCs

It is anticipated that an NC will need to spend about 10 months full-time equivalent on their tasks in one round (over 24 months). This is an increase from the 6 months that was anticipated for NCs under the fully face-to-face approach, and reflects the additional tasks arising from the mixed-mode round. NCs completely new to the ESS will require an additional 2 months full-time equivalent to perform their tasks.

Survey agency

As at previous rounds, NCs are ultimately responsible for all tasks at national level but they may delegate these to survey agencies or other third-party suppliers as required. NCs should consider the requirements for agencies based on the mixed-mode approach for Round 12. For example, some countries may require agencies for face-to-face fieldwork but be able to manage some or all of the tasks covered by the self-completion approach in-house. It will be up to each NC to decide on the best approach for their country.

Questionnaire and translations

A single source questionnaire will be produced and released to NCs covering all modes (face-to-face, web and paper self-completion). Differences between modes will be kept to a minimum and clearly highlighted in the source questionnaire.

The web and paper self-completion instruments will be provided centrally by Centerdata and use of these central tools is a mandatory requirement. The national paper self-completion questionnaires (for each language version) will be produced in Centerdata's platform. NCs will then need to fully check the web and paper questionnaires before the start of their data collection. There may also be a need for minor formatting edits in the paper questionnaires. NCs will need access to Adobe's InDesign software package for this process.

All countries will also be required to use Centerdata's translation platform (TranslationCTRL) for both their face-to-face and self-completion translations. The use of TranslationCTRL will be provided free of charge to national teams.

Countries that used Centerdata's face-to-face survey tool suite for Round 11 will be able to use this again for Round 12 (provided free of charge to national teams). Countries that have not used the tool suite in the past will need to continue to arrange their CAPI tools themselves.

Translation checks and verification

Under the self-completion approach, it is especially important that translated respondent materials match the source documents. Therefore, the invitation/reminder letters and data protection leaflet will be checked for consistency/accuracy as part of the translation process.

Questionnaire translation checks will focus on the new items for Round 12 in the repeat modules (approximately 20 items). Some checks will also be made by the ESS Translations Team to compare face-to-face and self-completion translations.

Sampling

NCs will need to submit a single Sample Design Summary (SDS) including their design for both the face-to-face and self-completion approaches. A single Sample Design Data File (SDDF) covering both approaches will need to be submitted at the end of fieldwork.

Reserve samples

It is a requirement that all countries draw reserve samples in advance of Round 12 data collection. Reserve samples should be included for both the face-to-face and self-completion parts of the sample. For self-completion, this reflects increased uncertainty over response rates due to changes in data collection mode and also provides contingency in case of problems identified during the soft launch.

Country level feasibility testing, pre-testing, and soft launch

Countries that do not have national evidence that they can deliver the self-completion approach effectively from previous ESS rounds or comparable surveys[3] must carry out a feasibility test of their proposed approach prior to main stage Round 12 data collection.

All countries are required to carry out a minimum of 30 pre-test interviews. This it to provide a test of the final translated questionnaires in advance of main stage data collection. For Round 12, the pre-test should focus on the self-completion questionnaire (web and paper).

All countries are required to carry out a soft-launch of their self-completion approach in advance of their full main stage launch. This involves starting data collection with a small subset of their gross sample and means that any errors uncovered do not impact their full sample. Assuming there are no errors/quality issues, soft launch cases can be included as part of the country's achieved sample.

Data Processing Agreement

As for previous rounds, all participating countries are required to sign a Data Processing Agreement (DPA) with ESS ERIC. This includes the details relating to arrangements for processing personal data. The DPA needs to be signed by the NC institution (the Processor) and ESS ERIC (the Controller) before any data collection can start, including pre-testing activities. **For Round 12, there will be single DPA covering both the face-to-face and self-completion approaches**. A template for the DPA will be provided to NCs. There will also be opportunities to discuss the DPA with the ESS ERIC Data Protection Officer (DPO) and ESS HQ during Round 12 preparations.

Briefings

Where fieldworkers are being used as part of the self-completion approach, all fieldworkers should receive an in-person briefing (including virtual formats) to train them in their role. As at Round 11, all interviewers carrying out face-to-face fieldwork are required to receive an in-person briefing (including virtual formats).

[3] The CST shall determine if the evidence is sufficient.

Incentives

For the self-completion approach, countries using the postal first method are required to use an unconditional monetary incentive[4]. The only exceptions to this are where it is illegal to send monetary incentives, it is not possible to send them by post (private providers should be considered if state mail prevents this) or if it creates a tax burden for respondents. In cases where any of these barriers apply, a significant non-monetary incentive must be offered.

Fieldworker non-response phase for self-completion

As part of the self-completion approach, countries that use the postal-first approach and an address-based sample will need to use fieldworkers to make in-person visits to non-responders after the postal mailings phase. Countries that use individual samples may be exempt from this phase if they can use an alternative approach that targets non-responding cases beyond the standard mailings phase. Where this applies, alternative strategies will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the CST.

Data entry

Paper self-completion questionnaires must either be keyed manually into a data entry questionnaire that is provided as part of Centerdata's central data collection platform or scanned and then merged with the web data.

Data processing

NCs will need to deliver a combined main data file to the ESS Data Archive including all interviews across face-to-face and self-completion approaches. It is expected that separate contact data files will need to be prepared for each approach.

National funding and timetable

General Assembly (GA) representatives are reminded that funding national fieldwork is a condition of membership of ESS ERIC. In ESS Round 12 GA members are expected to ensure that national funding is in place so that face-to-face fieldwork can start in September 2025. Countries not able to start their face-to-face fieldwork by 1 November 2025 will be directed to postpone until the following round; however, ESS ERIC membership fees will still be payable.

2.2 Changes to the face-to-face approach from Round 11

As noted above, the scale of face-to-face interviewing has roughly halved since Round 11 as part of the mixed-mode Round 12. A small number of changes have been made to the face-to-face requirements for Round 12 to make this mixed-mode round more manageable for NCs. These changes include:

- There is no SQP coding as part of the translation phase (for all approaches at Round 12). Some formal translation checks will be carried out by the ESS Translation Team but this will not require any coding by national teams.
- There is no longer a requirement to submit fieldwork projections prior to fieldwork.
- For countries using the FMS upload portal for face-to-face fieldwork monitoring, uploads only need to be provided fortnightly (and not weekly, as at previous rounds). However, countries can still provide weekly uploads if this is preferred.

[4] This includes vouchers but excludes entry into prize draws or lotteries.

- The requirement to back-check cases coded to ineligible outcomes has been removed. Information on respondent back-checks also no longer needs to be included as part of the contact data file.
- There is no requirement to run interim checks on interviewer behaviour using the tool provided by the CST. However, this tool will still be available to countries who choose to run these checks.
- The Contact Form is being reviewed to consider simplifications to reduce burden for interviewers and those processing this data.
- The Round 12 pre-test will focus on the self-completion questionnaires (web and paper). There is no requirement to pre-test the face-to-face questionnaire with respondents before the main fieldwork start (however, it should be extensively desk-tested by NCs and agencies).
- There have been some reductions to the list of deliverables to the ESS Data Archive following Round 12 fieldwork. This includes removal of separate data files for parents' occupation, verbatim recorded answers (now to be included as part of the raw data file), and verbatim recorded ancestry (this applies to both the face-to-face and self-completion approaches).

3. Key Information on the survey

The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically driven cross-national survey, founded in 2001. Since 2013, the ESS has been legally established as a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC). The host country is the UK. The Director of the ESS ERIC is Professor Rory Fitzgerald and the ESS ERIC Headquarters (HQ) are at City, University of London. The Core Scientific Team (CST, section 1) comprises the HQ and seven other institutions.

Survey data is usually collected biennially (every second year). The survey aims for optimal comparability, standardised approaches across countries and requires detailed documentation. Key characteristics of the survey are:

- Rigorous probability sampling procedures (section 9) and high target response rates (sections 10 and 11) aiming to ensure that the target population of all adults aged 15+ in residential accommodation is adequately represented.
- Innovative and extensive theoretically driven questionnaire design as well as translation procedures followed by thorough assessment, aiming for optimal comparability across countries (section 7).
- Standardised data collection approaches to ensure optimal comparability across countries. For face-to-face fieldwork, this includes a high emphasis on training and briefing interviewers and extensive monitoring of fieldwork progress. For self-completion data collection, this includes consistent communication materials across languages and countries, universal use of unconditional incentives, use of a central data collection platform, and strategic deployment of fieldworkers in countries where this is required (see sections 10 and 11).
- For the face-to-face approach, computer-assisted survey administration. For the self-completion approach, web and paper survey administration to maximise the chance of participation and to facilitate broad country coverage[5].
- Detailed documentation of survey processes, data collection, and outcomes, disseminated freely via the ESS ERIC website.
- Provision of support to NCs through expert teams and Country Contacts.
- Adherence to international quality and ethical procedures.
- Rigorous processing of data and metadata, and adherence to national and European data protection regulations, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Free and equal access to data and metadata for non-commercial use.
- Provision of top-line summary booklets of the data to encourage (non-academic) interest in the findings.

The ESS ERIC Director will assign each country a 'Country Contact' (CC) to support National Coordinators through the monitoring of progress of each step of the survey life cycle and the provision of assistance (where necessary). CCs have a global view of each country's achievements and challenges and can identify areas where comparability across rounds and between countries might be failing. They also facilitate round-to-round improvements in each country. The CC will help guide NCs on preparations and monitoring for both the face-to-face and self-completion approaches.

The ESS ERIC subscribes to the Declaration on Ethics of the International Statistical Institute (ISI)[6] to which the Survey Agencies that conduct the data collection will be asked to adhere, in addition to any co-existing national obligations that they may have.

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[5] Countries may opt for a sequential web first design or a concurrent design. However, all countries must offer both web and paper questionnaires in the survey life cycle.
[6] https://www.isi-web.org/isi-declaration-professional-ethics-0

4. Information for the General Assembly

As per the statutes of ESS ERIC Members, Observers and Guests have to ensure that the national costs for Round 12 are fully met. This is an obligation for all groups of participating countries. Leaving the funding of the survey to an open competitive call should therefore be avoided. National survey and coordination costs are equally as important as the central fee for ESS ERIC.

The tasks the National Coordinator must perform or arrange for other to perform under their supervision are as follows (sections 7 to 13):

- Communicating with the CST and attending three NC Forum meetings per year (for Round 12, we expect one in-person meeting and two virtual meetings in 2024, and two in-person meetings and one virtual meeting in 2025).
- Selecting and liaising with the Survey Agency or other third-party suppliers (where applicable).
- Signing a Data Processor Agreement with the ESS ERIC.
- Ensuring data protection, anonymity and confidentiality and full compliance with applicable data protection laws.
- Participating in questionnaire development, translation and pre-testing, including carrying out a national pre-test.
- Discussing available sampling frames and sampling procedures with the Sampling and Weighting Expert Panel (SWEP) and ensuring these are signed off before fieldwork begins.
- Providing a sampling frame.
- Briefing and training interviewers for the face-to-face approach and (where applicable) fieldworkers for the self-completion approach.
- Preparing and issuing survey materials (e.g. advance and invitation letters).
- Identifying optimal respondent incentives and arranging their purchase and dispatch (incentives are compulsory for the self-completion approach and optional for the face-to-face approach).
- Preparing for and planning data collection. For the self-completion approach, this includes recording the return of paper questionnaires.
- Delivering and overseeing data collection for the face-to-face and self-completion approaches. For the self-completion approach, this includes arranging mailing of invitation and reminder letters and/or deployment of fieldworkers as outlined in the specification.
- Delivering the target (effective) sample size, while maximising response rates and ensuring a nationally representative sample.
- Arranging return, recording, and data entry or scanning of completed paper questionnaires for the self-completion approach.
- Preparing, depositing and finalising data and other deliverables to the ESS Data Archive and communicating with the ESS Data Archive.
- Adhering to national and institutional ethical procedures.
- Disseminating ESS findings and methodological outcomes.
- Arranging for a survey agency representative to attend a Field Directors' Meeting (where applicable).

Some of these tasks may be performed by NCs or their wider national coordination team. Other tasks may be delegated to a survey agency, printing house / mail house, keying agency or other third-party provider. The NC remains ultimately responsible for their delivery.

In the next sections, Members, Observers and Guests of ESS ERIC will be referred to as ESS ERIC Members, given that Observers and Guests have exactly the same obligations as Members with regard to fieldwork and data delivery.

ESS ERIC General Assembly Member representatives are advised to speak to their National Coordinator to discuss the resources required to meet the ESS Round 12 Specification. These will often be different from those required for a fully face-to-face fieldwork round. These conversations must take place prior to setting the budget and the issuing of invitations to tender. If a national coordinator has not been appointed at this stage and it is not possible to speak to the coordinator from the previous round, GA Members should contact ESS HQ.

5. National Coordinators, Survey Agencies tasks and other suppliers' tasks and activities

5.1 Introduction

According to the Statutes of the ESS ERIC (art. 13.6), each Member shall appoint and finance a National Coordinator (NC). The selection process of the National Coordinator will vary between countries according to local circumstances, conventions and requirements. Some countries choose to appoint a team of additional researchers to support the NC. The CST can advise on or assist in the selection process if required but must be consulted with sufficient time to ensure that the appointments comply with the ESS ERIC timetable.

The National Coordinator will:

- be a person of standing within the social science community of their country,
- be familiar at first hand with survey methodology and procedures, in particular self-completion approaches,
- be knowledgeable about past national or sub-national studies of a similar nature,
- be fluent in spoken and written English,
- be willing to oversee the work of the survey organisation or other third parties responsible for parts of the survey life cycle,
- have experience of cross-national research,
- be accepting of the ESS Specification,
- act as a data processor in full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

Although most of the work will have to be done after November 2024, the NC should be appointed in time for them to make a general planning of the survey, (to help) to select the Survey Agency or other third-party organisations (as applicable), and to comment on the question module design process between January and November 2024. The NC must not have any other key role within the ESS ERIC organisational structure (e.g. GA representative or SAB Member).

In many countries, there will be a National Coordinating team. As the NC is ultimately responsible for overseeing and coordinating the activities, we will simply refer to 'NCs' in the following text. The NC team should together provide sufficient expertise covering all relevant areas of the survey life cycle to ensure a smooth ESS survey process.

The NC MUST ensure that national data (including summary outcomes and overviews) are not published or reported in any way before the release of the harmonised data file comprising their national data (sections 8 and 12).

5.2 NC workload and time budget

The workload of the NC will vary over the period of the survey. From previous rounds, it is clear that the bulk of the work is likely to take place across four stages for Round 12:

1) preparation for data collection and country questionnaires, including translations,
2) start of data collection and progress monitoring,
3) data preparation and processing,
4) dissemination of results.

It is anticipated that an NC with previous ESS experience will need to spend about 10 months' full-time equivalent on their tasks at Round 12 (over 24 months). This is an increase from the expected workload at Round 11 and reflects the inclusion of two data collection approaches at Round 12.

The precise number of person-months required by an NC may depend on national factors. This might include whether a postal-first or fieldworker-first approach to the self-completion element is adopted (it is expected that the fieldworker-first approach will require greater oversight), the number of languages to be fielded, tasks delegated to the Survey Agency or other third party, and relevant survey methodology experience (especially random sampling, face-to-face interviewing, self-completion data collection, and progress monitoring).

NCs completely new to the ESS are expected to require an additional 2 months full-time equivalent to perform their tasks regardless of the approach being taken.

5.3 NC activities

A detailed overview of NC activities before, during and after data collection is given in the next sections. The key roles of the NC are to coordinate activities of the ESS ERIC at a national level and ensure national compliance with the ESS Specification for that round. Some of these tasks may be performed by external survey agencies or other suppliers. In addition, the NCs are expected to contribute to strategic discussions about the ESS methodology and detailed discussions on ESS questionnaire design. The list of activities below is not intended to be exhaustive but provides a summary of the main tasks and responsibilities of the NC when preparing and overseeing implementation of the ESS in each country.

Communication

Almost all communications between the NC and the CST should be conducted via the Round 12 version of the myESS project portal (myESS R12).

The CST Country Contacts (CCs, see section 3) will oversee and monitor the progress of each step of the survey life cycle and support NCs as necessary. NCs will liaise directly with the different CST work packages, but also with CCs on cross-cutting issues. CCs will be included in all myESS R12 correspondence between the NC and the relevant CST work package experts.

The NC will:

- serve as the link between the national ESS ERIC Member, the national Survey Agency (and other suppliers) where appointed, and the CST,
- be the primary point of contact with the CST/CC on all aspects of the ESS in their country for the current round for which they are appointed, as well as for previous rounds in which their country participated,
- attend meetings of the ESS ERIC NC Forum (five meetings are expected over the 2-year period covered by Round 12 preparations and delivery, comprising two in-person meetings and three virtual meetings),
- possibly represent the NC Forum in other committees (e.g. CST, GA).

Implementation

The NC will ultimately be responsible for ensuring the implementation of the rigorous, standardised set of procedures and methods according to the pre-specified designs and timetable outlined throughout this document. Certain tasks will be carried out by the NC, independent of any Survey Agency, whilst others can be carried out in cooperation with the Survey Agency, other third party or delegated to them. NCs' key tasks will include (but are not limited to):

Main questionnaire design (section 7)

- advise the ESS Question Module Design Teams (QDTs) on question content and construction and provide detailed comments on two or more drafts of the question modules,
- liaise with the CST on question adaptation and consultation processes as required (e.g. on measures of partnership status, education, religion, income and ancestry).

Production of country questionnaires (section 7)

- using Centerdata's TranslationCTRL portal to document the process of translating the English source questionnaire according to the ESS procedures into all languages spoken as a first language by 5% or more of the population,
- follow translation assessment steps:
  1) team review and adjudication,
  2) external assessment (verification),
  3) working with the CST on formal translation checks between face-to-face, web and paper modes, and
  4) co-ordination and interpretation of a national pre-test to check the country questionnaires, **before main stage data collection starts**,
- discuss possible changes to existing translations, queries about new translations and possible adaptations with the ESS translation team,
- deposit the final face-to-face questionnaire(s) and showcards and paper self-completion questionnaire(s) to myESS R12 before fieldwork starts.

Production of communication materials for self-completion approach (section 11)

- Translate the communication materials for the self-completion approach according to the same translation procedures as used for the questionnaire,
- Agree source text for any additional communications as part of the self-completion approach (e.g. phone script, e-mail contact) with the ESS fieldwork team prior to finalising for translation
- Discuss any changes, omissions or additions to self-completion communication materials with the fieldwork team and agree those prior to printing the materials
- For the postal-first approach, select different envelopes for each mailing,
- Deposit the final communication materials including photos that contain an example of each of the envelope types used to myESS R12 before fieldwork starts.

Data protection (section 8)

- Sign a data processing agreement in their capacity as a Data Processor with the ESS ERIC Director (Data Controller). This must cover both the face-to-face and self-completion approaches.
- This DPA must be drafted and submitted at least **6 weeks before any pretesting/fieldwork activity or sampling tasks involving the processing of personal data.** The DPA includes, as an appendix, details relating to the management of the data.
- The DPA must be signed by an authorised signatory acting for the Processor (the NC) and then counter-signed by the Director of the ESS ERIC, Controller, before processing[7] takes place.
- Ensure compliance by the NC team and by the Survey Agency with applicable data protection laws, including documentation of all data breaches and that relevant parties are informed of any breaches, as regulated in the DPA.

[7] Here 'processing' covers any pretesting or fieldwork activity, or sampling tasks involving the processing of personal data.

- Compliance includes providing the participant with the agreed data protection information sheet provided by ESS ERIC. **All details must be included when translated, as it reflects mandatory information as required by UK GDPR and GDPR.**

Sampling (section 9)

- discuss with and advise their assigned expert from the ESS SWEP on appropriate local procedures to comply with ESS sampling requirements, covering both face-to-face and self-completion approaches, including maximising the effective sample sizes and ensuring that the sampling design is formally signed off by the ESS sampling panel **at least 6 weeks before data collection starts**,
- secure the best available sampling frame,
- agree specific procedures for selection of dwelling units (address samples), individuals within households (address samples) or the selection of addresses (area-based sampling) as appropriate to the design,
- deposit the Sample Design Data File (SDDF) to the ESS Data Archive, so that the design weights can be produced, and the national data can be included in the combined data file,
- provide national population estimates for demographic variables, so that the post-stratification weights can be produced, and liaise with the CST when issues arise preparing those.

Quality assessment (sections 11, 12 and 13)

- compare the achieved ESS self-completion sample to demographic characteristic from the population and provide a report to the CST,
- undertake a *post hoc* assessment of the occupation and education coding and compare that with the best available national source.

Selecting a Survey Agency

Unless all face-to-face and self-completion data collection will be facilitated by the NC's organisation (or that organisation wishes to bid to conduct data collection), the NC team, as national survey experts, should be involved in selecting a Survey Agency and any other third-party contractors (e.g. a keying agency for data entry of the paper self-completion responses).

It is recognised that, in many instances, countries will want to begin tendering for a Survey Agency or other supplier as soon as possible. NCs are encouraged to have a discussion with their Country Contact (and any other relevant experts) prior to the invitation to tender to ensure that the Round 12 methodologies (face-to-face and self-completion) are well understood. This conversation should be held as early as possible, particularly bearing in mind that some design considerations may have budget implications.

During the tendering process (and subsequently) NCs should ensure that agencies or other suppliers are made aware that they may have to change or adapt some of their routine procedures and methods for the ESS in order to ensure cross-national comparability and equivalence. In particular, for the self-completion approach, the use of fieldworkers who make contact with sample units but do not conduct actual interviews needs to be carefully specified (where this applies).

To ensure that agencies and other suppliers deliver in terms of effort, we recommend that contracts are structured so that payment is contingent on inputs being fully realised (for example delivering at least the minimum ESS requirements in terms of contact attempts and issuing the right number of communication materials at agreed times) rather than outputs (e.g. response rate).

NCs should consider whether they have a combined tender for the face-to-face and self-completion approaches or separate tenders for each. It is likely that the pool of suppliers may be larger for the self-completion approach, which might suggest separate tenders are preferable. However, this will be a country-specific decision and partly depend on the planned design (e.g. the extent that fieldworkers are used for the self-completion approach). In some cases, NCs may decide to tender for the face-to-face fieldwork, but to manage all or parts of the self-completion approach in-house. There may be other cases where an NC institution has its own face-to-face field force, so can carry out the face-to-face element in house, but may need or wish to contract a survey agency or other party to carry out some of the self-completion tasks.

It has been possible to tender for survey agencies for more than one round at a time. However, this is not advised for Round 12 due to the one-off mixed-mode nature of this round.

Data collection preparation (sections 10 and 11)

- Explain and discuss ESS procedures and their rationale with the Survey Agency.
- For the face-to-face approach: complete an online Fieldwork Questionnaire (FWQ) and discuss matters arising with the Country Contact; ensuring sign-off at least **one month before fieldwork** starts.
- For the self-completion approach: Complete an online Methodological Questionnaire (MQ) and discuss matters arising with the Country Contact; ensuring sign-off of the questionnaire at least **one month before data collection** starts.
- Play a key role in the design and the delivery of interviewer/fieldworker briefings.

Data collection progress monitoring (sections 10 and 11)

- Monitor data collection to ensure contract compliance and optimum response.
- Ensure all contact attempts during data collection are made in the specified manner.
- Ensure that the Country Contact receives a fortnightly commentary on data collection progress and any issues to arise/anticipated.
- (For the face-to-face approach) Ensure the back-check procedure is implemented as described in section 10.7.

Data preparation, weighting & deposit (section 12)

- Monitor data preparation activities.
- Ensure that all paper self-completion questionnaires are manually keyed into the data entry questionnaire (part of Centerdata's platform) or scanned.
- Check the data files as specified in the ESS Data Protocol, preparation for public use and quality control analysis aimed at improving ESS data collection in future rounds. Use of the national data for analytical purposes is not allowed until the first official release.
- Merge data collected across modes and deposit a single main data file (including face-to-face, web and paper self-completion) to be deposited to the ESS Archive.
- Liaise as necessary with the SWEP about the calculation of post-stratification and non-response weights.
- Check and edit data files to minimize respondent disclosure risk according to Data Protocol and Anonymisation Guide, in advance of the data deposit.
- Provide the CST with all electronic deliverables (including data and documentation) as specified in the ESS Data Protocol and listed in section 12.2.
- Provide the name and email address of a contact person at the Survey Agency to the CC and ESS Data Archive. This person will only be included in

correspondence directly related to deliverables and processing of data and documentation.
- Liaise as necessary with the ESS Data Archive about data deposit and data processing queries.
- Approve a draft data file from the ESS Data Archive before public data release.
- Act as the first national point of contact for queries relating to earlier waves of ESS data collection regardless of whether they were the NC at that time.

Research Ethics

The NC will be responsible for ensuring that institutional ethical approval for the ESS is obtained where required. New questions for each round are submitted to the ESS Research Ethics Board by the CST prior to the finalisation of the source questionnaire. Country specific questions are approved by the Director. NCs and Survey Agencies must ensure full compliance with relevant institutional ethics approval procedures.

Additional research tasks not directly included in the present document but implemented by the NCs or Survey Agency (e.g. appended studies, experiments) might require consultation with the ESS Research Ethics Board. In this case, the NC must contact ESS HQ and the assigned Country Contact.

The ESS ERIC subscribes to the Declaration on Ethics of the International Statistical Institute (ISI)23, to which the Survey Agencies that conduct the data collection will be asked to adhere (see footnote 6).

Dissemination

The NC is responsible for promoting the use of ESS data within their country and reporting to the CST on these activities. National and international dissemination activities will contribute to the ESS ERIC's ultimate goal to make the ESS (and its data) as widely used among academics, policy makers and other relevant communities as possible. Dissemination activities can be related to national websites, national launch events, booklets, national top-line reports[8], etc. The ESS ERIC Head of Media and Communications Officer at HQ can assist NCs with those tasks[9].

5.4 Requirements for the Survey Agencies or other third parties

In some countries, all survey implementation tasks might be conducted in-house by the institute where the NC is based. In other cases, some or all of the implementation tasks might be passed by contract to a survey agency. Other suppliers, such as a mailing house or data entry organisation, may be used for the self-completion approach. As ESS Round 12 will require face-to-face interviewing, alongside use of fieldworkers for the self-completion approach in some countries, it is expected that most countries will need to appoint an agency and/or other suppliers for some tasks.

Where most of the implementation tasks are delegated to a survey agency it must be capable of, and ideally have a track record in, conducting national probability-based surveys to the highest standards of rigour by means of face-to-face and self-completion (web and paper). That said, since a self-completion approach may be new in some countries, flexibility may be needed here. All contenders will have to submit proposals and budgets according to the relevant sections of the specification outlined in the next sections of this document.

[8] https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/findings/topline-series
[9] We understand that dissemination activities may be more limited at this time given the challenges of delivering a mixed-mode approach for Round 12.

The key tasks of the Survey Agency (where appointed) are preparing, conducting and monitoring of data collection (face-to-face and self-completion) as described in sections 10 and 11, and processing data and preparing deliverables as described in section 12. In some instances, the fieldwork agency may also be involved in sample design (section 9).

The Survey Agency will be asked to confirm adherence to the Declaration on Ethics of the International Statistical Institute, in addition to any co-existing national obligations that they may have (see footnote 6). **The Survey Agency and other third parties (where applicable) must also undertake to adhere to applicable data protection laws and national laws. Provision for this must be included in the contract between the Survey Agency (and/or other supplier(s)) and the NC.**

Communication

The Survey Agency will have to discuss data collection procedures, progress and outcomes with the NC in every phase. For the self-completion approach, it is especially important that the communication schedule with respondents is implemented as per this specification and that the fieldworker follow up stage is organised correctly (where this applies).

Before the start of fieldwork, a Face-to-Face Fieldwork Questionnaire and Self-Completion Methodological Questionnaire (templates provided by the CST) must be completed by the NC. This is meant to aid NCs/Survey Agencies adherence to the present ESS Specification. ***In many cases, input from the Survey Agency will be required.***

The Survey Agency will have to closely monitor data collection progress to allow the NC to provide a fortnightly commentary on fieldwork progress, alert them when something untoward happens, help them prepare deliverables and provide information requested by the ESS Data Archive

Survey Agencies must also follow all instructions given by the Data Controller (ESS ERIC Director) and report any data breaches to ESS ERIC HQ and to the National Coordinator at once.

Field directors from Survey Agencies where appointed are expected to attend one Field Directors' Meeting (expected to be held in November 2025).

Deposit of raw data to the ESS Data Archive

In recognition of the large amount of resources put into the collection of the ESS data, it is required that the participating countries deposit raw, unedited data (including verbatim recorded answers) to the official ESS Data Archive, in Norway. This is to ensure that copies of the unedited raw files are saved for possible future use and checks. The raw data and sample design data will not be released to the public from the ESS website but will be stored in a safe environment in accordance with the Data Processing Agreement between the ESS ERIC and the ESS Data Archive.

If national laws and regulations in countries outside the EU/EEA should prohibit the permanent deposit of raw data to the ESS Data Archive, the Survey Agency or National Coordinator must commit to safely store and maintain the raw data for a minimum of 10 years. The ESS ERIC Data Protection Officer must be notified before any destruction of ESS data, with ESS ERIC HQ in copy to this correspondence.

5.5 *Summary of tasks that can be assigned to survey agencies / third party suppliers*

The Survey Agency or other supplier(s) will conduct ESS data collection or parts of data collection according to the present Specification. ESS Round 12 face-to-face fieldwork should start in September 2025, with no countries permitted to start later than 1 November 2025. Self-completion data collection can start later but should be completed within the period allocated for face-to-face fieldwork. All Round 12 data collection must be completed by 15 May 2026.

Tasks of the Survey Agency or other third party may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- programming the face-to-face CAPI questionnaire[10] – including an electronic Contact Form – and designing (and, where necessary, printing) other fieldwork materials (for example, showcards),
- testing routing and completeness of the web and paper questionnaires in each language[11],
- pre-testing the translated web and paper questionnaire(s),
- training, briefing, and overseeing interviewers and fieldworkers (where applicable),
- preparing, translating and sending respondent materials (advance/invitation letters, reminder letters, ESS data protection information sheet, incentives, thank you letters,
- sampling implementation (samples of individuals or addresses),
- developing and implementing measures to enhance response rates,
- NCs (in collaboration with the Survey Agency) are required to have their data collection plans discussed and approved by the ESS Fieldwork Team using the Fieldwork Questionnaire (for face-to-face) and Methodological Questionnaire (for self-completion),
- monitoring data collection progress, including providing case-level fieldwork progress information to the CST for the face-to-face approach (via the FMS),
- reporting to/consulting with the NC and, if necessary, with the CST any measures or interventions not previously planned that are implemented during fieldwork,
- carrying out the ESS back-checks procedure (for face-to-face fieldwork),
- cleaning and editing data files,
- coding and classifying data,
- (helping) prepare data files and documents.

[10] For countries using Centerdata's face-to-face tool suite, the CAPI will be programmed centrally (available only to countries that have used this tool in the previous round).
[11] The web and paper self-completion questionnaires will be produced centrally by Centerdata.

6. Timetable of ESS activities and overview of key documents

6.1 Overview of actions required before, during and after fieldwork

The timetable for ESS Round 12 is presented in Table 1, below.

Table 1: ESS Round 12 Project Timetable (January 2024-April 2027)[12]

Month/ Date	***Action***	***Section***	***Mode (F2F or SC)***
January 2024	ESS ERIC Round 12 Specification issued to General Assembly (Members, Observers and Guests), NCs and Survey Agencies		F2F and SC
January – October 2024	Appointment of NCs	5	F2F and SC
March 2024	NC to share expected R12 costing with ESS HQ and Country Contact for review, before submitting it to GA representatives	5	F2F and SC
April 2024 – October 2025	Signing Data Processing Agreements[13]	8	F2F and SC (same DPA)
April – August 2024	Full R12 Pilot (2 countries) with Centerdata tools Advance Translation	6.1	SC
June 2024 – June 2025	Appointment of Survey Agencies	5	F2F and SC
June 2024	**myESS Round 12 available for R12 preparations and discussions**	5	F2F and SC
July 2024 – July 2025	Sample design plans discussed between NCs and assigned sample expert & signed off by the Sampling and Weighting Expert Panel (SWEP)	9	F2F and SC
July 2024	R12 face-to-face fieldwork materials released on myESS (video interviewing guidelines, Contact Forms, Advance letter template, Interviewer briefing materials, Fieldwork Questionnaire)	10	F2F

[12] Timing of some preparatory tasks for ESS Round 12 will vary between countries based on planned fieldwork dates.
[13] As the Data Processing Agreement Template will be available before the myESS R12 launch, this will be made available via myESS R11 and it would be possible for NC to discuss this via email until the launch of the new portal.

Month/ Date	***Action***	***Section***	***Mode (F2F or SC)***
30th September 2024	**Deadline for GA representative and NC to confirm funding for R12 to ESS HQ**	5	F2F and SC
15th October 2024	Penultimate draft main questionnaire sent to NCs for comments; NCs asked to highlight possible translation problems	6.1	F2F and SC
November 2024 – July 2025	FWQ completed by NCs and signed off by ESS Fieldwork Team	10	F2F
November 2024 – July 2025	Question adaptation and consultations with CST	6.1	F2F and SC
4th November 2024	Deadline for NC feedback on draft main questionnaire Deadline for NC to communicate any new or repeated country-specific items in the R12 questionnaire	7, 10, 11	F2F and SC
15th November 2024	**ESS Round 12 Source Questionnaire released to the NCs[14]**	7, 10, 11	F2F and SC
	R12 Self-completion data collection materials released to the NCs (letters templates, testing guidelines, specification for landing page, Methodological Questionnaire)	11	SC
December 2024	ESS12 Data Protocol and Dictionaries released to the NCs	12	F2F and SC
December 2024 – October 2025	Methodological Questionnaire (MQ) completed by NCs and signed off by ESS Fieldwork Team and ESS HQ	11	SC
Week commencing 13th December 2024[15]	**R12 Centerdata tools for Self-completion released to NCs** (TranslationCTRL[16], online and paper questionnaires, monitoring platform)	11	SC

[14] As all countries will be using Centerdata's TranslationCTRL tool for Round 12, it will not be possible to start translations at the point the source questionnaire is released. Centerdata will first need to programme the source questionnaires across modes before TranslationCTRL can be opened for TCs. As noted later in the timetable, it is expected that this will be ready by mid-December 2024 (nine months in advance of the Round 12 fieldwork start date).

[15] Since this is the first time Centerdata's tools have been used for self-completion for an ESS Round, there is some uncertainty over the time needed for certain tasks. The timing of releasing these tools to NCs on 13th December 2024 should therefore be treated as provisional. Any changes to the timetable will be communicated to NCs.

[16] This is the point that national teams will be able to start to enter their translations in

Month/ Date	***Action***	***Section***	***Mode (F2F or SC)***
From December 2024	Centerdata to hold monthly briefing on Self-completion tools for groups of NCs	11	SC
December 2024 – August 2025	Translation, Team review and adjudication, External assessment (Verification), formal translation checks and national pre-tests.	7	F2F and SC
April 2025 – October 2025	NCs to set up and test country-specific implementations of Centerdata tools for self-completion[17]	11	SC
June 2025	National Technical Summary (NTS) made available.	10, 11	F2F and SC
From August 2025	Interviewer briefings (and fieldworker briefings for self-completion approach, where relevant)	8, 10, 11	F2F and SC
From August 2025	Pre-test for self-completion questionnaires and tools	11	SC
September 2025	**ESS Round 12 data collection starts**	10, 11	F2F and SC
September 2025 – May 2026	Monitor fieldwork: Make fortnightly fieldwork progress information available to the Fieldwork Team in Fieldwork CTRL (F2F) and Survey CTRL (SC)	10, 11	F2F and SC
1 November 2025	**R12 Final deadline for face-to-face fieldwork start**	10	F2F
January 2026 – February 2027	Data processing and Archiving[18] Preparation of Sample design data file (SDDF)	9, 12	F2F and SC
31 March 2026	Data delivery to the ESS Data Archive (1st release countries)	8, 12	F2F and SC

TranslationCTRL (for all modes).

[17] Centralised tools offer extremely limited flexibility. New and repeated country-specific items have to be communicated to the CST by the related deadline, and specific intervals between the different phases of testing and deployment of the tools need to be planned to allow central tasks by Centerdata.

[18] The ESS Data Archive at Sikt will check and merge the national data files into a combined multi-nation data file that will be released publicly as soon as it is signed off by the CST. This release may, however, have to exclude any national data file that arrives after the deadlines of 31 March 2026 (first release) or 30 June 2026 (second release), or for which the data and/or technical documentation is late or incomplete. A final release may be made to include any remaining countries that have met the requirements in this specification.

Month/ Date	*Action*	*Section*	*Mode (F2F or SC)*
15 May 2026	**ESS Round 12 Fieldwork ends**	10, 11	F2F and SC
30 June 2026	Final data delivery to the ESS Data Archive (2nd release countries)	8, 12	F2F and SC
November 2026	1st data release expected		F2F and SC
April 2027	2nd data release expected		F2F and SC

6.2 Key documents

Please find below the list of the key documents for ESS Round 12. These will be made available on the dates specified below in myESS. **myESS R12 will open to the NCs in June 2024**.

Table 2: ESS Round 12 documents

Document name	**Section**	**R12 Publication date**	**Mode (F2F or SC)**
Data Processing Agreement Information sheet for respondents	8	31 March 2024[19]	F2F and SC
Sampling Guidelines	9	June 2024	F2F and SC
Advance Letter template Interviewer briefing materials Video-interviewing guidelines Fieldwork Questionnaire (FWQ) as myESS form	10	July 2024	F2F
Contact Form Template(s)	10, 11, 12	July 2024	F2F and SC
Questionnaire Consultations guidelines	10, 11	September 2024	F2F and SC
Source Questionnaire (one document for all the modes)	6.1	20 November 2024	F2F and SC

[19] It is possible that minor updates may need to be made to the information sheet after this date, for example in response to any legislation changes. If this occurs, alerts will be issued to NCs with new version(s), clearly noting changes from the previous version(s). Such changes, where strictly required, may be made until 31 May 2025, but not after this date.

Document name	**Section**	**R12 Publication date**	**Mode (F2F or SC)**
Invitation and Reminder letters templates Internal SC testing guidelines Specification for landing page Methodological Questionnaire (MQ) as myESS form	11	November 2024	SC
Translation Guidelines	7	November 2024	F2F and SC
ESS Data Protocol and dictionaries	12	December 2024	F2F and SC
Translation Verification Instructions TranslationCTRL manual	7	December 2024	F2F and SC
Manuals for self-completion tools	11	December 2024	SC
Guidelines on fieldwork monitoring	10, 11	May 2025	F2F and SC
Anonymisation Guide	8	May 2025	F2F and SC
National Technical Summary, as myESS Form	10	May 2025	F2F and SC
Translation Poll, as myESS Form	7	November 2025	F2F and SC

7. Preparing the questionnaires

7.1 The ESS source questionnaire

The ESS source questionnaire is the original British English questionnaire that needs to be translated into the target languages in all participating countries. The CST is responsible for producing the source questionnaire. The ESS Director has the final authority over the wording of the source questionnaire.

The source questionnaire includes the core content (repeated each round) and two rotating modules (which change between rounds). It may also include some experimental content.

The two rotating modules for Round 12 are:

- Personal and social wellbeing (repeated from ESS Round 6).
- Attitudes to immigrants and refugees (repeated from ESS Round 7).

Each rotating module will include 30 questions (or equivalent if some questions are asked to sub-samples). At least 20 of these questions need to be repeated from (one of) the previous ESS round when the modules were fielded.

Rotating modules are developed in conjunction with the Question Module Design Teams (QDTs). NCs play a role in the development of rotating modules. They are expected to provide detailed comments on draft questions at two stages in the development process.

A single source questionnaire will be issued for Round 12, covering face-to-face and self-completion versions. Any differences between modes in questions will be kept to a minimum. Where differences are necessary, these will be clearly highlighted in the source questionnaire. A fully designed and formatted version of the source paper self-completion questionnaire will also be shared with NCs.

The ESS face-to-face questionnaire is administered to all respondents using computer-assisted interviewing (CAPI). As at Rounds 10 and 11, countries can offer target respondents a video interview at Round 12 as an alternative to an in-person interview. The CAPI questionnaire should either be programmed by NCs/agencies or provided centrally in cases where Centerdata's face-to-face tool suite is being used.

ESS's self-completion approach requires all countries to use two questionnaire instruments: a web questionnaire and a paper questionnaire. For ESS's self-completion approach, it is not permitted to use interviewers to administer all or parts of the self-completion questionnaire to respondents via any means.

The national self-completion questionnaires will be produced by Centerdata, as part of their self-completion platform, based on translations provided by NCs. The same questions are included in both web and paper questionnaires, but there are some minor wording differences. There are also other elements that need to be translated for the paper questionnaire only – e.g. routing instructions for respondents. The translation process is covered in section 7.2. Details of the technical process for producing and testing the web and paper questionnaires are included in section 11.2.

The total questionnaire length in British English is expected to be around 55-60 minutes. This covers the main ESS questionnaire and excludes the contact form questions, screener questions, any country-specific questions, recontact questions, and the interviewer questionnaire/respondent feedback questions. The completion time may vary somewhat between the face-to-face and self-completion approaches and between respondents, but the questionnaire is designed to minimize these differences (e.g. most questions are asked of all respondents). Completion times may also vary to some extent between countries (e.g. based on the length of translations into target languages).

The final Round 12 source questionnaire will be available to NCs in November 2024. However, before translations can start, Centerdata will need to set up the TranslationCTRL portal for all countries. It is expected that countries will be able to start translations from mid-December 2024.

7.1.1 Questionnaire experiments

At previous rounds of ESS, test questions were included as part of multi-trait-multi-method (MTMM) experiments. This involved asking respondents two versions of a set of questions – placed midway through the questionnaire, and at the end of the questionnaire.

It is not yet confirmed if a questionnaire experiment will be included at ESS Round 12. In the event that an experiment is included, it is expected that it will compare different question wording/formats with a maximum of four conditions. Such an experiment can be easily implemented into the CAPI and web self-completion questionnaire, with routing in place to automatically ask respondents the correct questions. The approach for the paper self-completion questionnaire may depend on the precise nature of any experiments; in some cases, instructions could be included in the questionnaire to route different respondents to the correct question, while in others it may be necessary to produce and print different versions of the questionnaire.

Full details of any experiments to be carried out will be shared with NCs at the time the source questionnaire is released.

7.1.2 The interviewer questionnaire / respondent experience questions

For the face-to-face approach, as at previous rounds, a small number of questions for interviewers will be included at the end of the questionnaire – for example, how well the respondent understood the questions and whether anyone else was present during the interview. This would normally be completed by the interviewer at the end of the interview before packing up and thanking the respondent. Alternatively, it may be completed once the interviewer has left the dwelling but soon enough so that the interviewer can remember all of the relevant details. It is expected that the length of the interviewer questionnaire will be reduced for Round 12 compared with previous rounds.

Interviewers need to be informed that this data will be handled and stored in the same way as for respondent data. Interviewers should be informed that the Survey Agency would be able to identify the answers they give to these questions. Interviewer identifiers deposited to the ESS Data Archive should not be the same as in previous rounds or as in other surveys[20].

A small number of respondent experience questions will be included at the end of the self-completion questionnaire. It is expected that these questions will be very similar to those asked of interviewers in the face-to-face interviewer questionnaire.

[20] If the identifier contains characteristics of the interviewer, for instance a reference to a geographical area, it should be replaced before deposit. For anonymity reasons, please ensure that these identifiers are not the same as in previous ESS rounds or as in other surveys of the Survey Agency.

7.1.3 Showcards

Showcards are required for face-to-face interviewing. They should reflect the translation used in the source questionnaire. Occasionally there is additional text on the showcards, which should be translated according to ESS procedures. The visual appearance of the showcards should also reflect that of the source showcards and should not be altered. For countries using Centerdata's tool suite for their face-to-face fieldwork, the showcards will be produced by Centerdata (and need to be fully checked by national teams).

7.1.4 Adding country-specific questions

NCs can request to include up to five country-specific items. The Director will then decide whether to approve the inclusion of the items and, where suitable, whether they might require amendments to allow the official sign-off. Where necessary, the Director can submit any country-specific questions to the ESS ERIC Research Ethics Board for ethical approval.

Once the proposed items are signed-off by the Director, ESS ERIC will then be the Data Controller for those items. ESS ERIC reserves the right to refuse a request if the length or topic are considered detrimental to cross-national quality or to the reputation of the survey.

When thinking about adding country-specific questions, NCs should keep the number of country-specific items to a minimum (focusing on essential items). Topics that clash with the ESS questionnaire, are sensitive or intrusive should also be avoided.

Unless otherwise agreed with NCs, all country-specific items will be included at the end of the questionnaire. NCs should submit requests for country-specific items at the time the source questionnaire is released (November 2024). This includes requests for any repeated country-specific items that have been included at previous ESS rounds. Any late requests for country-specific items are likely to be refused for Round 12. Country-specific questions must be treated in exactly the same way as the main questionnaire with regard to data collection and processing. NCs should deposit them with the other deliverables listed in the Data Protocol. These items will then be available in the ESS Data Portal within the related country-specific dataset. No analyses or publication on these data should be carried out before the official ESS data release.

7.1.5 Questionnaire consultations (country-specific lists)

NCs will liaise with the CST on question consultation processes as required. This includes measures such as education, partnership status, religion, income and ancestry.

It is expected that changes to existing questions on highest level of education will be required in many countries. This reflects inclusion of the self-completion approach at Round 12 and the need to simplify/shorten existing lists in some cases. This may involve, for example, splitting long lists over two questions. NCs will be expected to consult with the CST and an expert on changes to their education questions.

7.2 Translating the source questionnaire

Producing country questionnaires that are comparable (functionally equivalent) to the source questionnaire is of great importance. A key to achieving this is to carry out careful translation and adaptation procedures. The ESS translation procedures have been developed to optimise comparability across languages, to minimise the probability of errors, and to maximise the chances that concepts in the source questionnaire will be the same in every language version after translation.

Languages and Target Population
The ESS target population includes all residents in each country, regardless of whether they can speak the main language(s) comfortably. Therefore, to ensure that the populations of the participating countries are optimally covered given constrained budgets, translations are required for each language used as a first language by 5% or more of the population.

NCs may wish to consider producing ESS questionnaires in languages used as a first language by less than 5% of the population, in order to be inclusive, increase representativeness and boost response rates especially if those speaking those languages are concentrated in certain areas or identifiable on the sample frame. Note that all language versions must be produced according to the ESS committee approach for translation (see the guidance documents). Implementation issues must be discussed with the CST fieldwork team and ESS translation team. In case national teams wish to offer translated questionnaires in languages spoken by less than 5% of the population, please contact the ESS translation team.

The translation protocol requires the following steps, based on the TRAPD process:

- questionnaire translation using a committee or team approach ('TRA' in TRAPD), including shared language as well as national harmonisation if applicable **(Centerdata's TranslationCTRL platform must be used for all translations across face-to-face and self-completion modes)**;
- external translation assessment by linguistic experts of new questions for ESS Round 12[21]; this will be carried out in the form of 'translation verification' by the external service provider Capstan (www.capstan.be) and the costs of this part are met by the CST[22];
- shared language harmonisation, if applicable (with or without CST involvement, depending on the language), and/or national harmonisation where applicable;
- translation checks by GESIS to compare formal characteristics of the translated questions with those in the source language, as well as comparisons between the three ESS Round 12 survey modes (face-to-face, web and paper self-completion);
- checks to ensure the completeness of translations in TranslationCTRL ("sanity checks");
- national pre-testing ('P' within the TRAPD scheme).
- sign-off on translations and documentation of the translation process ('D' in TRAPD).

All stages in the translation protocol MUST be completed before the start of data collection.

Guidance Documents for Translation Procedures
Detailed descriptions of the translation procedures and requirements are available in the ESS Translation Guidelines. This document will also include the translation quality checklist and guidance on making changes to existing translations.

[21] Only translations in one mode will be verified for Round 12. The mode will be confirmed at the point the verification guidelines are released.
[22] For Round 12, it is possible that not all new questions will be subject to verification to allow for verification of recruitment materials used as part of the self-completion approach (e.g. the invitation letter). Which questions and/or materials are subject to verification by Capstan will be confirmed to NCs by the ESS translation team.

In addition to the guidelines, two further translation documents will be issued to NCs:

- ESS Round 12 Verification Instructions
- ESS Round 12 Guidance on Formal GESIS Translation Checks
- ESS Round 12 Translation Queries and Answers[23]

Guidance will also be provided for NCs on using Centerdata's TranslationCTRL portal.

7.2.1 Translation procedures

Each country translates the source questionnaire into those languages spoken by 5% or more of the population. NCs are required to find suitable individuals to fulfil the three key roles in the approach: translators, reviewer, and adjudicator.

NCs need to make sure that all members of the national translation teams are paid accordingly for their tasks. These include not only the proper translation tasks (participating in the T-R-A-P-D, verification and formal GESIS translation checks), but it also needs to be made sure that all members are sufficiently paid for getting familiar with the ESS translation method: this includes reading or watching guidance material, such as the ESS Translation Guidelines or Verification Instructions or video tutorials, and participating in training sessions, such as training on TranslationCTRL or the Adjudicators Meeting (ideally attended by the adjudicator for each national language version).

Reading guidance material and participating in the relevant training is a requirement and may amount to about two additional working days per person. For new team members or new teams, more time is required than for teams and team members that already know the ESS translation method and our translation platform (TranslationCTRL, which is required for all countries at Round 12).

All countries are required to use Centerdata's TranslationCTRL tool for questionnaire translations. TranslationCTRL will include separate fields for face-to-face, web and paper questionnaire translations to be inserted by NCs (or their translation teams). For countries that have previously used TranslationCTRL, their existing face-to-face translations will be pre-populated in the tool. It is also possible to import translations from the (T)VFF used for previous rounds to TranslationCTRL. NCs and national translation team members will receive a briefing from Centerdata and the ESS Translation Team on the use of the tool before starting their translations.

Consistency Across Rounds
One of the aims of the ESS ERIC is to chart changes in attitudes over time. This will be difficult if question texts change over time. For this reason, changes to question wording should be avoided if possible. Countries that have participated in previous rounds of the ESS should note that **changes to their translations of questions in the core module of the ESS questionnaire and of repeated questions from repeat rotating modules MUST NOT be implemented without approval from the ESS translation team at GESIS and ESS HQ.** This does not cover changes associated with the inclusion of the self-completion approach for Round 12, which will be clearly highlighted in the source questionnaire.

[23] This document will only be created once the translation process has started.

One advantage of pursuing consistency is that, for countries that participated in earlier rounds, a substantial part of the translation work will already have been carried out.

If applicable, countries should engage in shared language harmonisation (e.g., for French in Belgium, France, and Switzerland) and in national harmonisation (e.g., for Catalan and Spanish in Spain). For shared language harmonisation, each country will prepare their own draft version and will then consult each other about appropriate translation and possible harmonisation of question wording. However, each country is responsible for ensuring the functional equivalence of its own translation(s). The different options recommended for this 'shared language harmonisation' step are outlined in the ESS Translation Guidelines.

7.2.2 Expert evaluations

All translated language versions are subject to three expert evaluation procedures: a linguistic, pragmatic and semantic quality assessment (verification) by the external service provider Capstan[24]; formal translation quality checks (carried out by the ESS Translation Team at GESIS); and checks to assess the completeness of translations in TranslationCTRL ("sanity checks"). In the case of some shared languages, CST involvement in the harmonisation will be a substitute for external verification by Capstan.

NCs should set aside approximately **6-8** weeks for the entire translation verification process (i.e. the first step above), including discussions resulting from verification interventions. Translation verification is described in more detail in the ESS Translation Guidelines and in the Verification Instructions.

NCs are required to participate in a "formal translation quality assessment" step guided by GESIS. It will consist of different formal translation checks, e.g., comparing formal characteristics between source and translations, consistency within the questionnaire and across rounds, and comparisons between the different modes. NCs should set aside approximately **1 week** in total for the formal translation quality checks. In Round 12, it should cover every language version and not just the first national language. Further details of this step will be included in the Round 12 Guidance on Formal GESIS Translation Checks.

The final checks, to assess the completeness of translations in TranslationCTRL ("sanity checks"), are expected to take **1-2 weeks** to complete and will be guided by GESIS and Centerdata.

Taken together, the full set of translation checks (prior to pre-testing) are expected to take **8-10 weeks** to complete. This is therefore the time needed from submission of translations by national teams for verification to approval of final translations for pre-testing. Following this approval, for the self-completion approach, Centerdata will prepare the national web and paper instruments, for checking and finalization by national teams, which is expected to take **a further 2 weeks**.

7.2.3 National pre-testing

All countries are required to carry out a questionnaire pre-test following completion of the translation steps detailed above. **The pre-test should focus on the self-**

[24] Only translations in one mode will be verified by Capstan for Round 12.

completion (web and paper) questionnaires[25]. The main aims of the pre-test are:

- To assess any problems or concerns with questionnaire translations.
- To assess any usability problems with the web and paper questionnaires (e.g. unclear instructions or layout).

The pre-test is not an opportunity to amend the source questionnaire, but it may lead to changes in translations, which should be discussed with the ESS translation team.

Key requirements of the pre-test are as follows:

- The pre-test can either be conducted by the NC institution or by the Survey Agency that will conduct main stage data collection (where this applies).
- The pre-test achieved (net) sample size should be at least 30 cases per country. In countries with more than one target language, the 30 cases should cover a mix of these languages.
- A quota sample should be used to ensure the inclusion of different population groups. In particular, it is important to include offline people and those with lower levels of education.
- The national web and paper questionnaires produced by Centerdata should be used for the pre-test.
- Around half of the respondents should complete the web questionnaire and around half the paper questionnaire (i.e. roughly 15 cases with each). Quotas should be set for this at the recruitment stage.
- It is important to test the web survey with different devices as part of the pre-test – i.e. some respondents should use a desktop/laptop, others a tablet and others a smartphone. Testing on a small screen smartphone is especially important as certain questions may be problematic on smaller screens.
- Respondents should use their own device.
- Pre-test respondents should self-complete the questionnaire (rather than an interviewer asking the questions). An interviewer/researcher should be present while the respondent responds to observe the process and record any issues to emerge. The interviewer/researcher may also ask probe questions at particular parts of the questionnaire or at the end. It is possible to use a video platform to test the web questionnaire, as long as the respondent is able to willing to share their screen as they complete.
- Respondents should enter the survey as would happen at main stage data collection. For those completing on web, they should be given a letter with the URL for the landing page and login details. For those completing on paper, they should be given an invitation letter and copy of the paper questionnaire.
- Pre-testing can take place either at respondents' homes or in a central location (e.g. a lab), or a combination.
- Following completion of pre-testing, a debrief session should be held with the researchers/interviewers involved in this phase. This will allow them to share feedback and consider any changes that may be required in advance of the main stage. The CST will provide a report template that NCs should complete following pre-testing and submit to their Country Contact.

It is possible that some changes may be required between the pre-test and start of main data collection. Countries should allow around one month between completion of their pre-test and planned soft launch (see section 11.14 in the event that such changes are required).

7.2.4 Translation documentation

[25] For Round 12, there is no requirement to carry out a pre-test on the face-to-face questionnaire. However, the CAPI programme should be fully tested by NCs prior to fieldwork.

NCs are required to document the steps in their translation process. Translation documentation should include:

- parallel initial Translations, translation agreed at the national Review stage, translation of the Adjudication stage (T-R-A steps),
- documentation of changes made and discussions at shared language harmonisation and/or national harmonisation (if applicable),
- follow-up on the verification results,
- follow-up on formal translation checks,
- follow-up on TranslationCTRL completeness checks ("sanity checks"),
- follow-up on pre-testing results, if applicable,
- any changes made to existing translations, and
- documentation of the role and qualifications of the different people involved in the translation, review and adjudication process: translator 1, translator 2, reviewer, adjudicator, and any other people involved, if applicable.

This documentation should be provided to the ESS Translation Team at GESIS via myESS. Part of the documentation will be included in TranslationCTRL.

7.3 Questionnaire language versions

NCs will need to produce questionnaire versions for each target language to be offered in their country. The languages required should be agreed with the ESS Translations Team and ESS HQ and confirmed to Centerdata at the start of the translation process.

Where more that one language is offered, for the face-to-face CAPI survey and web questionnaire, respondents will be allowed to select their preferred language version at the start of the survey. For the paper self-completion questionnaire, different versions will need to be produced for each language (where applicable).

NCs should consider the approach for sending different language versions of the paper questionnaire to sample units – for example, whether multiple versions are sent, or if one 'main' language version is sent with others available on request (or if this varies regionally, for example).

NCs should also consider and communicate to Centerdata the approach they will take to deal with gendered language (where applicable) in the questionnaire. For example, in some countries, male and female versions can be incorporated into a single questionnaire, while in others there may be a need to produce separate versions for male and female respondents.

Where different questionnaire versions are required by countries (either in case of multiple language versions, or where separate male and female questionnaires are required), additional time should be included for testing and finalising the questionnaire instruments.

8. Data protection

In order to ensure compliance with the UK Data Protection Act, 2018, UK GDPR, the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and other applicable national laws, the following is required by the NCs, Survey Agencies or other third parties as appropriate[26].

8.1 Data Processing Agreement (DPA)

In general, NCs are Processors in the ESS, meaning that they are processing personal data on behalf of, and under instructions of, ESS ERIC as the Controller[27]. Personal data means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person. An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly (for instance by name) or indirectly (for instance when combining variables, as age, gender, job). During ESS Round 12, the NC will therefore process personal data on behalf of ESS ERIC during sampling (as sampling frames often include personal data), pre-testing and in the main stage. This applies to both the face-to-face and self-completion approaches.

Whenever a Controller (ESS ERIC) uses a Processor (e.g. NC), a Data Processing Agreement (DPA) must be entered into by both parties. This agreement must be counter-signed by ESS ERIC before **any** processing of personal data begins (including before any pre-tests or mainstage fieldwork can begin)[28]. In the DPA, NCs will provide information on how the personal data will be processed. The NC must provide sufficient guarantees that appropriate technical and organisational measures are taken.

The DPA includes the requirements in the event of a breach (section 8.13, below). The template for the DPA for use in Round 12 will be available on the NC Intranet pages of the myESS R12 portal. If the NCs are planning to process personal data for any of their own purposes, an agreement must be reached with ESS ERIC.

For Round 12, there will be a single DPA template covering both the face-to-face and self-completion approaches.

Where members of an NC team are based in different institutions, the authorised contact at each institution must sign the agreement or, alternatively, one of the NC team members has to take responsibility for all members of the team.

Where NCs have commissioned a Survey Agency or other third party directly, they have responsibility to ensure that a sub-processing agreement binds the supplier to the terms of the Data Processing Agreement. However, note that in general NCs also process personal data through their activities as NCs. In some cases, a fieldwork agency may also be asked to sign a DPA directly with ESS ERIC.

NCs should be aware that when they use platforms for video interviewing as part of their face-to-face approach, the arrangements in place for this must be clearly outlined in the DPA. This includes licensing arrangements. Processors are obliged to

[26] The information presented in this section is abridged; the requirements are set out in full in the Data Processing Agreement.
[27] There may be cases where survey agencies act as Processors and, depending on the arrangements, joint Controller agreements are entered into by ESS ERIC and the NC.
[28] According to GDPR art 4 nr. 2 'processing' means any operation or set of operations which is performed on personal data or on sets of personal data, whether or not by automated means, such as collection, recording, organisation, structuring, storage, adaptation or alteration, retrieval, consultation, use, disclosure by transmission, dissemination or otherwise making available, alignment or combination, restriction, erasure or destruction.

confirm the arrangements in place for the use of such platforms.

Any other third parties engaged by the Processor must comply with the provisions of the DPA between the Controller and Processor.

8.2 Technical and organisational measures (Appendix 1 of the DPA)

As part of the DPA, NCs must submit details of the technical and organisational measures which are to be applied during the processing of personal data. Appendix 1 of the DPA will outline how personal data are handled during collection and processing (and afterwards), provide information on the measures in place to ensure the rights of the data subjects, and the relevant security arrangements like encryption, ongoing reviews of security measures, facilities for restoring availability and access, regular security testing and achieved certifications regarding data security. In particular for Round 12, the procedures for receiving, storing, processing and eventually destroying the paper self-completion questionnaires must be clearly specified.

8.3 Data Protection Officer

The Data Protection Officers (DPO) of ESS ERIC are Callan Ramewal and Lasse Andre Raa. They can be reached by e-mail: dpo.esseric@europeansocialsurvey.org

Representative in the EU/EEA: The Controller's Representative in the EU/EEA is CESSDA ERIC (ess-gdpr@cessda.eu)

8.4 Data protection information to respondents

All target respondents must be given a ESS data protection information sheet containing a harmonised data protection statement and necessary information.

For Round 12, there will be two versions of the data protection information sheet – one for the face-to-face approach and one for the self-completion approach. **NCs must not change the information given in the source documents provided, other than translating and adapting the text in square brackets.** The translation of the self-completion version of the information sheet will be checked to ensure consistency with the source version.

This information sheet contains information that is mandatory, as regulated in law (GDPR art 13 and/or 14). It should be provided to respondents as follows:

- For the face-to-face approach:
    - Where advance letters are sent, the information sheet should be sent in the same envelope as the advance letter, in advance of the interviewer visiting the address.
    - In countries not using advance letters, or where an address or dwelling-based sample frame is used, the information sheet must be given to the selected respondent before the interview starts.
    - Sufficient time must be given for target respondents to read the information sheet before proceeding.
    - All interviewers should carry spare copies of the information sheet when they are in field.
- For the self-completion approach:
    - In countries using a postal-first approach, every sample unit must be sent the information sheet with the initial invitation (or prior to that if using a pre-announcement), in the same envelope.
    - In countries using the fieldworker-first approach, selected sample

units must be given the information sheet by the fieldworker when they make contact. Where no contact is made, the information sheet should be left in an envelope in the postbox, along with the survey invitation.

  - All fieldworkers should carry spare copies of the information sheet when they are in field.
  - Helpline staff should have copies of the information sheet and have been briefed on how to handle queries and formal data subject requests.
  - An electronic copy of the information sheet should be available via a link on the survey landing page.

8.5 Data subject rights

Survey Agencies and NCs must respond to any requests from data subjects concerning their rights to access, modify or have personal data deleted[29]. Data subjects also have the right to object to processing. Furthermore, a description of received requests and how they were dealt with must be sent to ESS ERIC's Data Protection Officer within one week after receiving the request: dpo.esseric@europeansocialsurvey.org. Guidance for dealing with data subjects' rights will be made available for ESS Round 12.

8.6 Disclosure risk

In accordance with the data protection information sheet provided to ESS respondents, we will make every effort so that no participant is identifiable in the publicly available data. **Before depositing data to the ESS Data Archive, each national coordinator is responsible for ensuring the removal or recoding of variables that might lead to the identification of individuals in the published data.** This applies to the freely distributed data files (Main Questionnaire, Contact Data, Interviewer Questionnaire/Respondent Experience Questions).

NCs will be asked to confirm in their National Technical Summary that all data that will be made publicly available to users have been checked and edited with the aim to avoid identifiable information being released. The ESS Round 12 Data Protocol describes a set of minimum requirements that all countries must follow to reduce disclosure risk. In addition, the ESS Round 12 Anonymisation Guide[30] provides further guidance on how to assess and minimise disclosure risk. It is a requirement that NCs adhere to and act in accordance with the Anonymisation Guide.

8.7 Secure data transfer

To ensure a secure transfer, all deliverables must be uploaded using the Data Deposit Tool in myESS R12. Note that this is regulated in Appendix 1 of the DPA regarding technical and organisational measures relating to security.

8.8 Deletion of data

Once a country's data has been published by the Archive, the NC/Survey Agency is required to delete all personal data, including:

- The key that links the serial number to the name and address of the

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[29] The Data Processing Agreement covers the legal requirements in the event of a breach.
[30] The Anonymisation Guide provides guidance for NCs to act in accordance with what it is promised to ESS respondents; to make every effort so that no participant is identifiable in the published data. This reflects that a 100% or absolute anonymisation is a difficult position to achieve.

respondent. Processors are required to confirm in writing to the Controller that this has been done within 10 days of the data being published. (Separate arrangements for recontact data may be made).
- All other data that could possibly identify individuals, such as raw data[31] and the sample design.

The above requirements will be regulated in the DPA.

8.9 Access

According to art. 23 of the Statutes, the ESS ERIC shall, where practicable, seek to own the intellectual property rights in its work. It shall grant a royalty free non-exclusive license over its intellectual property rights to any person for non-commercial purposes[32].

The ESS ERIC shall allow free access to all anonymised data of the European Social Survey for non-commercial use. There shall be no privileged access rights by any person to such data except during its processing and preparation for public use.

8.10 Country-specific questions

In cases in which NCs add country-specific questions to the ESS questionnaire, such questions shall *not* imply that they assume the responsibilities of Data Controllers. **The ESS ERIC Director, the Controller, has final approval of whether these questions can be fielded on the ESS. The data must be deposited to the ESS Data Archive and treated in the same way as the main ESS data, including deletion arrangements once the main ESS data have been deposited.**

These additional questions that are approved are included in Appendix 2 of the DPA.

8.11 Joint Data Controllers

If data is to be used/retained for other purposes than performing ESS, a Joint Controller Agreement must be made. Joint Controllers must have a transparent arrangement that sets out their agreed roles and responsibilities. Any specific purposes and planned use of the data must be described.

The main points of this arrangement should be included in the information that is provided to data subjects. Individuals must remain able to exercise their rights (i.e. deletion or access). This is regulated in the DPA.

8.12 Data transfers to third countries

If applicable, an international transfer of personal data will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. This is regulated in the DPA and will be carried out as part of the routine privacy assessment undertaken in the DPA review. Transfer includes access to the data set as well as direct transfer of data between different entities.

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[31] If national laws and regulations in countries outside the EU/EEA should prohibit the permanent deposit of raw data to the ESS Data Archive, the Survey Agency or National Coordinator must commit to safely store and maintain the raw data for a minimum of 10 years. The ESS ERIC Data Protection Officer must be notified before any destruction of ESS data, with ESS ERIC HQ in copy to this correspondence.

[32] See the following link for the ESS user licence (data): https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

8.13 Breaches of data protection law

As part of the DPA, Survey Agencies and NCs must immediately report all incidents and breaches to ESS ERIC's Data Protection Officer: dpo.esseric@europeansocialsurvey.org

Processors must also report incidences to the ESS ERIC Director: esseric.breach@city.ac.uk.

Personal data breaches can include (among others): access by an unauthorised third party; deliberate or accidental action (or inaction) by a controller or processor; sending personal data to an incorrect recipient; computing devices or paper questionnaires containing personal data being lost or stolen; alteration of personal data without permission; and loss of availability of personal data. Lack of transparency in dealings with data subjects (e.g. ESS respondents) is also treated as a breach.

8.14 Recontact questions

As at Round 11, the source questionnaire will include recontact questions. This applies to both the face-to-face and self-completion approaches. These questions will ask respondents if they give permission to be re-contacted about further research ESS ERIC may be carrying out. Where permission is given, the questionnaire will ask respondents to provide their contact details. No specific further research is planned at this stage; however, by collecting this permission, it will provide a sample for any follow-up studies that are later confirmed.

The recontact questions are optional, and NCs can decide whether to opt-in or opt-out to include these. However, it is beneficial that as many countries as possible participate in any further research that is carried out, and so where possible countries are encouraged to include the recontact questions.

NCs and/or agencies will be responsible for retaining respondent contact details until two years after the end of Round 12 fieldwork (May 2028), at which point they must be deleted. This information, where relevant, will be communicated to respondents in the data protection information sheet.

9. Sampling

High quality probability sampling is a foundation of high-quality survey data. A separate document provides detailed **Sampling Guidelines** which each country must follow. This will be made available via the myESS Round 12 NC Intranet. Key aspects of those Guidelines are summarised here.

9.1 Sampling principles and procedures

Every country will be assigned a contact member of the ESS Sampling and Weighting Expert Panel (SWEP). The NC, the SWEP member, and possibly a representative of the Survey Agency, will collaborate to develop the optimum sampling design. The design must be signed off by the SWEP before the sample can be selected. As the gross sample size required is also crucial for costing and planning, a preliminary discussion with the SWEP **before** the budget is set and tender conducted is also highly recommended.

Scientific sampling procedures will ensure that every member of the population under study has a known probability greater than zero to be part of the survey. The sample is to be selected by strict random probability methods at every stage. The selection probabilities of every sample member must be known and recorded. **Quota sampling is not permitted at any stage, nor is substitution of non-responding dwellings or individuals (including 'ineligibles').**

The ESS will be representative of all persons aged 15 and over (no upper age limit) resident within private dwellings in each country, regardless of their nationality, citizenship or language. Potential under-coverage, because of sampling frame deficiencies or for any other reason, must be discussed with the SWEP contact person prior to deciding on the final sampling method, so that the problem can be remedied if at all possible.

The SWEP strongly recommends using stratified sampling. This is likely to increase the effective sample size.

Due to uncertainties over response rates, it is a requirement to select a reserve sample for each data collection mode in advance of fieldwork. The size of the reserve sample should be determined based on an estimate of the lowest response rate likely to be achieved on the main sample. Details relating to the reserve sample should be discussed with the SWEP expert. Decisions on whether to issue reserve samples during fieldwork should be made in liaison with the Country Contact.

9.2 Sampling frames

Sampling frames of named individuals, such as a population register, are strongly preferred. If such a frame is not available, or lacks sufficient coverage, countries may use a frame of dwellings or of addresses. In this case, procedures for selecting a dwelling from a multi-dwelling address (where needed), and an individual within a dwelling, will be specified and agreed in advance with the SWEP, in accordance with the Guidelines. These procedures will be more challenging for the self-completion sample than for the face-to-face sample (see section 9.5).

If no frame of dwellings or addresses is available either, area sampling may be carried out, with in-field listing to create a frame of dwellings. In this case, it must be ensured that in each area the number of dwellings listed will be at least twice the number that need to be selected. The person who makes the listing (the enumerator) **must not be the same person as the interviewer/fieldworker**. Enumeration should be fully completed before the start of fieldwork.

9.3 Effective sample size

The 'effective achieved sample size' (n_{eff}) must be at least 800 (or 430 in countries with ESS populations (aged 15+) of less than 2 million) in **each** of the two data collection modes, after discounting for design effects (i.e. an effective total sample of 1,600, or 860 for countries with eligible populations below 2 million). With the help of the SWEP, each country should determine the appropriate size of its issued sample for each mode by taking into account the realistic predicted impact of clustering, variation in inclusion probabilities (if applicable), eligibility rates (where appropriate), and response rate. The SWEP will assist in the calculation of the gross sample size required in order to achieve an effective sample size of at least 800 (430) interviews per approach.

In some cases (e.g. unequal-probability, multi-stage sampling design) the required number of completed interviews may be considerably larger than the required effective sample size. Furthermore, the gross sample size may be quite different in the two modes due to differences in sample design and differences in expected response rate, so a separate calculation must be made for each mode. The gross sample size issued to field in each mode must be the one agreed on and signed off by the SWEP.

Where a country fails to meet the effective sample size requirement in the most recent round of fieldwork, efforts must be made to meet this in the next round and the cost implications should be considered by the funder.

9.4 Clustered sampling

For face-to-face survey fieldwork, it is often cost-effective to select a geographically clustered sample, at least in the less urban areas. However, clustering the sample produces a design effect and results in needing a larger number of interviews in order to deliver the minimum effective sample size. There are therefore benefits in switching to unclustered designs, or reducing the level of clustering, where this is practically possible and does not unduly increase the data collection costs.

For the self-completion sample, if there is no fieldworker component[33], an unclustered sample is recommended. However, in many countries a fieldworker component is expected (see sections 11.6 and 11.7).

For countries using the fieldworker-first approach, clustering may be needed. Whether – and to what extent – this is desirable may depend on how intensively in-person visits will be used. (e.g. if fieldworkers are only used for first contact, with reminders sent by post, the motivation for sample clustering is less strong than if fieldworkers are used to deliver reminders).

9.5 Within-household selection

If using an address or household-based sample, there is a need to carry out a within-household selection to select one eligible person to take part in the survey. For the face-to-face sample, the interviewer will carry out this selection.

For the self-completion sample, instructions need to be provided to the household to

[33] This applies to countries that use the postal-first approach, have an individual sample, and can offer an alternative method to boost response and/or improve sample composition in a targeted way (which is agreed by the CST). See section 11.6 for further details.

determine who should take part in the survey. These instructions will be to implement the next birthday approach. This involves including an instruction in the invitation and reminder letters that the person aged 15+ in the household with the next birthday should complete the survey. There is also a check question at the start of the questionnaire to confirm the correct person is completing.

While the next birthday approach is currently proposed, there are some concerns about how often an incorrect person completes the survey and the impact this may have on the data. The CST is carrying out work to assess this, while also reviewing the next birthday instructions and questions in the household grid to check the accuracy of selection. It is possible for later ESS rounds that modifications may be made to the procedures. However, for Round 12, the next birthday approach will be used. All completed questionnaires (unless identified as fraudulent) will be retained in the data even if apparently completed by an incorrect person, but a variable will be included to flag cases that may relate to an incorrect respondent[34].

9.6 Integrating face-to-face and self-completion samples

The sample for each of the two parts of the survey must be a fully representative national sample that complies with the sampling guidelines, but it may be advantageous to select the two samples in an integrated way rather than independently.

If both samples have the same design, integration is straightforward. A single sample can be selected and then allocated at random to the two data collection modes. The best way to do this is to allocate alternately, in the order the sample is selected. For example, if the sample is a systematic random sample of persons from a population register, the 1st, 3rd, 5th, etc selected person can be allocated to face-to-face and the 2nd, 4th, 6th etc to self-completion. If the sample is clustered, the selected PSUs can be allocated in the same way.

If the designs are different (for example, clustered for face-to-face and unclustered for self-completion), integration may not be possible and it may be necessary to draw the samples independently.

If the designs are partially different (e.g. unclustered in the urban domain for both modes, but clustered in the rural domain only for face-to-face mode), then it may be possible to integrate one part of the sample.

In any event, the best way to integrate the samples should be discussed with the allocated SWEP member.

9.7 Documentation of sampling procedures

The sampling procedures to be employed in each country and for each mode, and their implications for representativeness, must be documented in detail in the **Sample Design Summary** (SDS) and submitted in advance of fieldwork to the SWEP for 'signing off'. The information to be included in the SDS includes:

- a description of the target population and of any systematic exclusions due to frame imperfections or due to cost-effectiveness considerations;
- a description of the sampling frame and of the units it comprises at each stage of the design, and estimates of any likely under- or over-coverage;
- if using a multi-stage sample, a description of how units at each stage will be selected to result in a random sample of individuals, plus the inclusion

[34] The same principle applies to countries with individual sample frames – i.e. cases where the incorrect person has responded can be retained, but will be flagged in the data.

probabilities of units at each stage of selection;
- details of whether and how the sample is to be clustered geographically, and how the initial clusters are to be selected;
- full details of any stratification to be employed;
- the calculations on which the predicted effective sample size has been based;
- realistic predictions of design effects (due to clustering and due to unequal inclusion probabilities), response rates, the rate of ineligibles and the required number of interviews as well as the required size of the initial (gross) sample.

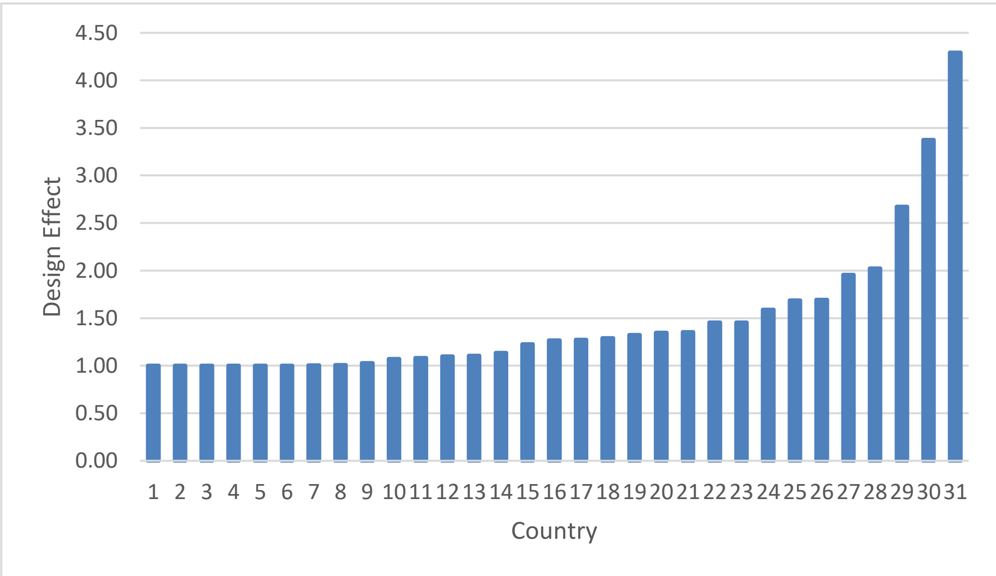
A Sample Design Data File (SDDF) must be produced and delivered, upon completion of fieldwork, to the CST. The SDDF must include all cases in the gross sample for both data collection modes. It must contain all relevant information about the sample design for each unit in the gross sample, such as inclusion probabilities at each stage and indicators of cluster, stratum, domain and mode, as specified in the SDS. A detailed specification of the SDDF will be provided in the ESS Data Protocol. Failure to deliver the SDDF will be considered an irreparable compromise to quality (section 13). The SWEP will use the SDDF information to produce integrated sample design indicators (stratum, psu and domain) and to enable appropriate weighting strategies.

Number of interviews and effective sample size

The effective sample size is a function of the number of interviews, a correction for household size (for samples of dwellings and addresses), a correction for other possible differences in selection probabilities, and a correction for intra-class correlation within Primary Sampling Units (PSUs). Information from ESS Round 10 (see graph below) shows that in a number of countries the design effect is 1. This means that 1,500 interviews, for example, result in an effective sample size of 1,500. In a small number of other countries, the design effect is close to 4. This means that 6,000 persons have to be interviewed to achieve an effective sample size of 1,500.

There are four ways to minimise the design effect:
- if possible, move to an individual sampling frame;
- increase the number of PSUs, and thus decrease the number of units within a PSU;
- deploy different interviewers within the same PSU;
- improve interviewer training and briefing to decrease interviewer effects.

See the Sampling Guidelines on the ESS Round 12 NC Intranet.



10. Specification for face-to-face fieldwork

This section sets out the requirements for face-to-face fieldwork at ESS Round 12. The self-completion requirements are included in the next section.

Fieldwork responsibilities

The NC is responsible for the national implementation of fieldwork, the monitoring of fieldwork and the deliverables. The Survey Agency will conduct fieldwork according to the specification in this section, and according to the national elaboration and details of the Fieldwork Questionnaire. The Survey Agency will also have to provide information on the progress of fieldwork, to make monitoring by the NC and the CST possible and play a supporting role in the preparation of deliverables (section 12).

The tasks of the Survey Agency will have to be clearly specified in each country. In some cases, there can be a division of labour between NC and Survey Agency. In all cases, close communication with the NC is required.

10.1 Fieldwork period

The fieldwork period for Round 12 runs from 1 September 2025 to 15 May 2026. Countries should start their face-to-face fieldwork as close to 1 September 2025 as possible. All countries must start their fieldwork by 1 November 2025. If this is not possible, countries should not take part at Round 12.

10.2 Programming the questionnaire

The ESS questionnaire has been prepared by the CST in cooperation with Question Module Design Teams (QDT) and the NCs. A key task of the Survey Agency is to programme the CAPI questionnaire and an electronic Contact Form, and prepare all other fieldwork documents (advance letters, showcards, etc.).

Time stamps are a valuable way of monitoring interview quality, helping to detect undesirable behaviour such as speeding. **Time stamps, at the seconds level (format DTIME20), need to be included at the start and end of each module in the Round 12 questionnaire.**

For countries using Centerdata's face-to-face survey tool suite, the CAPI questionnaire will be centrally programmed by Centerdata.

10.3 Interviewer briefing, workload and fieldwork preparations

In each country, a sufficient number of interviewers should be engaged to conduct the ESS interviews. Ideally, all ESS interviewers conduct multiple interviews to make briefing costs effective. However, even well-trained interviewers can influence the quality of the collected data, and research has shown that higher workloads are positively related to larger interviewer effects. Therefore, the workload per interviewer will be limited to a maximum of 48 sample units (i.e. respondents and non-respondents) throughout original issue fieldwork. Interviewers can work additional sample units (beyond the 48 maximum) as part of the reissue stage.

In certain circumstance, it is possible to propose a higher than 48 sample unit workload per interviewer. In those instances, the deviation needs to be agreed with the CST beforehand, whereby it should be made clear a) that the proposed deviation has a limited negative impact on the expected data quality and/or execution of fieldwork, and (b) what measures are in place to monitor and evaluate the possible impact of this deviation. National teams should inform the CST about their interest in increasing the workload as early as possible.

All interviewers working on the ESS are expected to have experience with face-to-face CAPI interviews among random samples. They are also expected to have been trained in conducting such interviews, i.e. they must have received instructions about effective doorstep interaction and standardised interviewing and they must have a sound grasp of both positive and negative effects of interviewer behaviour on data quality. If interviewers have not received such training prior to being hired for ESS work, the Survey Agency should ensure that a general interviewer training session takes place before the briefing session. Training should cover all relevant areas, such as standardised interviewing and doorstep interaction techniques, and coding contact attempts.

Briefing is different from training in that it is project-specific, i.e. it describes the ESS project, the ESS questionnaire, and ESS rules. **All** interviewers must be briefed by the NC or Survey Agency upon being hired for ESS Round 12 and before carrying out their assignment. Their briefing must cover how to follow contact procedures and complete the Contact Forms, and how to follow respondent selection procedures (if applicable). Furthermore, it should include the ESS back-check procedure (see section 10.7). The CST will provide materials that serve as the basis for this briefing. It will also provide a version of the ESS Round 12 Source Questionnaire annotated with example answers and specific notes (Practice Interview), which must be administered in full during the briefing, so that interviewers can practice asking questions from the survey.

Briefings can either be carried out in-person or online (by video). It is crucial that online briefings, where carried out, cover all of the same information as in-person briefings, including the practice interview.

ESS interviewer training and briefing

ESS interviewers must be trained (task-specific) and briefed (project-specific).

The CST will provide a series of pre-structured slides and related materials to be used as the basis for briefing sessions. Each key part of the briefing will be outlined with the explicit expectation that the NC team will then adapt it to their local circumstances. The materials include, among other documents:

- guidelines on completing ESS Contact Forms (see section 10.5),
- scripted ESS practice interview,
- guidelines on training as well as briefing,
- guidelines on data protection, data handling and compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

10.4 Respondent recruitment

The first contact with potential respondents, following a possible advance letter and the ESS Round 12 data protection information sheet (section 8.4), will be face-to-face. Only once contact with a dwelling has been established, or after four unsuccessful personal visits, may interviewers make (or change) appointments by telephone.

The one exception to this is for countries with sample frames of named individuals where a high proportion of telephone numbers are provided. Here the first contact may be made by telephone, in order to make appointments to visit the respondent. However, the NC has to provide acceptable evidence to the CST that the response rate will not be damaged. Interviewers should be trained to avoid receiving a refusal over the telephone wherever possible and to leave the way open for a follow up face-to-face contact attempt. **In the event of non-contact by phone, the same number of in person visits is still required (4 before non-contact can be assigned as the final outcome code).** Sampled individuals without a listed phone number must be contacted face-to-face. At least one in-person visit to each sample unit is always required in order to collect information on the dwelling and neighbourhood (e.g. even in the event of a telephone hard refusal).

Survey research has shown that the effect of survey modes on the measurement can be large (Villar, A. & Fitzgerald, R. (2017) 'Using mixed modes in survey data research: Results from Six Experiments' in Breen, M. (ed) *Values and Identities in Europe. Evidence from the European Social Survey.* Routledge. London). Substantial differences can be expected between administration of a questionnaire by telephone and in a face-to-face situation. **For that reason, for the face-to-face sample, interviews may not, under any circumstances, be conducted over the telephone or by self-completion methods whether on paper or online, unless clearly specified in the source questionnaire.**

As at Rounds 10 and 11, countries can offer target respondents a video interview at Round 12 as alternative to being interviewed in-person. Countries can decide whether or not to include the video approach based on their expected level of demand for this (e.g. how effective this option was at previous rounds). The DPA will need to reflect the inclusion of video interviewing.

Interviews can also be conducted face-to-face outside of respondents' homes (e.g. in a private garden) if the respondent agrees to this and the interview setting complies with GDPR regulations.

Interviews may only be conducted with the sampled individuals: substitution (replacing a 'difficult' target person with a target person easier to interview) or proxy interviews (someone else answers on behalf of the target person) are **not** allowed. When no list of named individuals, dwellings or addresses is available for sampling, it should be ensured that the enumerator, i.e. the person who lists the dwellings in the field, is **not** the same person as the interviewer. Enumeration should take place before the start of fieldwork.

Interviewers should be thoroughly briefed on selection methods and be informed that the correct selection is vital to ensuring that the sample is representative of the target population (see section 9.2).

Evidence from the ESS suggests that when interviewers have to select the target person from amongst all of those living in the dwelling, the final sample is less likely to accurately reflect the target population, compared to where a named sample of individuals is used. For example, more women tend to be selected than men, whereas this should be usually be equal. Interviewers must therefore be thoroughly briefed on careful selection and methods should be put in place to carefully monitor the selections made.

10.5 Response rates: targets, calculation and contact forms

1) *Target response rates*

The proportion of non-contacts should not exceed 3% of all eligible sample units.

In addition, the ESS has always aimed for a minimum target response rate of 70% – after discounting ineligibles (as defined by the CST – see 'Calculation of ESS response rates' below). However, we acknowledge that, based on previous experiences in the ESS, reaching this 70% target response rate is unlikely in many countries. As a minimum, all countries are expected to plan and budget fieldwork in order to reach a response rate higher than in the previous round.

NCs will discuss with the SWEP and with the ESS fieldwork team which national target response rate will be used in designing the sample and preparing fieldwork. This national target response rate will be based on response rates in previous rounds and feedback from the Fieldwork Team on past deviations in fieldwork, and may require increased efforts and improvements in the fieldwork design. Survey Agencies should cost their surveys with this response rate in mind and consider what steps may be required to achieve it.

All countries should draw a reserve sample which can be issued (with CST approval) in the event that response rates achieved are lower than expected.

Calculation of ESS face-to-face response rates, and final disposition codes

The ESS response rate is calculated as shown below:

$$Response\ rate = \frac{number\ of\ achieved\ complete\ interviews}{number\ of\ individuals, households, addresses\ selected\ MINUS\ ineligibles}$$

For the calculation of this response rate, **ineligibles** comprise:

For samples of individuals:
- Respondent deceased,
- Respondent emigrated/left the country long term (for more than 6 months),
- Respondent resides in an institution.

For samples of dwellings or addresses:
- Address not occupied at all/demolished premises,
- Address not yet built/under construction,
- Non-residential address (e.g. used solely for business / industrial purposes or as an institutional address, e.g. a prison, a nursing residence, or a boarding school),
- Address occupied, but no resident household (e.g. weekend or second homes),
- Address occupied by resident household, but no eligible respondent (no one aged 15+).

The ESS response rate to be reported will be calculated according to a pre-specified standard format, which will include at least the following mutually exclusive categories:

A. Total issued addresses (or other sample units)
B. Units not eligible, and why (as defined above)
C. Total eligible sample (A-B)
D. % no contact (after 4+ contact attempts, or if fewer contact attempts made, why)
E. % personal refusal, and why (pre-specified categories)
F. % too ill or incapacitated
G. % household (or proxy) refusal, and why (pre-specified categories)
H. % achieved complete interview
I. Total per cent response rate (H/C)

What constitutes a complete interview?
In the interviewer manual, the CST specifies the minimum criteria for designating a productive case as a complete interview.

2) *Contact Forms*

Outcomes of all contact attempts and contacts, whether by telephone, video or in-person visits, to addresses, dwellings and individuals in the sample will be defined and recorded on so-called Contact Forms (CFs) according to a pre-specified set of categories that distinguish ineligibility, interview, non-contact, refusal, other contact (but no interview) and other types of non-response.

The purpose of the Contact Form is to document all stages of interviewers' attempts to make contact with every selected sample unit, to identify non-response units, to assist in improving response rates through re-approaching non-contacts and converting initial refusers and to facilitate the detection of potential non-response bias. Given the nature of the contact procedures during ESS fieldwork, it is recommended that interviewers are remunerated additionally (or separately) for completing the Contact Form. All interviewers are required to complete an **electronic** CF for Round 12.

The content of the face-to-face Contact Form is being reviewed for Round 12. However, it is expected that some or all of the following information will need to be collected (the items in italics may be considered lower-priority and might be removed or reduced for Round 12):

- interviewer identifier,
- date, time, mode and outcome of all contact attempts and contacts,
- dwelling and respondent selection procedure (non-individual sampling frame countries),
- *interviewer's judgment of future cooperation of initial refusers,*
- *demographic information of the initial refusers,*
- *information on dwelling and neighbourhood.*

The CST provide model CF templates, which must be requested from ESS ERIC HQ, for translation and use by national teams. It is preferable that these model CFs are followed by all countries when programming their electronic CFs. If this is not possible, country-specific Contact Forms may be used, but countries must be able to 'bridge' their CF data into the ESS CF Data Protocol.

CFs should be programmed and added to the CAPI programme or completed by some other means of digital collection. Whichever method is used, it must be possible to transmit up to date information on the progress of both productive **and** unproductive cases still in the field to the ESS's central Fieldwork Management System on a fortnightly basis (see below). All countries using the Centerdata face-to-face survey tool suite for Round 12 are required to use one of the model CFs. Centerdata will be responsible for programming the electronic CFs for these countries.

In addition, the Survey Agency should provide information on the interviewers' age group and gender. This information should be delivered as administrative variables in the Main data file to be deposited to the ESS Data Archive.

Detailed guidance on interviewer tasks and the completion of Contact Forms can be found in the NC Manual, which also includes a dummy interview and the interviewer manual (the latter incorporates the former project instructions and guidelines on completing contact forms).

3) *Fieldwork Management System (FMS)*

The ESS has successfully developed and implemented a Fieldwork Management System (FMS[35]) since ESS Round 9. The FMS is a data upload portal which countries are required to use during fieldwork to provide the CST with a fortnightly subset of the contact form data at case level using a pre-specified file template. The data upload portal provides a way for the CST and NCs to have access to timely and detailed monitoring data to ensure that fieldwork standards are being observed in all countries and to assist countries in the event of problems occurring during fieldwork. Documentation and assistance on the use of the FMS upload portal will be provided to NCs and Survey Agencies by the CST. There may be some minor changes to the precise specification of the FMS upload template and summary reporting features for Round 12 based on feedback received following Round 11 fieldwork.

Countries using Centerdata's face-to-face tool suite will use the FMS App, which is updated automatically based on outcomes recorded by interviewers. These countries therefore don't need to manually upload fieldwork updates. However, they will still need to provide a regular commentary of fieldwork updates to their Country Contact.

10.6 Response rate enhancement

The ESS aims for high response rates (target 70%) and low non-contact rates (maximum 3%) in all participating countries. To pursue this, interviewers have to make at least four personal visits to each sample unit before it is abandoned as non-productive:

- on different days of the week and times of day,
- of which at least one must be at the weekend and one in the evening,
- spread over at least two different weeks (14 days).

Similarly, to allow difficult-to-contact people to be located, the fieldwork period should not be less than 8 weeks.

All potential Survey Agencies must suggest a range of techniques that they believe would enhance the final response rate. Such techniques could include advance letters, incentives, toll-free telephone numbers for potential respondents to contact, links to national ESS websites, extra training of interviewers in response-maximisation techniques and doorstep interactions, implementing refusal avoidance and conversion techniques, re-issuing of refusals and non-contacts, and many others not listed here.

Refusal conversion, i.e. obtaining the cooperation of initially reluctant sample persons, should not be confused with the quality back-checks specified in section 10.7.

In pursuing high response rates, one should be mindful of the need to maximise response amongst all groups of the population and to bring response rates to a consistent level among subgroups. Based on experiences from previous rounds, groups can be identified that are harder to reach or less willing to participate, e.g. apartment dwellers, inner-city residents, men, younger respondents[36]. In designing the survey, special efforts should be made to include these groups, e.g. by making more (evening) calls, through interviewer bonuses or respondent incentives.

The CST has previously provided guidance on possible response enhancement strategies such as incentives, whilst recognising that the effectiveness of different

[35] For Round 12, this may be referred to as FieldworkCTRL.
[36] See, for example, https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/methodology/ess-methodology/data-quality-assessment

approaches may well vary between different countries, with different norms, cultural settings, geography, and so forth. Response enhancement techniques employed should be discussed as part of the Fieldwork Questionnaire and documented in the National Technical Summary form[37].

10.7 Fieldwork monitoring and quality assessment

1) *Fieldwork projections*

There is no requirement for countries to submit fieldwork projections for Round 12. It is expected that the last round (Round 11) progress will provide an indication of the flow of interviews during fieldwork. However, in the event that any major differences from this are expected, NCs should raise this with their Country Contact.

2) *Monitoring and progress reports*

Survey Agencies should closely monitor the progress of fieldwork. In Round 12, this will involve using the FMS (see section 10.5). The Survey Agency will need to:

- provide fortnightly fieldwork progress information[38] at case level (based on the information collected using the Contact Form) and upload this to the FMS using a pre-specified template (with the exception of countries using the FMS App as part of Centerdata's face-to-face tool suite).
- ensure regular communication between Survey Agency and NC regarding the progress of and issues arising from fieldwork.

Primary responsibility for realising and monitoring fieldwork rests with the Survey Agency. The FMS is intended to supplement rather than replace regular communication about fieldwork progress – and any corrective measures to be taken – between the Survey Agency and the NC.

The ESS Fieldwork Monitoring Guidelines provide recommendations for how to monitor fieldwork progress effectively using the FMS.

3) *Interim data files*

As at Rounds 10 and 11, the CST will provide NCs with a tool that facilitates the analysis of the interim data locally with the purpose of flagging potentially problematic interview and/or interviewers. This can be run on the interim main questionnaire data (where this has been formatted to meet the data structure in the ESS R12 data protocol) and will produce a report flagging interviews/interviewers across a range of quality metrics.

The interim data file should contain a numeric interviewer identifier to enable the Survey Agency to identify any interviewers flagged. The national teams should make sure that data protection requirements are in place for conducting quality checks over the interim data file.

For Round 12, there is no requirement for NCs to run the interim data checks using the above approach. However, it is recommended that this is done where possible as an important quality assurance measure. If countries are not using the tool provided, they should ensure that other measures are in place to check the quality of the collected data.

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[37] See, for example, https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/methodology/methodological-research/minimising-nonresponse-bias

[38] Countries can supply weekly updates (rather than fortnightly) if this is preferred.

The use of any tool(s) for checking interviewer behaviour must be in accordance with national laws.

4) *Quality control back-checks*

Quality control back-checks are a standard tool to monitor the performance of interviewers. Survey Agencies should make quality control back-checks to respondents. This involves a short interview (whether by telephone or in person) including:

- checks on the respondent selection (if applicable),
- checks on whether an interview was indeed conducted,
- checks if showcards were used,
- checks that a laptop or tablet was used,
- the approximate length of the interview, and
- optionally, some of the ESS questions where change would be unlikely (e.g. age, job title) could be repeated.

We require that back-checks are mentioned during the ESS interviewer briefing. It needs to be mentioned when and how interviews will be selected for back-checks and how this selection will be conducted, on which aspects they will be back-checked, and what the (possible) consequences are in case of detection of irregularities. Furthermore, during fieldwork the NC should be informed by the Survey Agency about the detection of any irregularities due to back checks and discuss this with their Country Contact.

Quality control back-checks of respondents should be conducted across all interviewer assignments (i.e. at least one for each interviewer). Across all achieved interviews, 10% of cases should be back-checked. The back-checks have to be conducted **within two weeks** of a productive interview. The number of respondents to be back-checked per interviewer should increase with the number of respondents the interviewer achieves. We suggest this should be done in the following manner: a minimum of one respondent per interviewer should be randomly selected for back-check from all respondents interviewed by an interviewer within a two-week period. That would mean a minimum of one respondent back-checked for each interviewer every two weeks the interviewer is active during the fieldwork.

An (other) interviewer or supervisor should be sent to check these cases in person. Checks should **not** be done by the original interviewer.

When selecting interviewers for additional back-checks we put forward the following recommendations:

- Selecting interviewers with a low proportion of reported available phone numbers from respondents.
- Selecting interviewers with very high success rate and/or a high number of interviews completed on the same day(s).
- Back-checking cases with a very short interlude of time between the end of one interview and the start of the next conducted by the same interviewer.
- Back-checking respondents with an extremely long or extremely short interview duration. We also encourage NCs to conduct analysis of these interviews in order to identify possible problematic cases.
- If an interviewer is suspected of falsifying data, then all of their remaining cases should be back-checked.

In instances where NCs and/or Survey Agencies become aware of falsified interviews, the CST must be informed, and the cases removed from the main data file submitted to the ESS Data Archive (but retained in the raw data). If a large number of cases have been affected, the NC should discuss remedial action with their Country Contact.

Back-checks should not be confused with re-assigning non-contacts and refusals to interviewers in order to increase the response rates. Back-checks are a quality control instrument.

There is no requirement to back-check cases coded to ineligible outcomes at Round 12. The requirement to document the outcomes of back-checks in the Contact Form data has also been removed for Round 12.

11. Specification for self-completion data collection

This section sets out the requirements for self-completion data collection at ESS Round 12. The face-to-face fieldwork requirements are included in the previous section.

Data collection responsibilities
The NC is responsible for the national implementation of self-completion data collection, the monitoring of data collection and the deliverables. The NC may appoint a Survey Agency or other third party to conduct some or all of the data collection according to the specification in this section, and according to the national elaboration and details of the Methodological Questionnaire. The tasks of the Survey Agency and/or other third parties appointed by the NC will have to be clearly specified in each country. In some cases, there can be a division of labour between NC and Survey Agency or other third party. In all cases, close communication with the NC is required.

11.1 Data collection period

The Round 12 data collection period runs from 1 September 2025 to 15 May 2026. National teams should consider how long they need for their self-completion data collection and plan based on this.

Self-completion data collection is expected to take less time than face-to-face fieldwork in most countries. Therefore, the self-completion approach can start later than face-to-face fieldwork as long as a) it can be completed by the time that face-to-face fieldwork is expected to close, and b) this is before 15 May 2026.

The time needed to complete data collection may vary somewhat between countries based on the approach taken (see section 11.4). In particular, countries that use the fieldworker-first approach may need a little longer than those that use the postal-first approach.

11.2 Producing the web and paper questionnaires for data collection

The self-completion approach includes two questionnaire instruments: a web survey and a paper questionnaire. All countries are required to include both the web and paper questionnaire in their approach. Respondents will be able to complete the web survey using any internet-enabled device they wish (desktop/laptop/tablet/smartphone).

A centralised data collection platform, developed and hosted by Centerdata, will be used for the self-completion approach in all countries. As part of this, Centerdata will be responsible for programming the national web and paper questionnaires for all participating countries.

As noted in section 7.2, NCs will need to provide translations for the web and paper questionnaires in the TranslationCTRL tool, which is part of Centerdata's platform. Once the translation quality checks have been completed and are signed off by the ESS Translation team and Centerdata, they will then be used to produce the national web and paper questionnaires (first used for the pre-test and then the main stage). For countries that offer the survey in multiple languages, separate versions will be produced for each language. Once Centerdata have produced these questionnaires, they will be shared with the NC.

NCs will be responsible for fully checking the web and paper questionnaires prior to the start of data collection. This includes the following checks:

- That all questions are displayed, and in the language expected.
- That the web survey routing is working as specified in the ESS source questionnaire (which will be provided to NCs).
- That the web survey works and displays clearly across a range of devices (PC, tablet, smartphone).
- That questions are displayed clearly and with no formatting issues in the paper questionnaire.
- That any country-specific content is included as expected.

There is likely to be some need for NCs to carry out minor reformatting work on the paper questionnaire. This is because the length of questions and response lists can vary between languages which may present some formatting issues (e.g. questions moving off the bottom of pages). NCs will need access to Adobe's InDesign software in order to perform this task.

As part of their checks, NCs will need to test the full 'round trip' on Centerdata's platform (SurveyCTRL). This involves completing the survey as a respondent would, starting with entering an access code before progressing through the survey. NCs can then check that responses have been registered on the platform. Countries can proceed with their soft launch (see section 11.14) once both the NC and Centerdata have signed off their final web and paper questionnaires. Further details of the testing requirements will be provided in a separate manual.

NCs will be able to raise issues regarding their national questionnaires with Centerdata using the Redmine project management portal. Centerdata will set up Redmine accounts for NCs for this purpose.

At the start of each round, Centerdata will arrange briefing meetings with NCs (including the survey agency where relevant). These meetings will be held virtually and take 1-2 hours. Additional meetings may be held with some countries, in case of country-specific issues or concerns. These meetings will allow Centerdata to familiarize NCs with all aspects of the ESS self-completion platform, from the start of the translation phase to the end of data collection and data entry. The meetings will also allow NCs to ask Centerdata any questions they have.

11.3 Loading the sample on Centerdata's platform and access codes

NCs will need to load their sample cases on to Centerdata's platform in advance of the data collection period. This will comprise a unique ID number for each sample unit, alongside information that NCs need to monitor data collection in each country (e.g. region; in some cases, age and gender if this is expected to support targeting/response enhancement activities). **The uploaded file must <u>not</u> include personal directly identifiable information – e.g. names, addresses, and phone numbers.** The data protection information sheet will inform respondents that Centerdata will not have access to such personal information, and sharing these details will represent a data breach. Centerdata will provide NCs with details of how the sample file should be uploaded.

Once the sample cases have been uploaded, Centerdata will automatically assign a unique access code for each sample unit. This will include the two-letter country code, followed by 6 random digits/letters. This access code will be needed by respondents to log into the web survey. It must be printed on invitation/reminder letters and on the front page of the questionnaire.

11.4 Data collection approaches (introduction)

There are two options for the self-completion data collection approach. They are introduced here and described in more detail in the following sections.

- **Postal-first approach**: all invitations and reminder letters are sent to sample units by post[39]. For some countries, a fieldworker non-response phase must be included at the end of the postal mailings phase (see section 11.6).
- **Fieldworker-first approach**: initial contact with sample units is made by in-person visits from fieldworkers. The fieldworker is responsible for delivering the invitation letter (and paper questionnaire, if using a concurrent approach – see below) and introducing the survey (where contact is made). Reminder letters can either be delivered by further in-person visits from fieldworkers or by postal mail (to be determined by each country).

Each country should decide which of these two data collection approaches they will use. Countries where either of the following applies will need to use the fieldworker-first approach:

- Where the sample frame does not allow letters to be sent to specific addresses.
- Where there is no reliable postal system or mailing provider in the country.

In addition, some countries may judge the fieldworker-first approach to be more cost-effective or efficient, even where none of the above factors apply. NCs are free to choose whichever approach is felt to be more suitable and effective in their country. If NCs are unsure which approach to take, they can contact their Country Contact to discuss options.

For both approaches, countries can also decide whether to use a sequential or concurrent approach.

For the sequential approach, sample units are initially invited to complete the web survey, with a paper questionnaire being included with a later reminder. For the concurrent approach, both web and paper options are offered with the invitation letter.

There are pros and cons associated with both methods. A sequential approach reduces the share of paper completions, which is likely to reduce costs and potentially improve the quality of the data (e.g. as respondents may miss routing instructions on paper). But a concurrent approach may be seen as a more inclusive and 'respondent-friendly' option, in not excluding the offline population from participating until a later stage and providing everyone with a choice throughout.

NCs should decide which approach to take based on any existing evidence in their country and other national factors (e.g. where internet penetration is lower, a concurrent approach may be preferred). Where the fieldworker-first approach is being used a concurrent approach should be taken.

It is acceptable to use 'hybrid' data collection approaches. For example, countries may decide to use the postal-first approach in some parts of the country and the fieldworker-first approach in others. Equally, they could choose to use a sequential design in some regions or with some population groups, and a concurrent design with others. Each country should outline their proposed approach as part of the Methodological Questionnaire (see section 11.8).

[39] This can include the main national postal service or other providers or a combination thereof.

11.5 Protocol for postal-first approach

In order to be able to use the postal-first approach, countries need to be able to send letters reliably to individual addresses and to be able to send an unconditional monetary (cash/voucher) incentive with the invitation letter (see section 11.12 for details of limited exemptions to this incentive requirement).

A minimum of four mailings must be sent: an invitation and three reminder letters. Additional reminders can be made by telephone and/or in person.

The invitation letter should include the link to the web survey landing page and the access code. This information should also be included in all reminder letters (and any other communication sent to sample units). After the invitation letter, the three reminders should be sent to the non-responding sample units, reflecting as closely as possible the following guidelines[40]:

- The first reminder letter must arrive 7 days after the first invitation.
- The second reminder letter should arrive 14 days after the first reminder.
- A third reminder letter should be received approximately 14 days after the second reminder.

It is advisable that letters are timed to arrive so they avoid the very end of the week. This means that technical support and helpline services are more likely to be fully operational.

If a concurrent approach is being used, the paper questionnaire should be sent with the invitation mailing. A further copy of the questionnaire should be sent with one of the reminder mailings. If a sequential approach is being used, the paper questionnaire should be sent with the first or second reminder letters. In all cases where a paper questionnaire is sent, a (pre-paid) freepost return envelope needs to be included to allow respondents to send back completed questionnaires.

All reminders should only be sent to non-responding sample units who have not opted out. NCs (or their appointed agencies) will therefore need to monitor completions and remove sample units from mailings where relevant as soon as possible (information on completions will be available in Centerdata's platform). For the first reminder, there is a very limited time period to do this and inevitably this means some who have responded will receive that reminder. However, it is crucial that the first reminder arrives as specified as this has been shown to be optimal for boosting response.

Paper questionnaire returns should be collected, recorded and checked for completeness on a daily basis. The questionnaires must also be stored securely. Where letters are returned as non-delivered, this should be recorded alongside any reasons for non-delivery. This information will be required for outcome code classification in the contact data file. Refusals from respondents should also be documented. When paper questionnaires are received, they should be logged on the date they arrive by post as this information will be required as part of the final dataset. This information can be logged on Centerdata's platform.

11.6 Minimizing nonresponse: fieldworker nonresponse phase and alternatives

It is possible that many (but not all) countries will achieve a lower response rate for the self-completion approach than has previously been achieved based on face-to-face fieldwork. It is therefore important that ESS achieves the highest possible response rates

[40] Dillman, D.A., Smyth, J.D., & Christian L.M. (2014). Internet, phone, mail and mixed-mode surveys: The Tailored Design Method. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

under the new approach. This is because "Low response rates can seriously undermine the representativeness of a survey, since with low response rates there is a greater potential for bias" (Stoop, Billiet, Koch and Fitzgerald, 2010)[41].

There are limitations with relying only on postal invitations and reminders for countries that use the postal-first approach. Some sample units may not receive or open letters – perhaps particularly if they are not addressed to named individuals. Excluding people who don't open invitation and reminder letters will negatively impact on response rates and sample composition.

The risk of letters not being opened is expected to be higher for countries that use address-based samples, since letters will be addressed to 'The residents' rather than a named person. These countries also don't usually have the option of a reminder phase by phone or targeting different sample members in different ways (e.g. based on their age group).

Countries using the postal-first approach and who use address-based samples are therefore required to carry out a fieldworker non-response phase. This will involve fieldworkers making in-person visits to all non-responding cases after completion of the postal mailings phase.

Fieldworkers should attempt in-person contact at selected sample units for the non-response phase. A minimum of two contact attempts must be made and these attempts can either be on the same day (at least 3 hours apart) or ideally on different days. When contact is made, the fieldworker should introduce the response task and provide a copy of the web survey invitation, the paper questionnaire, and freepost return envelope (if the free post option is not available in a particular country, a time to collect the paper questionnaire should be agreed). If there has been no contact at the address after the final visit, the fieldworker should leave the web survey invitation, paper questionnaire and freepost return envelope in the postbox.

The role of the fieldworker is simply to encourage the sample units to complete the survey and provide the materials to enable this. They should not assist respondents in the process of completing the questionnaire (e.g. reading questions and coding answers). They are allowed to help respondents log onto the web survey.

If the fieldworker phase is proposed but due to budgetary issues it is not possible to visit all nonresponding cases, it may be acceptable to only target a subset of non-responding sample units. National teams need to present any proposals for a reduced non-response phase to the CST for approval. It is more likely that any such proposal will be approved if the reduced non-response phase specifically target areas/groups where response rates are lower[42].

The fieldworker non-response phase is also strongly recommended (but not a strict requirement) for countries using the postal-first approach and with individual samples. Where the fieldworker phase is not proposed in these countries, national teams are required to carry out an alternative activity to minimize nonresponse. They should present their alternative proposal to the CST for approval prior to launching any tender for agencies. Below we outline three alternative options for targeting non-

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[41] Improving Survey Response: Lessons learned from the European Social Survey.
[42] If it is not possible to add information at the level of the individual sample unit that allows targeting, it might be possible to add information to sample units that reflect the area where they are located. This could include information such as levels of deprivation, age profile or information about the housing type. Such an approach can facilitate targeting even if it is less direct. For an example, see the 'DCMS Participation Survey goes digital' Presented by Penny Gaught-Allen (DCMS), Joel Williams (Verian) https://natcen.ac.uk/events/3rd-survey-practice-forum-changing-data-collection-modes (see the section of the video between 3 hrs 27 mins and 4 hrs 5 mins).

responding individuals:

- Option 1: **Including additional reminders via an alternative channel** (i.e. not postal mail). This could include phone calls, SMS messages or emails. These options will only be feasible if the contact details are available for a large share of the sample. Countries can have the option to include these reminders for all non-respondents or to specifically target subgroups where response rates are lower with the aim of minimizing non-response bias.

- Option 2: **Sending an additional mailing or offering something additional only to subgroups where response rates are lower**. This could include an extra mailing with messaging targeted at encouraging the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g. young people or those in a certain part of the country). Alternatively, an additional or higher incentive could be offered to those in subgroups with lower response propensity.

- Option 3: **Sending or offering something additional to <u>all non-respondents</u>, but with tailoring based on boosting the participation of underrepresented groups**. In some countries, it won't be possible to send targeted mailings only to certain groups (i.e. where information to allow this targeting is not available in the sample). However, in these cases, countries could send something additional (e.g. an extra mailing or offer an extra incentive) to all non-respondents but with the aim of particularly increasing response rates in underrepresented groups. For example, if younger people are underrepresented, an additional letter could be designed to particularly appeal to this group by noting the importance of their participation. We see in most countries that those with lower levels of education tend to be underrepresented with a self-completion approach. One option may be to consider sending an additional shorter and simpler language reminder letter to encourage the participation of these groups.

11.7 Protocol for fieldworker-first approach

Under the fieldworker-first approach, fieldworkers are used to attempt in-person contact with sample units, hand-deliver the invitation letter, and introduce the survey. It is expected that this personal contact may maximize the chances of sample units responding to the survey. Where address-based samples are used, fieldworkers can instruct household members that the survey should be completed by the person aged 15+ with the next birthday[43].

Visits to addresses should be made at times when people are most likely to be at home. Fieldworkers should also provide a copy of the paper questionnaire. In addition, fieldworkers should try to collect contact information (e.g. names and telephone number) to be used for reminders.

If there is no contact at the sample unit, the fieldworker can either make repeat visits or leave the survey invitation at the dwelling (in a postbox). Repeat visits may be needed in cases where it is not feasible to leave the invitation letter anywhere (e.g. locked gates or no postbox available).

Reminder letters can either be hand-delivered by fieldworkers or sent via the post. In countries where the sample frame does not include specific addresses but the postal

[43] It is not expected that the fieldworkers carry out the within-household selection beyond this instruction. This simplifies the contact process and their task and means they are not required to ask for information on the household on the doorstep. If any NCs strongly feel that fieldworkers should be responsible for the within-household selection process in their country, they should raise this with their Country Contact.

system works well (i.e. the vast majority of letters will be delivered), this information can be collected by fieldworkers as part of the initial contact phase – meaning that reminders can then be sent via the post. However, in countries where the postal system does not allow letters to be sent reliably, fieldworkers will be needed to deliver the reminder letters. In these cases, as with the invitation letters, they should attempt contact at the address and leave a copy of the letter in a postbox when no one is at home. It will be up to each country using the fieldworker-first approach to determine the most suitable strategy in their country, in consultation with their Country Contact.

As with the postal-first approach, three reminder letters should be sent/given to non-responders, at the following intervals:

- The first reminder letter should ideally arrive 7 days after the first invitation.
- The second reminder letter should ideally arrive 14 days after the first reminder.
- A third reminder letter should be received approximately 14 days after the second reminder.

It is advisable that letters are timed to arrive so they avoid the very end of the week. This means that technical support and helpline services are more likely to be fully operational. Countries using the fieldworker-first approach should use a concurrent approach with the web and paper questionnaires.

Countries using the fieldworker-first approach will need to determine how completed paper questionnaire are returned. Where there are no serious concerns with the postal system, a freepost return envelope can be provided with the paper questionnaire, allowing respondents to send the completed questionnaire back in the post. However, where there are concerns with the postal system, it will be necessary for fieldworkers to make repeat visits to sample units to collect completed questionnaires and arrange for their safe return to the office. Where this applies, it is recommended that fieldworkers make appointments for a time to collect the questionnaire based on when the respondent is available and expects to have completed it. The approach to collection and return of paper questionnaires needs to be specified in the Data Processing Agreement (see section 8.1).

Where in-person visits are made, details of the visits will need to be recorded for inclusion in the contact data file for the self-completion approach. This will include the date/time and outcome of each visit. A paper contact form template will be provided by the CST to NCs for this purpose.

Where in-person visits are used for reminders or to collect completed paper questionnaires, fieldworkers will need to be kept up-to-date with outcomes – for example, cases where people have already completed the survey or opted-out. This will avoid any unnecessary visits to sample units and annoying respondents. NCs (or their appointed agencies) will be able to monitor which cases have completed the web survey on Centerdata's platform. This will also allow cases to be removed from reminder mailings where postal reminders are being used.

Unless stated otherwise, all of the remaining sections in this chapter are relevant to all countries, regardless of whether the postal-first or fieldworker-first approach is taken.

11.8 Methodological Questionnaire

All countries (regardless of the approach taken) will need to complete a Methodological Questionnaire based on a template provided by the CST. NCs will be asked to describe their proposed self-completion data collection approach in this questionnaire.

The Methodological Questionnaire will form the basis for discussions with Country Contacts regarding the proposed approach. It should therefore be completed at a time when there is still scope to change details of the proposed approach. **The Methodological Questionnaire must be signed-off at least one month before the start of the planned data collection start date.**

11.9 Invitation letters and reminders

The CST will provide source versions of survey invitation and reminder letters. These will need to be translated by the national translation teams following the same approach and with the same care as the Round 12 questionnaire. Minor wording changes may be needed depending on the specific approach taken in the country. However, other changes should not be made as the source versions are based on extensive testing and expert advice. The translated letters will be included as part of the translation checks to ensure consistency with the source wording.

NCs also need to consider if the invitation needs to be provided in more than one language and if so when / how this will be delivered (e.g., double-sided letter).

It is mandatory to use different envelopes for each mailing stage. By providing different sizes, colours or even shapes of envelope it suggests to the respondent that this is something different and makes them more likely to be opened. NCs (and appointed agencies/third parties) are advised to avoid using materials which make the mailing look like a commercial marketing exercise (e.g. very bright colours).

If there are different categories of postage or different providers available in the country, it is strongly recommended to select the option expected to be most reliable to maximise the chances of letters being delivered to sample units. Services with very recognisable envelopes that might be associated to advertising should be avoided. Providers that offer mail tracking might be preferred in order to ensure that letters are being delivered as expected.

In countries where an individual sample is available, the invitation letters and reminders should be personalised with the respondent’s name. Where not available this should be ‘To the Resident’ or ‘To the Occupier’ depending on the usual approach in the country.

It is strongly recommended that letters are sent using letterhead and a signatory from the NC Institution, rather than the survey agency. This is expected to give the request more legitimacy and increase the chances of people responding. There may be exceptions to this, which should be discussed between NCs and their Country Contact.

Some web surveys use QR codes in invitaton and reminder letters, which allow respondents to directly access the web survey landing page (see section 11.11) without typing the URL. Evidence on the impact of QR codes is currently inconclusive. Some studies have found that they improve response rates, but also increase the proportion who complete surveys using smartphones[44]. Since those using smartphone are usually more likely to break-off in surveys, and may provide lower data quality in some contexts, the overall impact of using QR codes is not entirely clear. NCs can choose to print QR codes on letters but should review any available national evidence before making this decision.

[44] Kyle Endres, Erin O Heiden, Ki Park, Mary E Losch, Karisa K Harland, Anne L Abbott, Experimenting with QR Codes and Envelope Size in Push-to-Web Surveys, Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology, 2023.

11.10 Data protection information sheet

A data protection information sheet needs to be sent/provided to sample units with the invitation letter. The information sheet must be directly translated from the source version provided by the CST, with no information excluded. As with the letters, the translated information sheet will be included as part of the translation checks. See section 8.4 for further data protection details on the information sheet.

11.11 Landing page for web survey

NCs will need to set up a landing page for the survey in their country. The URL for this page must appear on all of the invitation and reminder letters. The URL should be short and simple to allow people to type this easily and minimize the risk of errors. It should also be meaningful – i.e. referring to the survey name being used in your country. It is usually recommended that the landing page is hosted by the NC institution to give more legitimacy.

The landing page should include basic details of the survey, a link to an electronic copy of the data protection information sheet, and a link to start the survey (which will take people to the login page in the national web questionnaire programmed by Centerdata). The link to start the survey should be made very prominent on the landing page so this can be easily seen. The landing page should also include the same logos as the letters to help reassure respondents that the web page is genuine.

A short specification for setting up the landing page will be provided to NCs by the CST. Additional text should not usually be added as its best to avoid a text heavy page.

11.12 Incentives

For countries using the postal first approach, an unconditional monetary incentive is required. The only exceptions to this are where it is illegal to send monetary incentives, it is not possible to send them by post (private providers should be considered if state mail prevents this) or if it creates a tax burden for respondents. In cases where any of these barriers apply, a significant non-monetary incentive must be offered.

Institutional barriers to sending monetary incentives should be overcome through flexible solutions (e.g. the use of a third-party contractor).

Monetary incentives can include cash or vouchers, but where possible cash is recommended. It excludes entry into prize draws or lotteries. Where vouchers are used, these should be for widely known and accessible stores across the country (e.g. vouchers only redeemable at physical stores that only exist in certain regions should be avoided). The incentive needs to be sent in the same envelope as the invitation letter.

Where the fieldworker-first approach is used, an unconditional incentive is not required but may be beneficial in helping to increase the response rate.

It is strongly recommended that a conditional incentive is offered for both the postal-first and fieldworker-first approaches.

The incentive amounts can vary between countries depending on the relative value of different amounts. It is likely countries will need to use quite a small unconditional incentive (perhaps no more than €5 or equivalent) given the relatively low response rate expected in most countries (therefore needing quite a large gross sample). However, this unconditional offering is still felt to be essential in motivating target respondents to complete the survey. The conditional incentive should usually be larger given it will only be paid to those who complete the survey (perhaps at least €10 or equivalent). The conditional incentive is not mandatory, but for a fairly long self-completion survey such as ESS, it is felt to be highly beneficial to include this.

The unconditional incentive should be sent with the invitation letter or handed out by the fieldworker on first visit/contact. The conditional incentive should be sent or handed to those who have completed the survey, along with a thank you letter.

Countries are not permitted to use different incentive approaches (e.g. non-monetary) unless it is not possible to send a monetary incentive based on the exclusion criteria above. Where a non-monetary incentive is proposed for these reasons, NCs should submit their proposed approach to the CST to review at an early stage of their planning, alongside any available evidence from other surveys.

11.13 Feasibility testing

Countries that have not previously delivered ESS's self-completion approach (or something equivalent to this) are required to carry out a feasibility test before their main Round 12 data collection. Countries that have previously used the approach – for ESS Round 10, feasibility testing/parallel runs, or from other similar studies to ESS – do not need to carry out a feasibility test. However, all countries are required to carry out a questionnaire pre-test (see section 7.2.3) and a soft launch (see section 11.14).

Where a feasibility test is required, countries should use a gross sample of at least 1,000 cases and follow a similar approach to that being planned for their main stage data collection (the number of reminders can be reduced, and the fieldworker non-response phase excluded). Following completion of the test, NCs should submit a report to the CST (based on a template provided) summarizing the outcomes. This report will be reviewed by the Country Contact and facilitate discussion regarding any changes to make before the main stage.

11.14 Soft launch

All countries are required to carry out a 'soft launch' of their data collection. This involves issuing a small subset of the sample to invite to complete the survey in advance of the full launch and ensuring everything is working as expected before the full launch.

The need for a soft launch reflects the nature of a self-completion survey where responses tend to come much more quickly compared with a face-to-face survey. Therefore, in the unlikely event that any issues are detected, they will only impact a small proportion of the sample and can be resolved before the full launch.

The soft launch differs from a pilot/pre-test as the soft launch is part of the main data collection and will count towards the final achieved sample (assuming no major issues are detected that would affect the data). It is recommended that the soft launch sample includes around 5% of the full sample. Cases assigned to the soft launch should be sent their invitations mailings in advance of the 'full launch' (i.e. when the rest of the sample are sent invitations).

Following the soft launch, NCs should check that the rate of completions is as expected[45] and review the data to make sure all questions are being answered based on the questionnaire routing. In countries using a concurrent approach, a sample of the returned paper questionnaires should be reviewed, in addition to web responses. Any

[45] To support this, the CST will provide NCs with graphs showing web completions over the data collection phase for countries that have carried out ESS's self-completion approach previously.

issues or concerns arising from the soft launch should be flagged to the Country Contact. It is recommended to include at least two weeks between the soft launch and main launch to allow responses to be checked and any issues resolved. A longer period is likely to be needed in countries using concurrent approaches (to allow for some checking of paper questionnaires).

The requirement for a soft launch applies to both the postal-first and fieldworker-first approaches. For the postal-first approach, a random 5% of the sample should be sent invitation letters. For the fieldworker-first approach, 5% of the sample should be issued to fieldworkers to attempt contact (it is expected this may not be a random 5% as it will be inefficient to issue small numbers of cases across the country).

Soft launch cases need to be sent reminder letters as described in sections 11.5 and 11.7. However, NCs should follow a different schedule for soft launch and full launch reminders to keep intervals between mailings consistent. The table below shows the schedule that should be followed based on an example where soft launch invitations are sent on 1st September and where the full launch is planned for 1 month after this (on 1st October).

	Soft launch	**Full launch**
Invitation	1st September	1st October
1st reminder	8th September	8th October
2nd reminder	22nd September	22nd October
3rd reminder	6th October	5th November

As noted above, the soft launch differs from the pre-test (described separately in section 7.2.3). Both the pre-test and soft launch need to be carried out by all countries. The key difference between the two phases is that the pre-test is part of the national preparations to test and finalise the web and paper questionnaire, whereas the soft launch is part of the main data collection stage. The table below compares the two phases on various metrics.

	Pre-test	**Soft launch**
Description and objectives	A small-scale test of the translated web and paper questionnaires. These are tested with respondents that are not included in the sample drawn for Round 12 data collection. The pre-test will allow for a test of whether respondents can access/start the questionnaire based on the instructions in the invitation letter, and whether there are any errors/issues with questionnaire layout or translation that need to be resolved before the soft launch. This represents the 'P' in the TRAPD translation approach.	An initial/first launch of the Round 12 main stage data collection for the self-completion approach. This involves sending the invitation letters to a small subset of the main stage gross sample rather than sending to the full gross sample. It allows for an initial check of the contact and response process for this small sample and means that if any issues/errors are detected, they only impact a small share of the sample and can be rectified before the full launch.

	Pre-test	Soft launch
Timing	To be completed at least one month before the soft launch.	To be completed at least two weeks before the full launch (when the remainder of invitations letters will be sent). This should be seen as the absolute minimum and in most cases a longer gap (e.g. four weeks) is strongly recommended. This will allow more time for a full review of soft launch responses. It is also strongly recommended to delay printing materials for the full launch until the soft launch has been checked. Otherwise, there is a risk that materials need to be re-printed (if the soft launch reveals any issues).
Sample	Participants can be recruited through purposive/convenience sampling. Quotas should be set to ensure inclusion of different population groups (e.g. offline people and those with lower levels of literacy).	This should be a subset of the main stage gross sample. In most cases it should be drawn randomly from the full sample, but where a fieldworker-first approach is being used, it can be a non-random subset (see details above).
Scale	30 interviews to be carried out	The soft launch sample should include around 5% of the main stage gross sample. For example, if the main stage gross sample is 10,000 units, 500 of them should be used for the soft launch.
Approach	Participants should be recruited to complete the questionnaire either at home or in a central location (e.g. lab). An interviewer/ researcher should be present for the interviews to observe the response process.	The soft launch involves sending/ delivering the invitation letter and (where using a concurrent approach) paper questionnaire to the soft launch sample units. The approach should fully reflect what has been agreed in a country's methodological questionnaire for their self-completion data collection.
Outcomes	Feedback on any issues experienced/changes needed from the interviewers/ researchers observing the questionnaire completions. This feedback should be reviewed by national teams before determining whether any changes are needed to the questionnaires/materials for the main stage (consulting with ESS HQ and the ESS Translation team as needed).	National teams should a) check that target respondents are starting and finishing the web survey (monitoring progress on SurveyCTRL); b) review any contacts/complaints from target respondents; c) review the data from the web questionnaire to make sure it looks as expected (i.e. all relevant questions being answered); and d) (where relevant) check a sample of completed paper questionnaires (e.g. to make sure no questions/pages are missing). Based on this they should consider if any changes are needed in advance of the full launch.

	Pre-test	Soft launch
Use of data	The data is only being collected for the purpose of the pre-test and can be deleted thereafter (in line with what has been agreed with participants). It will **not** form part of a country's Round 12 data.	Assuming no major quality issues are found, the soft launch cases will be part of the main stage net sample. They will be included in the main data file and contact data file in the same way as the full launch cases. A 'batch' variable in the contact data will identify the soft launch cases.

11.15 Batches

Some countries may decide to divide their gross sample into batches (beyond the soft and full launches). This will allow them to assess the response from the first batch before deciding how many cases from additional batches need to be issued. It may be a good option in countries where there are large uncertainties about what response rate may be achieved. However, taking such a batched approach also comes with challenges. There are more mailings to schedule and organise with agencies/printing houses, and in some cases, this may increase the risk of errors. It will also increase the length of the data collection phase. Countries should therefore consider carefully whether such a batched approach is needed. Where this is used, it is strongly advised that countries include a maximum of two batches (not including the soft launch) to minimise complexity. The precise details of national approaches should be outlined in the methodological questionnaire and discussed with Country Contacts.

11.16 Other response maximization activities

All countries are strongly encouraged to consider and propose other measures that can maximize their response rate and/or improve their sample composition. This may include:

- Publicizing that the survey is taking place (especially in countries where surveys are rare).
- Sending an additional reminder letter, postcard or other reminder format (e.g. box with letter inside) in addition to the three reminders required by the specification. This letter could take a different form to the previous letters (e.g. different style of envelope or different messaging).
- Adding telephone or SMS reminders where telephone numbers are available for a large share of the sample. These reminders can happen during the postal mailings phase (e.g. before the final mailing) or after this phase (or both).
- Considering any strategies to target usually under-represented groups where the sample allows such targeting – e.g. using additional tailored reminders or incentives.

A balance should be struck between taking steps to maximize response rates and/or improve sample composition, and not overly burdening target respondents with contact attempts. To this end, the maximum number of confirmed contacts any sample unit should receive across all methods is 10. A confirmed contact includes the delivery of a letter, a phone call, SMS or email, or where in-person contact is made by a fieldworker. In-person contact attempts by fieldworkers where no contact is made and nothing is left at the address do not count towards this limit.

There should be a clear process in place for target respondents to opt-out of further contact at any point during the data collection phase (see section 11.17).

NCs should include details of any response maximization activities in the Methodological Questionnaire (see section 11.8). Where possible, the data should record which condition(s) respondents received at the case level.

11.17 Respondent helpline

Regardless of the data collection approach used, a helpline for respondents must be provided throughout the data collection period. This should include an email address (with an out of office message out of working hours) as well as a telephone number (with an answer phone for out of working hours). Some weekend cover must be offered at times when high response volumes are expected. It is likely that call/email volumes will be high after invitation/reminders letters have been delivered, and lower during other periods. Any target respondent should contacts the helpline to refuse to participate in the survey must be removed from all further communication (including letters, in-person visits, and any other contact methods).

11.18 Response rate target and assumptions

The ESS has always aimed for high response rates. This remains the case after the switch to self-completion data collection. The ESS aims to exceed response rates that are achieved by other studies implementing self-completion designs. With this in mind, it is expected that all countries work towards achieving a **45% response rate**.

Several countries that adopted the self-completion approach at ESS Round 10 achieved response rates of between 35% and 40%. With more development time and additional response maximization activities, it's expected that these rates can be improved in future, so the 45% should be a realistic aspiration for many countries.

While the 45% represents ESS's target response rate for the self-completion approach, it is not suggested that all countries design their samples based on an assumption that this target would be achieved. Rather, it is recommended that response rate assumptions are based on what has previously been achieved for ESS's self-completion approach (at Round 10), in feasibility testing or parallel runs, or from other similar studies. Where NCs are unsure on the likely response rate due to a lack of prior evidence, it is recommended to assume a 25% response rate when designing the sample.

It is mandatory that a reserve sample is drawn given uncertainties over the likely level of response in some countries. The reserve sample can be issued in the event that the response rate falls short of expectations, to prevent a major shortfall against the target effective sample.

11.19 Response rate calculations

The calculation of response rates in ESS Round 12 for self-completion mode presents challenges stemming from diverse approaches to recruitment employed across countries, such as postal invitations and fieldworker engagement as well as from different self-completion modes used to collect the data (paper and web). These differences pose complexities in determining final disposition codes, notably concerning nonresponse outcomes, where postal recruitment may result in a higher prevalence of cases labeled as unknown eligibility due to limited fieldworker interaction with target persons or households. In general, the self-completion approach with decreased or even no interviewer/ fieldworker participation will make it much harder or even impossible in most cases to distinguish eligible cases from ineligible among non-contact contact attempt outcomes. This in turn will substantially increase the number of unknown ineligibility cases in self-completion mode compared to face-to-face mode.

To address this, two measures of response rate (RR), will be used, aligning with AAPOR standards. The first one is Response Rate 1 (RR1) which involves calculating the response rate by considering completed interviews divided by the total gross sample minus known ineligible cases (AAPOR Standard definitions, 2023: 85-86[46]). The second one is a corrected Response Rate (RR_corrected) which is based on proportional allocation of eligibility of cases with unknown eligibility non-response contact outcomes. Proportional allocation implies the use of the ratio of eligible to not eligible cases among the face-to-face mode target persons and application of this ratio to self-completion mode unknown eligibility cases (Smith, 2009: 3[47]). Thus, RR_corrected is calculated as completed interviews divided by the total gross sample minus known ineligible cases minus unknown eligibility cases multiplied by the ratio of eligible to not eligible cases among the face-to-face mode target persons.

The key distinction between RR1 and RR_corrected lies in the treatment of cases categorized as unknown eligibility: RR1 assumes all of these cases as eligible, while RR_corrected assumes the same proportion of cases as eligible as in the face-to-face data collection mode. This nuanced difference in treatment of unknown eligibility cases results in divergent estimations of response rates. For Round 12, the calculation of RR_corrected will allow for a comparison of response rates achieved between the face-to-face and self-completion approaches based on consistent assumptions.

Calculation of ESS response rates for Round 12 self-completion approach

RR1 =

$$\frac{\text{number of completed questionnaires (valid interviews)}}{\text{number of individuals, households, addresses selected - known ineligibles}}$$

RR_corrected =

$$\frac{\text{number of completed questionnaires (valid interviews)}}{\text{number of individuals, households, addresses selected - known ineligibles - }(e_{F2F}{}^{48} \text{ * unknown eligibility non-response cases})}$$

For the calculation of these response rates, **unknown eligibility non-response** comprise:

For samples of individuals:

- Unreachable housing unit
- Fieldworker unable to reach housing unit and cannot verify address
- Fieldworker unable to locate housing unit/address
- No one reached at the housing unit
- Target person never available at the eligible address
- Inability to gain access to sampled housing unit
- Letter with invitation was not received (dependent on country mailing system)
- Not mailed
- Letter returned Unopened

[46] The American Association for Public Opinion Research. 2023 Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys. 10th edition. AAPOR.
[47] Smith, T. W. (2009). A revised review of methods to estimate the status of cases with unknown eligibility. Chicago: University of Chicago, National Opinion Research Center.
[48] e_{F2F} - ratio of eligible to not eligible cases among the face-to-face mode target persons.

- Letter returned Opened
- Nothing ever returned

For samples of households or addresses:
- Unreachable housing unit
- Fieldworker unable to reach housing unit and cannot verify address
- Fieldworker unable to locate housing unit/address
- No one reached at the housing unit
- Inability to gain access to sampled housing unit
- Letter with invitation was not received (dependent on country mailing system)
- Not mailed
- Letter returned Unopened
- Letter returned Opened
- Nothing ever returned

For the calculation of this response rate, **known ineligibles** comprise:

For samples of individuals:
- Target person deceased
- Target person emigrated/left the country long term (for more than 6 months
- Target person resides in an institution
    - Duplicate listing

For samples of households or addresses:
- Address not occupied at all/demolished premises
- Address not yet built/under construction
- Non-residential address (e.g. used solely for business / industrial purposes or as an institutional address, e.g. a prison, a nursing residence, or a boarding school)
- Address occupied, but no resident household (e.g. weekend or second homes)
- Address occupied by resident household, but no eligible respondent (no one aged 15+)
    - No Such Address
    - Duplicate listing

What constitutes a complete interview?
Cases where at least 75% of the 'ask all' questions in the questionnaire have been answered will comprise a complete interview[49].

Case level outcome information for all issued sample units will be required. The data protocol will set out the information to be recorded and the format required. However, as a minimum it is expected that this will include:

- Whether the sample unit has been issued in each contact attempt
- Date of each mailing/visit/other contact attempt (where sample unit included)
- Whether included in fieldworker non-response phase (where applicable – see section 11.6)
- Outcome information (see details in table above)

[49] However, all cases to start the survey should be included in the data file sent to the ESS Data Archive (see section 12 for further details).

11.20 Monitoring data collection progress

NCs and their appointed parties will be able to monitor data collection progress using Centerdata's platform. This will show which cases have started/finished the web survey at any point during the data collection phase and provide a breakdown of responses against different categories (depending on the information uploaded with the sample).

During the data collection phase, NCs should upload sample files with updated information at each mailing stage. This will allow progress to be tracked in relation to mailing dates. It will also allow for cases where paper questionnaires have been completed and returned to be recorded, alongside other outcomes (e.g. ineligibles, refusals). Centerdata will provide instructions for NCs on how this information should be uploaded to the self-completion platform.

NCs (or their agencies) can enter responses from paper questionnaires using the data entry questionnaire tool in the Centerdata platform (see section 12.1 for more information on this) or choose to scan these separately and merge the paper and web data later.

NCs should provide a short weekly commentary to their country contact in the myESS platform on their data collection progress. This should include latest completion numbers (split by web and paper), planning for upcoming reminders/other activities, and highlighting any issues or concerns.

11.21 Recruitment and briefing of fieldworkers

Most countries will be required to use fieldworkers at some point in their data collection phase. For countries using the fieldworker-first approach, they will make first contact with sample units and potentially deliver reminder letters and collect completed questionnaires. For some countries using the postal-first approach, fieldworkers will be used for the non-response phase (see section 11.6 for details of where this phase is compulsory).

The key distinction between these uses of fieldworkers and the role of interviewers under ESS's previous face-to-face approach is that the fieldworker will not be carrying out any interviewing. This is why they are referred to as fieldworkers in this specification and not as interviewers.

NCs (and agencies) will need to consider how to best resource these fieldworker tasks. In some cases, existing interviewers could be repurposed to take on this role. But there may be reasons why this is not possible or appropriate: for example, this resource may not exist anymore, it may be prohibitively expensive, or interviewers may not be motivated to perform this task. It may therefore be necessary to recruit new resources to take on the specific fieldworker tasks required here.

Fieldworkers will need to be briefed about the specific tasks they will perform (which will vary based on the approach taken in each country). Guidance on these briefings will be provided by the CST.

NCs (and agencies) should also consider how fieldworkers are paid. While the task is not equivalent to carrying out face-to-face interviews, it will be important to ensure fieldworkers are paid sufficiently well to ensure they visit all of their allocated sample units. It is recommended that at least part of the payment (or a bonus) is based on subsequent completion of the questionnaire. This should help motivate fieldworkers to encourage sample units to complete the survey.

The CST will review the effectiveness of the fieldworker non-response phase in Round 12 and decide if / how it should be continued in future rounds.

11.22 Sample assessment

As well as achieving the highest possible response rate, it will be important to ensure the achieved sample reflects the composition of the national population as closely as possible. To allow this to be assessed, NCs will be required to complete a sample and non-response assessment immediately following completion of data collection. This should show the breakdown of the achieved sample by different socio-demographic categories (e.g. age, gender, citizenship, education, working status, region) against the eligible population. A short commentary on any large discrepancies should also be provided by the NC. The CST will provide a template for this report.

12. After fieldwork: data processing

Well documented and accurate data is at the core of providing excellent service to the end users of the ESS infrastructure. Data processing is therefore a crucial responsibility of the NC and the survey agencies / other third parties who they may delegate these tasks to.

12.1 Data entry or scanning from paper questionnaires

Centerdata's data entry questionnaire will be available to countries to use free of charge as part of the centralised platform for self-completion. As completed paper questionnaires are received, NCs or survey agencies/other third parties will be able to enter responses into the data entry questionnaire.

The design of the data entry questionnaire will mimic the paper questionnaire, with all questions available. Responses should be entered exactly as they appear in the paper questionnaire, even where this does not correspond to questionnaire routing. The only exception will be for single-code questions where a respondent selects multiple responses. In these cases, the question should be left blank in the data entry questionnaire.

It is recommended that countries carry out the data entry process on an ongoing basis during data collection, rather than waiting until the end of the data collection phase, to minimise processing delays. Centerdata will provide detailed documentation and briefing on the data entry questionnaire to NCs.

It is recommended that all countries use Centerdata's platform for data entry of paper questionnaire responses. However, countries are permitted to use scanning rather than data entry if this is preferred. Where scanning is used, NCs are strongly advised to use the variable and value definitions from the data protocol when programming the scanning software. It will also be necessary for NCs to merge the web and paper data where scanning is used (where Centerdata's data entry questionnaire is used, the web and paper data can be automatically merged).

12.2 Deliverables

The ESS Data Protocol provides the complete list of deliverables to be deposited to the ESS Data Archive. Funders are requested to make receipt of these deliverables part of the contract with the NC. All details on how to present the deliverables as well as the procedures to be applied in the production of the national ESS data and metadata are described in that protocol. All NCs should adhere to the specification provided in the ESS Data Protocol and dictionaries. The ESS Data Protocol for Round 12 will be made available on the ESS Round 12 NC Intranet in by the end of 2024.

All electronic deliverables are to be uploaded to the ESS Round 12 NC Intranet (on myESS12) by the end of March 2026 for the first release and the end of June 2026 for the second release. Prior to deposit of data, each NC is responsible for checking and assuring anonymity of their data files a, b and c (see section 8.6).

If the content and quality of the electronic deliverables do not adhere to the specification in the Data Protocol and the standards available from the ESS Round 12 NC Intranet, the Archive reserves the right to ask for new deliverables.

For the mixed-mode Round 12, NCs should deliver a combined Main questionnaire data file, including face-to-face and self-completion (web and paper) cases. A single data protocol will be provided, and the questionnaires will be set up to be as similar as possible between modes. However, NCs will need to merge and fully check the data from each mode before deposit to the Archive. The Main questionnaire data file should include all cases to start the survey, regardless of how many questions have been completed.

It is expected that NCs will need to deposit separate Contact Form data files for the face-to-face and self-completion approaches. However, the requirements for the contact data are being reviewed from previous rounds, with an aim to simplify this process for NCs. For example, for Round 12 there is no requirement to include the results of back-checks in the face-to-face contact data file. Where fieldworkers are not being used for the self-completion approach, it is expected that the data requirements for the self-completion contact data will be minimal.

ESS deliverables

Data files:

a) Data from Main questionnaire (combined for face-to-face and self-completion), including test and country-specific questions
b) Face-to-face Contact Form (CF) data
c) Self-completion Contact Form (CF) data
d) Interviewer Questionnaire/Respondent Experience Questions data (a combined file covering each mode)
e) Sample design data file (SDDF)
f) Raw data (separate files for each mode, including verbatim answers from open questions (including ancestry))

Documents:

a) National Technical Summary (NTS) with appendices (education, income, political parties, marital and relationship status)
b) Population statistics
c) Main face-to-face questionnaire(s) (all language versions) *(this can be provided by Centerdata for countries using the face-to-face tool suite)*
d) Main paper self-completion questionnaire(s) (all language versions)
e) Contact form(s) (or code used for collection programme)
f) Showcards
g) Interviewer instructions, briefing and training material
h) Fieldworker instructions, briefing and training material
i) (For face-to-face) Advance letters, data protection information sheet, and any other information to the respondents
j) (For self-completion) Invitation letters and reminders, screen shot of any email or text reminders, screen shot of landing pages, photo of example of envelopes used, data protection information sheet, brochures and other written information provided to the respondents
k) CAPI program for face-to-face fieldwork *(this can be provided by Centerdata for countries using the face-to-face tool suite; Centerdata will also provide the web questionnaire program for all countries)*

12.3 Coding

The following socio-demographic items will be recorded and subsequently coded by the NC or Survey Agency according to international standard classifications. These items include:

- Occupation: four-digit ISCO code for respondent and partner,
- Industry: two-digit NACE code for respondent,
- Country: two-character ISO 3166-1 code for respondent's citizenship and country of birth, mother's country of birth and father's country of birth,
- Language: three-character ISO 639-2 code for first and second language spoken at home, and language of interview.

Further items in the questionnaire require country-specific variables to be bridged into the following standards:

- Education: Country specific questions. Answer categories are set in cooperation between NCs and the CST. Questions are then to be bridged into a detailed ESS coding frame for respondent, partner, father and mother[50]. Country specific and harmonised variables to be deposited,
- Religion: Country specific variables. Answer categories are set in cooperation between NCs and the CST. Questions on current or past religious belonging to be bridged into ESS coding frame. Both country specific and harmonised variables to be deposited if they differ.

Prior to fielding Round 12, NCs must review their education questions to ensure they can work effectively in the new self-completion format. An education specialist at GESIS will advise on this process. NCs should also appoint a national education specialist to provide 3-5 days of expert review time.

For Ancestry of respondent, the verbatim recorded answers in the "Other" category must be coded into the ESS coding frame for ancestry. The coding of Ancestry should be included in the costings.

Further details regarding standards and bridging will be available in the ESS Data Protocol and from the ESS Round 12 NC Intranet. To ensure optimal comparability, the standards that are provided on the ESS Round 12 NC Intranet must be used, and care should be taken to ensure compliance.

12.4 Weighting

NCs are expected to liaise with the Sampling and Weighting Expert Panel concerning the calculation of design weights and post-stratification.

12.5 Processing and dissemination

The processing is organized into multiple steps, each implemented in Jupyter Notebooks, culminating in a standardized processing report. This report includes an HTML file and a spreadsheet that summarizes the programs, files, and output generated during the processing. It also contains queries on issues found in the data and/or documentation that needs to be clarified by the NC/agency before national data files can be produced.

NCs and funders must ensure that time and resources are set aside for the

[50] It is not yet confirmed whether the parental education questions will be included in the Round 12 questionnaire. This is currently under review by the CST.

data processing period. NCs and, where applicable, the fieldwork agency must assist the Archive in their queries during this period.

When the Archive has completed the processing of the national data file, a draft file will be provided for NCs via the myESS12 portal to approve of the processing carried out by the Archive. All NCs are responsible for the validation of their national data. All national files will be subject to further quality checks by the CST (and the QDTs when a draft integrated file is available). The draft files should not be published or used for official analyses (even after the official release of the data) as further edits to data are made after the country files have been compiled to the integrated data file. After the data release, a national data file can be downloaded from www.europeansocialsurvey.org.

A complete deposit of all deliverables is a prerequisite for a country to be included in the integrated released file.

All data uploads and downloads, report sharing and communication must be organised via the myESS12 portal.

No national data (or interpretations of such data) can be released, published or reported in any way until the data has been officially released by the ESS Data Archive. NCs should not make requests for exceptions as this is a fundamental rule of the ERIC to ensure equal and fair access to all. The best way to ensure prompt access is to be in the first data release. Thereafter, the data will be available without restriction for non-commercial use, scientific research, knowledge and policy making. Usage requests for the ESS ERIC's intellectual property for commercial purposes, will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

13. Quality, comparability and adherence to ESS procedures

The ESS is a repeat cross-sectional survey that strives to use the highest standards of cross-national social measurement and to improve this over time. As such, it aims to achieve the highest methodological standards in all participating countries so that users can have confidence in the data collected and published by the ESS. This means that: high quality standards pertain to the instruments, fieldwork and data resulting from the survey; serious efforts are made to produce comparable data both across countries and over time; and it also means that compliance and adherence to ESS rules, regulations and agreed fieldwork and data management processes as set out in this Specification are necessary to achieve the required quality and comparability.

As ESS Round 12 will be a mixed-mode round, disruption to the time series is anticipated as some changes in sample composition and measurement necessarily result from the inclusion of the self-completion approach. In particular, point estimates may be subject to mode change effects compared to previous rounds. The CST has tried to minimise mode effects through this specification and therefore NCs are urged to follow this as closely as possible.

There are four groups of compliance issues that can compromise the quality and comparability of ESS data and thus seriously limit the value for users.

The first group of compliance issues are particularly central. Therefore, all Member, Observer and Guest countries are asked to ensure that they:

- sign and submit to ESS ERIC for counter-signature a DPA (this is a legal requirement, in accordance with applicable data protection law) before any data collection takes place,
- field the complete ESS Round 12 questionnaires using the prescribed mixed-mode approach,
- allocate cases to either face-to-face or self-completion at the sampling stage, with no switch of cases between approaches permitted,
- deliver a Sample Design Data File (SDDF) which allows the calculation of inclusion probabilities (covering both data collection approaches),
- make a complete delivery of ESS Round 12 data and documentation to the ESS Data Archive no later than the 2nd deposit delivery deadline (June 2026).

In the past, significant deviations from these requirements have led to exclusion of the data from the integrated data file and are likely to do so in future.

The second group of compliance issues relate to the quality assurance procedures imposed by the CST. In particular, a country has to finalise the following before data collection starts:

- the translation, verification and formal checks assessment procedures for the ESS Round 12 questionnaire,
- technical checks on the translations and the questionnaire instruments as required by Centerdata,
- the questionnaire consultations,
- the sign-off procedure for the sampling design,
- the sign-off procedure of the Fieldwork Questionnaire (face-to-face) and Methodological Questionnaire (self-completion).

The third set of compliance issues arise if quality control analyses performed by the CST reveal serious doubts as regards data quality. This may include, for instance, serious deviations from the agreed effective sample size, an extremely low response rate[51], indications of very high design effects, indications of very large non-response bias or very low measurement quality (reliability/validity) of the data, including large amounts of missing data. Respondent substitution and interviewer/fieldworker fraud are also serious threats to data quality.

The fourth area of compliance relates to data release. ESS data is a public good. NCs must ensure that no national data is released until the official data release via the ESS Data Archive. This allows the data to be properly checked prior to release and ensures equal access to the data for all.

The ESS ERIC recommends that ESS datasets are not made available on external websites. Instead, links should be provided to datasets on the ESS website. ESS ERIC is not responsible for any datasets stored externally. If ESS datasets are stored externally the version of the centrally provided ESS dataset it was drawn from should be clearly stated. If a dataset is modified in any way, including translation changes, this should be indicated in a citation ('Adapted from ESS Round X, version number X').

In the event of a breach of any of these four key compliance considerations, the CST reserves the right not to include the country data in the integrated file. In these cases, the representative for that country in the ESS ERIC General Assembly will be informed of this decision, which will be final.

[51] For the self-completion approach, it is expected that any countries achieving response rates below 10% would be excluded from the integrated data file. This reflects the high likelihood that the effective sample size will fall substantially short of the minimum level accepted. Countries achieving response rates between 10% and 20% will need to provide the CST with details of their sample composition and other information relating to their data collection to help assess whether their data can be included in the integrated file.

14. Changes from previous version of specification

This is version 3 of the ESS Round 12 Specification. The previous (second) version was released on 9 April 2024. Below we list the small number of changes between the second and third version of the specification:

- The section on the fieldworker nonresponse phase for the self-completion approach has been updated. The main change is to provide clearer information on acceptable alternative approaches to minimise nonresponse in countries that are not required to carry out the fieldworker nonresponse phase. See section 11.6 for further details.
- The section on the soft launch for the self-completion approach has been updated and expanded. The requirements of the soft launch have been more clearly set out, particularly regarding the difference between this phase and the pre-test. See section 11.14 for details.
- A short section has been added on sample batches for the self-completion approach. See section 11.15 for details.

Appendix 1. Glossary and abbreviations

Term	*Abbr.*	*Explanation*
Country Contact	CC	CST member, assigned by the Director, who oversees the entire national survey life cycle for that country.
Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing	CAPI	Data obtained from the interview is directly entered into a computer programme instead of first using paper forms.
Computer Assisted Web Interviewing	CAWI	Data obtained from web self-completion interviews.
Contact Form	CF	Form on which interviewer records outcomes of all contact attempts and contacts, whether by telephone or in personal visits, to addresses, dwellings and individuals, for all sample units (respondents and non-respondents) according to a pre-specified set of categories that distinguish ineligibility, interview, non-contact, refusal, other contact (but no interview) and other types of non-response.
Core Scientific Team	CST	Team comprising HQ and seven other institutions in charge of managing and coordinating the survey. A committee of the Director.
Country questionnaire		The source questionnaire translated in the national languages in which the ESS is fielded in every participating country.
Data entry questionnaire		A tool as part of Centerdata's self-completion platform that allows countries to enter responses from completed self-completion questionnaires.
Data Management Plan	DMP	Document outlining how research data is handled during collection and processing (and afterwards), including relevant security arrangements.
Data Processing Agreement	DPA	The handling of personal data by a data processor on behalf of a Data Controller must be secured by a data processing agreement. It must meet certain minimum requirements, as set forth by Article 28 of the GDPR.
Data Protection Officer	DPO	The primary role of the DPO is to ensure that the organisation processes the personal data of its staff, customers, providers or any other individuals (also referred to as data subjects) in compliance with the applicable data protection rules.
Data Protocol		Guide to the production of the ESS data files and documentation. It contains detailed descriptions of the required deliverables and also includes a complete list of variable definitions.
ESS Data Archive		ESS ERIC Data Archive at Sikt: Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research in Norwegian.
European Research Infrastructure Consortium	ERIC	The principal task of the ERIC is to establish and operate the ESS research infrastructure on a non-economic basis.
European Social Survey	ESS	European Social Survey.
Field Directors' Meeting	FDM	Meeting of Field Directors and CST members aimed at discussing ESS requirements and national experiences.
Fieldwork Management System or FieldworkCTRL	FMS	Two versions: 1) Data upload portal that each ESS country is required to use during fieldwork to provide the CST with a fortnightly subset of the contact form data at case level using a pre-specified file template. This provides a way for the CST and NCs to have access to timely and detailed monitoring data. 2) Android or Windows application that allows interviewers to collect CF data on the doorstep and transfer it in real time back to a central database accessible to the Survey Agency, NCs and the CST. The latter is used by countries using Centerdata's face-to-face tool suite.
Fieldwork Team	FWT	Team comprising CST members involved in discussing with NCs the data collection plan of each country and monitoring planning and progress.
Fieldwork Questionnaire	FWQ	Questionnaire developed by the Fieldwork Team of the CST to monitor face-to-face fieldwork plans. It is an instrument to help decide upon, discuss and document major fieldwork decisions and parameters (timing of fieldwork, number of interviewers, etc.).
General Assembly	GA	The body representing all the Members of the ESS ERIC.

General Data Protection Regulation	GDPR	The GDPR (Regulation (EU) 2016/679) is a regulation by which the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission intend to strengthen and unify data protection for individuals within the European Union (EU). It came into force in May 2018.
Headquarters	HQ	Headquarters of the ESS ERIC, home of the Director.
International Standard Classification of Education	ISCED	Standard Classification developed by UNESCO to facilitate comparisons of education statistics and indicators across countries on the basis of uniform and internationally agreed definitions
International Standard Classification of Occupations	ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations is a tool for organising jobs into a clearly defined set of groups according to the tasks and duties undertaken in the job. The ILO is responsible for ISCO.
International Standard for Country Codes	ISO	ISO is the International Organization for Standardization. ESS uses ISO codes for Country (ESS10: ISO 3166-1 and UN M49) and Language (ESS10: ISO 639-2).
Methodological Questionnaire	MQ	Questionnaire developed by the Fieldwork Team of the CST to facilitate national planning of the self-completion data collection approach. It is an instrument to help decide upon, discuss and document major decisions and parameters (timing of data collection, plans for incentives, etc.).
Multitrait Multimethod	MTMM	MTMM test questions to assess construct validity.
National Coordinator	NC	NCs coordinate the activities of the ESS ERIC at a national level and assure its compliance with the Specification. In many countries there will be a National Coordinating team. NCs and their teams are jointly called 'NCs'.
National Coordinators’ Forum	NC Forum	The NC Forum comprises the National Coordinators of each Member, the Director and Deputy Directors. They assist the Director.
National Technical Summary	NTS	Overview of the metadata of the survey for each country and each round of the ESS. The NCs have a central role in the production of such documentation.
Other third parties		Organisations that may be involved in the national delivery of an ESS Round beyond the NC and Survey Agency. This may include, for example, mailing providers or data entry organisations (to enter responses from paper questionnaires).
Primary Sampling Unit	PSU	Sampling units that are selected in the first (primary) stage of a multi-stage sample ultimately aimed at selecting individual elements.
Question Module Design Team	QDT	External team selected by the SAB from applications received following an international competition, assisting the Director in developing a Question Module.
Sample design data file	SDDF	File to be produced by each country and delivered to the CST, containing complete information about the sample design, such as inclusion probabilities at each stage, information on clustering and stratification.
Sampling and Weighting Expert Panel	SWEP	Team of sampling and weighting experts advising NCs on the optimal sampling design. The SWEP must sign off the sampling design well before fieldwork starts. The SWEP also provides design and post-stratification weights.
Soft launch		An initial launch of main stage data collection based on a small subset of the overall sample. This allows checks to be made before the full sample is issued.
Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community	NACE	The Nomenclature of Economic Activities is the European statistical classification of economic activities. NACE groups organisations according to their business activities.
Survey Agency		The Survey Agency appointed to conduct the ESS Round 12 fieldwork in a participating country.
Translation Expert Panel	TEP	The ESS Translation Expert Panel consists of questionnaire translation experts, some of these being members of the CST, others external experts. The function of the TEP is to advise the ESS Translation Team in questionnaire translation matters on an ongoing basis.

Translation Guidelines	TGs	Detailed descriptions of the translation procedures and requirements, shared languages and translation quality assessment, and the choice of suitable personnel.
TranslationCTRL	TC	A customised web interface for managing the translations which also provides a digital repository of the process (originally developed for the SHARE survey and now adapted for use by the ESS as well). This is the successor of the "TMT".
Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pre-testing and Documentation	TRAPD	The translation protocol requires the following steps: (1) Questionnaire translation using a committee or team approach (**TRA**PD), including shared language harmonisation if applicable; (2) External linguistic expert check of all translated language versions in the form of 'translation verification' by the external service provider cApStAn; Comparing formal characteristics of the translated questions with those in the source language (SQP assessment); (3) National pre-testing (TRA**P**D); (4) Sign-off on translations and documentation of the translation process (TRAP**D**).
(Translation and) Verification Follow-Up Form	(T)VFF	Translation template including the entire ESS source questionnaire. In past rounds, it was partly used to develop and document the translations into all national language versions. In ESS Round 12, it may serve as a vehicle for imports into the TC, but not for the translation steps. It will be produced once the ESS 12 source questionnaire will be programmed in the TC.