

European Social Survey (ESS)

The entity that has organized the survey and is responsible for data collection - as well as key data on the entity's membership, governance arrangements, source of funding etc.

The European Social Survey (ESS) is directed by a Core Scientific Team led by Rory Fitzgerald from the Centre for Comparative Social Surveys at City University London, UK. Six other institutions are also represented: NSD from Norway, GESIS from Germany, The SCP from the Netherlands, Universitat Pompeu Fabra from Spain, University of Leuven from Belgium and University of Ljubljana from Slovenia. Countries that participate are responsible for funding and performing field work and data collection in their own country, although the ESS Core Scientific Team is responsible for methodology, translation etc. After the data collection is done in all countries, the [Norwegian Social Science Data Services \(NSD\)](#) does the rest of the work and is functioning as an archive for the ESS. The NSD runs [ESS Education Net](#) and hosts a service that makes it possible to analyse some of the data directly via their web page.

The ESS consists also of a [Scientific Advisory Board](#), a Funder's Forum and four Specialist Advisory Groups: Question Design Teams, [Methods Group](#), a Sampling Panel and a Translation Taskforce. In addition, it is linked to the national coordinators and survey institutes in all the participating countries.

[The ESS is funded through three different sources](#). First, The European Commission, which funds the project's overall design, coordination and control. Second, The European Science Foundation, which meets the cost of its academic and scientific liaison. Third, the national academic funding bodies, which provide funding for their own country's fieldwork and coordination.

A historical sketch of the initiation and origin of the survey

Work on the ESS started in 1995 in the context of the Standing Committee for the Social Sciences of the European Science Foundation. Committees under the leadership of Max Kaase and Roger Jowell, with the assistance from Dr. John Smith of ESF, were set up and produced an ESS Blueprint which provided the basis for the ESF decision to start the ESS Project.

The first round of ESS surveys was conducted in 2002 and covered 22 countries. It was initiated with two main aims: "(...) to measure and understand changes over time in the underlying attitudes, values, perceptions and behaviour patterns of the peoples of Europe, and the interaction of such changes with changing economic, social and political circumstances" and "...to become an exemplar of, and pathfinder for, improved cross-national social survey and research methods" (O'Shea et al. 2002:6)

In order to overcome the difficulties stemming from the complex model of ESS funding (ESF, national research councils, European Commission), the ESS is presently (2013) in the process of being transformed into a European Research Infrastructure (ERIC).

The ESS was the first social science project to win the Descartes Prize “for excellence in collaborative scientific research” in 2005, a sign of the high standards of the ESS.

Internet links to the website of the responsible organization

<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

The frequency or repetitions of the survey. Possible explanation of this.

The ESS is a biennial survey and has been so since its first wave in 2002.

A description of the survey's content, i.e. both focused rotational and / or core modules of the survey.

The ESS' core module is repeated each round, and it contains twelve broad topics that form the first half of an hour-long interview, namely:

- Trust in institutions
- National, ethnic and religious identity
- Political engagement
- Well-being, health and security
- Socio-political values
- Demographic composition
- Moral and social values
- Education and occupation
- Social capital
- Financial circumstances
- Social exclusion
- Household circumstances

The other half of the interview is usually changed each round and consists of two so-called rotating modules. They are selected on the basis of a Europe-wide open competition among research groups coming at least from three countries. In the meantime, the ESS Scientific Advisory Board has established the possibility that after a sufficient period of time also rotating modules can be repeated (e.g. family, work and well-being). The questionnaires are developed in

collaboration with scholars who have won the competition, and the ESS Core Scientific Team . The Rotating Modules have been as follows:

ESS Round 1: 2002

- Citizen involvement and democracy: the citizens' social and political participation, ties with friends and family, etc.
- Attitudes about immigration and asylum

ESS Round 2: 2004

- Family, work and well-being (60 questions)
- Economic morality in Europe (30 questions)
- Attitudes regarding health and care seeking (30 questions)

ESS Round 3: 2006

- Personal and Social Well-being: Creating indicators for a flourishing Europe (50 questions)
- The Timing of Life: The organisation of the life course in Europe (50 questions)

ESS Round 4: 2008

- Welfare Attitudes in a Changing Europe (50 questions)
- Experiences and Expressions of Ageism (50 questions)

ESS Round 5: 2010

- Trust in Criminal Justice: A Comparative European Analysis
- Family, work and well-being: The Implications of Economic Recession

ESS Round 6: 2012

- Personal and Social Well-being
- Europeans' understandings and evaluations of democracy

ESS Round 7: Upcoming

- Attitudes towards immigration and their antecedents
- Social inequalities in health and their determinants

An outline of the type of sample and the main data collection methods used

The ESS demands random probability samples which are representative of the whole population in each country at the age of 15 or older. The actual methods used to achieve this vary, but are all

required to adhere strictly to the principles of probability and representativeness.

[The detailed ESS Sampling Guides](#) for round 3-5 include a shorter summary dealing with sample design, sample size, sample design data file, design effects and the members of the sampling expert panel.

The ESS has also published one report per round called “Sampling Plans” where they have discussed at length the sampling design, size, etc. of each individual country. These can be found under the heading “Survey Documentation”:

[Round 1](#)

[Round 2](#)

[Round 3](#)

[Round 4](#)

[Round 5](#)

Round 6

The ESS uses face-to-face interviewing. However, there have also been experiments with [other, mixed-mode forms of data collection](#) (telephone, internet).

An account of the availability of the data to researchers, restrictions on access, etc.

The data are available without restrictions for not-for-profit purposes. However, the ESS demands acknowledgement for their work by a bibliographic citation and a reference to NSD as the data archive and distributor of ESS data. In addition, all data are anonymous. It is possible to analyze some of the data directly through the web browser or to download the data files, but it is required to register as an ESS data user to do this. This means registering full name, e-mail address, institution (unless registering as a private user), country and type of activity.

Questionnaires, English version

[Main questionnaire for round 1](#)

[Main questionnaire for round 2](#)

[Main questionnaire for round 3](#)

[Main questionnaire for round 4](#)

[Main questionnaire for round 5](#)

Main questionnaire for round 6

The countries included in the different rounds

The ESS has made [an overview](#) of country participation, round by round.

Round 1: 22 countries.

Round 2: 26 countries.

Round 3: 25 countries.

Round 4: 31 countries.

Round 5: 28 countries.

Cumulative file of the various rounds

A cumulative file of the first five rounds is [available here](#).

Publications based on the data

There is a [list of publications](#) based on the ESS data.

The ESS has also written a [report on some selected findings](#) from the first three rounds.

In 2011, the ESS launched the "[ESS Topline Results](#)", which summarizes top findings from the rotational modules of certain rounds.

An analytical summary of major findings and identification of lacunas in knowledge, as well as opportunities which appear from the review

Since its inauguration, hundreds of publications stemming from the analysis of ESS data on a wide variety of topics have been produced (see list of publications).

Sources

Unless otherwise noted, all information is extracted from the web site of the European Social Survey.

O'Shea, R., C. Bryson and R. Jowell. (2002). *Comparative Attitudinal Research in Europe*, European Social Survey Directorate, National Centre for Social Research, London

Jowell, Roger, Caroline Roberts, Rory Fitzgerald, Gillian Eva (eds.) (2007). *Measuring Attitudes Cross-Nationally: Lessons from the European Social Survey*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Fitzgerald, Rory, Eric Harrison, and Lorna Ryan (2013), *A cutting-edge comparative survey system: The European Social Survey*. In: Brian Kleiner, Isabelle Renschler Boris Wernli, Peter Farago, Dominique Joye (eds.), *Understanding Research Infrastructures in the Social Sciences*, Zurich, pp.

100-113.