

The cross-national challenge: Moving (some) European Social Survey countries to 'web first' during the pandemic

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ERIC) GenPop2 Event, 17 Sept 2021



europeansocialsurvey.org

ESS is a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC)

Acknowledgements

- ESS Core Scientific Team: Eric Harrison, Tim Hanson, Eva Aizpurua, Elissa Sibley, Jennifer McGuinness, Siobhan O'Muircheartaigh, Niccolo Ghirelli, Wiebke Weber, Peter Lynn
- ESS National Coordinators: especially Peter Grand (Austria); Vera Messing and Bence Ságvári (Hungary); Dragan Stanojevic and Bojan Todosijević (Serbia)
- Design consultants: Don Dillman, Emily Geisen
- NatCen design and testing team: Charlie Ridley-Johnson, Victoria Ratti, Nadim Maatook, Emma Berteen, Amanda Gratwick
- ESS ERIC General Assembly (Funders)

Topics covered in presentation

- Introduction to ESS and response to the pandemic
- Key findings from self-completion piloting testing
- Video interviewing – approach initial outcomes
- ESS Electronic Questionnaire Device – a device for the future?
- CRONOS-2 web panel
- Conclusions, future and steps

Introduction to ESS and response to the pandemic

Introduction to the European Social Survey (ESS)

- Academically-driven cross-national survey measuring attitudes and behaviour across Europe
- Conducted every two years since 2002; nine rounds of fieldwork to date
- 38 countries have participated in total; 30 at Round 9
- Fully face-to-face approach across all participating countries; consistency of methodology important
- Central fieldwork specification and central planning/oversight – but decentralised fieldwork contracting and delivery
- Random probability sampling; mix of sample frames across countries (individual/dwelling/address)
- Interview length c. 1 hour
- Alongside core survey methodology, conduct developmental/experimental work with online methods (e.g. CRONOS panels)

ESS Round 10 and COVID-19

- Fieldwork for Round 10 of ESS was originally due to run from September 2020 to January 2021 using the usual face-to-face approach in all countries
- But major concerns about feasibility of face-to-face fieldwork due to the pandemic, so adopted contingency plans:
 - Extended deadline for Round 10 fieldwork to December 2021
 - Adapting Round 10 specification but retaining face-to-face approach (our preferred approach) – included video interview option
 - Allowing an alternative data collection approach (self-completion – web and paper) – to be adopted by any countries unable to deliver the round face-to-face (including recruitment to CRONOS-2 where applicable)

ESS Round 10 and COVID-19

- Around half of ESS countries are now in the field for Round 10 with others starting in the next few weeks.
- In most countries the cooperation rate similar to the last round.
- Main challenge is interviewer capacity (interviewer reluctance, availability).
- Most countries opted to stick with face-to-face data collection.
- UK – started - issues with including NI.
- 7 of 31 opted for self-completion (Austria, Germany, Israel, Latvia, Poland, Serbia, Sweden).
- Self-completion available only if face-to-face not possible.

Developing a self-completion approach for ESS

Key challenges of a developing a self-completion approach for ESS

- Internet penetration not high enough to support a web-only approach in most countries – paper option also needed (limitations/design considerations)
- Length of ESS questionnaire – would people complete an hour-long survey without an interviewer? (Spoiler alert yes!)
- How to keep the paper questionnaire as short as possible (in terms of pages)
- Complexity of routing in some parts of the questionnaire – would respondents be able to follow this?
- Detailed questions on education and employment – would respondents answer these (to sufficient detail) without an interviewer present?
- No time for extensive adaptation of the questionnaire for self-completion – could the approach work without this?
- (Other challenges relating to person selection, translations, and other logistical issues)

Can we develop a self-completion version of ESS that includes the majority of content from the face-to-face survey (with limited adaptation) while delivering ‘acceptable’ response rates, sample composition and data quality?

Summary of the self-completion approach

- Push-to-web design (web first) with postal recruitment (unless fieldworkers essential eg Israel)
- Sequential approach: web first and paper questionnaire sent to non-responders with second reminder
- Three mailings in total for experiment 1 conducted in 3 countries (invitation and two reminders); additional reminder mailing added for experiment 2 (conducted in Austria)
- Source instruments developed centrally – web survey in Qualtrics (allows simple translation upload), paper questionnaire in InDesign
- Approx. 20 minute questionnaire used for experiment 1 (16 pages on paper); experiment 2 compared (near) full version (c. 50 minutes / 36 pages) with two shorter versions

Differences / adaptation between modes

- **Limited adaptation from face-to-face survey** – question wording and instructions updated to reflect self-completion format but question formats retained
- Small number of questions removed or reworked for self-completion questionnaire – e.g. those where randomisation used (as not suitable for paper)
- Sub-set of questions on COVID-19 pandemic moved to start of questionnaire for self-completion – importance to start with interesting/relevant questions
- Differences in orientation of 0-10 scale questions between web (vertical) and paper (horizontal) – horizontal in face-to-face survey (using showcards)
- ‘Don’t know’ and ‘Refused’ codes excluded from self-completion – respondents instructed to skip any questions where they didn’t know the answer or didn’t want to answer
- Design of web survey was mobile-optimised (incl. minimising the need for vertical scrolling); in most places one question per screen and no grids
- Two-column design used for paper questionnaire

Key findings from piloting

Promising response rates achieved – better than expected?

- In experiment 1 (with 20 minute questionnaire), response rates of 35-40% achieved
- Similar response rates achieved between individual named sample (Hungary) and address sample (Austria, Serbia) countries
- Not much drop-off in response when longer (near full) questionnaire tested in experiment 2

Response rates from experiment 1 (c. 20 minute self-completion questionnaire)

Country	Sample	Response rate	% of responses online
Austria	Self-completion	38.7%	76.7%
	Round 9 F2F	50.8%	n/a
Hungary	Self-completion	40.8%	70.4%
	Round 9 F2F	40.7%	n/a
Serbia	Self-completion	36.4%	62.0%
	Round 9 F2F	57.9%	n/a

Response rates from experiment 2 – comparing near full version with shorter lengths (Austria only)

Condition	Estimated length	Un-conditional incentive	Conditional incentive	Response rate	% of responses online
A	20 minutes	€5	€10	37.0%	68.1%
B	35 minutes	€5	€10	36.9%	71.8%
C	35 minutes	€5	€25	38.8%	74.5%
D	50 minutes	€5	€10	33.8%	73.1%
E	50 minutes	€5	€25	33.4%	76.5%

Self-completion data quality

- Self-completion sample composition mostly good
- Self-completion sample profile compared with Round 9 data (unweighted and weighted) and population statistics
- No large differences between self-completion and R9 face-to-face regarding sex, age or years of education (but higher incentives better for migrants)
- Paper is important for bringing in older people – e.g. in experiment 2, 91% of 18-24 years olds responded online versus 58% of those aged 65+
- Item non response on some items a concern
- Also some evidence of other differences with face to face (eg LGBT attitudes in HU). Needs further analysis

Question(s)	Item non-response (paper)	Item non-response (web)	Item non-response (Round 9 face-to-face)
Mother's highest level of education	49%	26%	2%
Father's highest level of education	46%	26%	4%
Number of employees (if self-employed)	45%	18%	0.1%
Write-in occupation questions for partner	22-41%	9-17%	1%
Write-in industry and occupation questions for respondent	18-36%	10-16%	1-3%
Household income	28%	8%	25%
Partner's highest level of education	27%	9%	1%
Whether partner did any paid work in last 7 days	26%	1%	1%
Hours normally worked	25%	8%	3%
Digital social contacts questions – children block	11-21%	1-7%	n/a
Party voted for in last election	21%	12%	12%
Whether ever lived with a partner	20%	2%	1%

Video interviewing

Introduction

- Video interviewing included as an optional approach for countries delivering face-to-face fieldwork at Round 10
- Video interview can be offered in case of reluctance to take part in an in-person interview
- Guidelines prepared for video approach and questionnaire to be completed by NCs; some variation in approaches between different countries
- 15 countries have now started their main stage face-to-face fieldwork; 12 offering video interviews (though differing expectations regarding the role of video)
- Feedback collected from 7 national teams who are offering video interviews and are quite far through their fieldwork: Croatia, Estonia, Iceland, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland

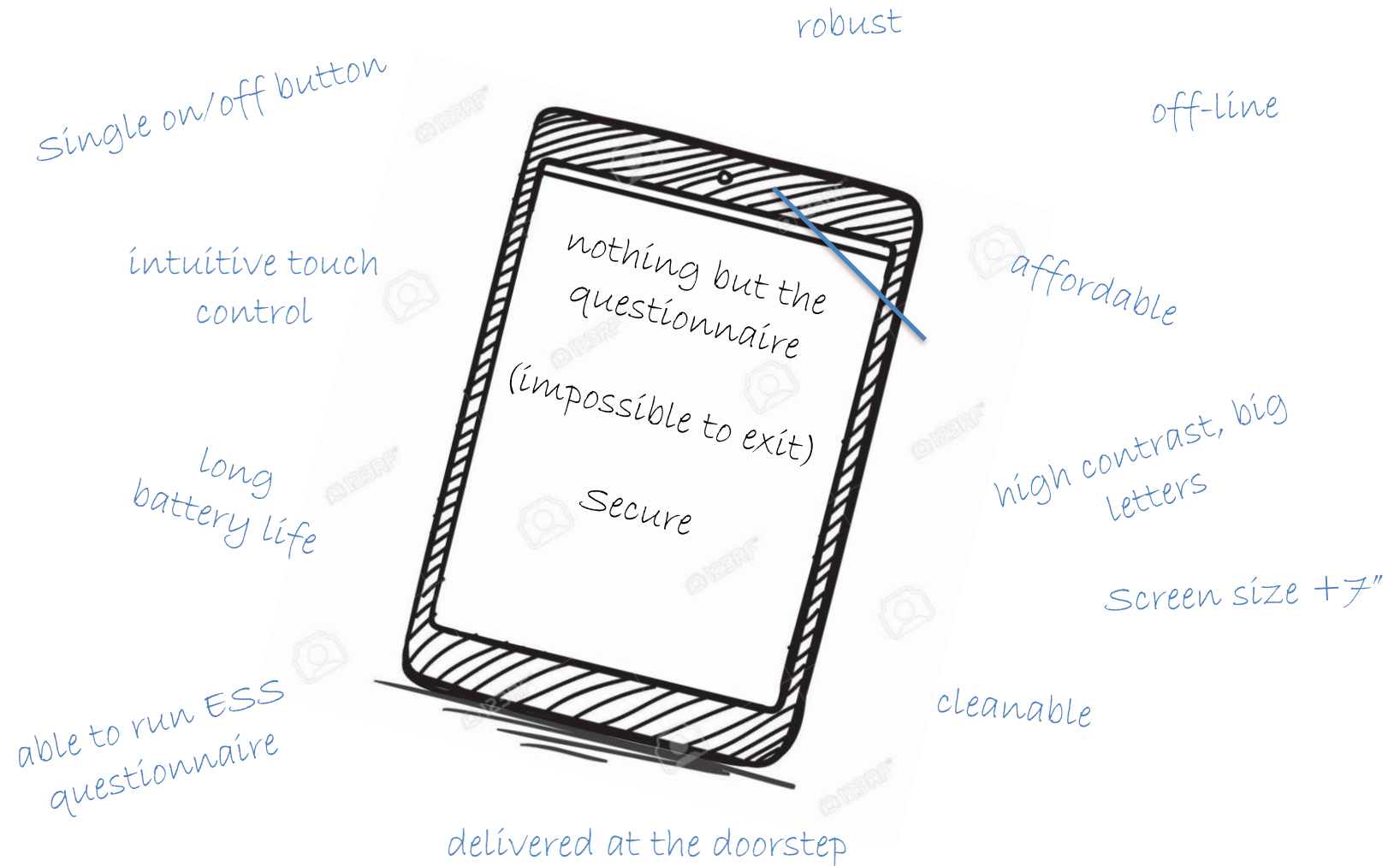
(Varying) role of video interviews so far

Country	Total interviews	Total video interviews	% video interviews of total interviews
Iceland	188	63	34%
Norway	379	58	15%
Estonia	595	87	15%
Croatia	801	29	3%
Switzerland	515	8	2%
Slovakia	1,265	0	0%
Hungary	1,870	0	0%
Slovenia	1,249	0	0%

Figures taken from NC updates for all countries apart from Estonia (taken from FMS); in some cases quite large differences between NC reports and FMS data (to be checked)

ESS EQD

Electronic Questionnaire Device (EQD)



Conclusions and next steps

Conclusions

Can we develop a self-completion version of ESS that includes the majority of content from the face-to-face survey (with limited adaptation) while delivering ‘acceptable’ response rates, sample composition and data quality?

- General conclusion from our testing/piloting is ‘yes’ – but with some caveats
- Positive findings for response rates (though still likely to be lower than face-to-face in most countries), sample composition and some data quality indicators
- But concerns about levels of item non-response for some items and especially whether we can collect data on education and employment to a standard close to that achieved for the face-to-face survey
- Particular issues/limitations with a paper questionnaire

Next steps – ESS Round 10

- Self-completion instruments updated following piloting/testing and source versions have now been released to countries using the self-completion approach
- Expect around 7-8 countries to use self-completion for Round 10 (majority of countries are using a face-to-face approach)
- Data collection to take place between September 2021 and January 2022
- Data from self-completion will be released in a separate file from the face-to-face data

Next steps – beyond ESS Round 10

- Plan to return to a fully face-to-face approach for ESS Round 11 (in 2023); however, options for future data collection approaches (incl. part of full switch to self-completion) being considered
- Need to learn more about measurement differences between face-to-face and self-completion and implications for ESS time series – further testing being considered (incl. parallel runs)
- Open question of whether we would need to (or should) more drastically redesign the ESS questionnaire for future self-completion – experiments have shown that reasonable outcomes can be achieved without this, though need to consider the more problematic areas of the questionnaire + respondent experience
- Future role of an ‘electronic questionnaire device’ to remove / reduce the need for a paper questionnaire?
- ESS likely moving towards amending its data collection strategy to be web first self-completion in future – but still too early for many countries.



Thank you

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