

ESS Round 13 Survey Specification for ESS ERIC Member, Observer and Guest Countries

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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 thirteenth 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.

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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 St George's, 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 other CST institutions will henceforward be referred to as the CST.

According to the Statutes of ESS ERIC¹ 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 thirteenth round of the European Social Survey (ESS Round 13).

Round 13 will be ESS's first fully self-completion round. Countries are required to deliver their effective sample using self-administered web and paper questionnaires.

This is version one of the Round 13 Specification. In the event that any subsequent versions are released, the changes from the previous version will be clearly listed.

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

2. Changes over time

The biggest change from ESS Round 12 is a move from a mixed-mode approach, comprising half face-to-face interviewing and half self-completion (web and paper), to a fully self-completion (web and paper) approach. In earlier rounds (Round 1 through to Round 11) all data collection from respondents took place face-to-face (including video interviews)². Round 13 is the ESS's first fully self-completion round.

Most elements of the self-completion approach for Round 13 are consistent with the self-completion part of the Round 12 Specification. However, some changes have been made, which are set out below. Please note that this is a not exhaustive and the full specification must be reviewed in detail.

Data collection approaches and sample size (section [10](#))

ESS Round 13 will use a fully self-completion approach, comprising web and paper questionnaires, across all participating countries. The minimum sample size targets are as follows:

- For countries with eligible (15+) populations of at least 2 million: 1,500 effective sample size³.
- For countries with eligible (15+) populations below 2 million: 800 effective sample size.

As at Round 12, countries can choose to adopt a contact strategy based on either a postal-first approach or a fieldworker-first approach, or a combination. Equally, they can choose to take a concurrent approach, where the paper questionnaire is provided with the invitation letter, or a sequential approach, where the paper questionnaire is sent with a later reminder. In considering their approach, NCs should review evidence from the delivery of their self-completion approach at Round 12, look at the experience from other countries, and consult closely with the CST.

Data collection period (section [10.1](#))

The Round 13 data collection period runs from 1 September 2027 to 15 May 2028. Countries are strongly advised to do all they can to start in September 2027. The final deadline for starting Round 13 data collection (with the soft launch) is 20 January 2028. Countries which cannot plan to complete data collection by 15 May 2028 should skip Round 13 and plan for Round 14 instead.

Time allocation for NCs (section [5.2](#))

It is anticipated that, on average, NCs will need to spend around 8 months' full-time equivalent on their tasks at Round 13 (over 24 months). The precise time needed will vary between countries depending on the tasks being undertaken by the NC. For example, where countries are managing some or all of the data collection process in-house (rather than contracting an agency), additional time will be needed. NCs completely new to the ESS will require an additional 2 months' full-time equivalent to perform their tasks.

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.

³ Please refer to section [9.3](#) for information on how effective sample sizes are calculated.

Survey agency (section [5](#))

As at previous rounds, NCs are ultimately responsible for all tasks at the national level but they may delegate these to survey agencies or other third-party suppliers (e.g. printing and mailing services) as required. NCs should consider the requirements for agencies based on the fully self-completion approach for Round 13. For example, some countries may 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.

Ethical approval (section [5.3](#))

The NC will be responsible for ensuring that institutional ethical approval for the ESS is obtained. For Round 13, written confirmation of local institutional approval must be submitted with the final ESS deliverables. Should ethical approval not be required, the NC must inform the assigned Country Contact who will inform the ESS Research Ethics Board.

Questionnaire (section [7](#))

A single source questionnaire in British English will be produced and released to NCs covering the web and paper versions (the face-to-face elements from Round 12 will be removed). Differences between web and paper will be kept to a minimum and clearly highlighted in the source questionnaire.

The CST are currently considering possible changes to two elements in the questionnaire: how sex/gender is measured, and the employment questions within the demographics section. Any changes to these or other parts of the questionnaire will be confirmed when the source questionnaire is released in November 2026. NCs will also be asked to provide feedback on proposed changes based on their national context during the questionnaire development phase.

For Round 13, there will be a reduced consultation process for country-specific lists in the questionnaire (education, income, ancestry, partnership status, religion). A consultation process will only be required in cases where NCs propose changes from Round 12. In most cases, this is only expected to apply to income.

NCs can again request to include up to five country-specific items. ESS HQ will review the proposed items and may provide suggestions for revisions to NCs. The deadline for submitting applications for country-specific items is 16 September 2026. For Round 13, country-specific questions need to be approved by the ESS ERIC Research Ethics Board (REB).

For Round 13, the REB require that all countries include contact details for sources of support for respondents at the end of the questionnaire. This reflects the perceived sensitivity of some of the questionnaire content (particularly the Round 13 rotating module on Social (dis)connectedness). The only exception to this requirement is in countries where there are no suitable support sources available, but these cases are expected to be rare.

As at Round 12, the web and paper self-completion instruments will be provided centrally by Centerdata, and use of these central tools is mandatory. ESS ERIC covers the costs for providing this to all national teams.

Translations (section [7.2](#))

Most parts of the translation process are unchanged from Round 12. As at Round 12, the TranslationCTRL tool will be used for translations across all countries.

In ESS Round 13, for the first time, it is planned to integrate a Large Language Model (LLM) generated translation version into the TRAPD approach and test its usefulness and suitability for the ESS questionnaire translation process. This will be prepared centrally by the CST as a third parallel translation. Limited additional resources for national translation teams will be required to consider these translations as part of the Review step and to provide feedback regarding the LLM translations.

As at previous rounds, cApStAn will carry out verification on new questionnaire content. There may also be checks on the invitation letter and data protection information sheet depending on the level of changes to the source materials from Round 12.

Targeted nonresponse phase to reduce nonresponse bias (section [10.7](#))

The Round 13 specification sets out a range of measures to be used by countries to reduce nonresponse bias through targeting of underrepresented groups.

Countries will need to implement additional measures to target underrepresented groups, unless they can provide evidence that existing approaches deliver representative samples (based on criteria to be set by the CST). This now includes countries using the fieldworker-first approach. In most countries, fieldworker visits are likely to be required as part of a targeted nonresponse phase.

Interviewer assistance with questionnaire completion (section [10.14](#))

For Round 13, it is permitted for interviewers (or fieldworkers) to assist respondents in completing the questionnaire in cases where they want to take part but are unable to self-complete (e.g. due to having low literacy). This is a change from Round 12, when such assistance was not allowed.

It is expected that such assistance will only happen in a small proportion of cases, but it is seen as an important modification to make the survey more inclusive. A detailed protocol is provided in section [10.14](#) to outline when and how this option can be offered to target respondents. NCs will need to closely monitor that assistance is only provided in cases where this is strictly necessary.

Other changes to data collection protocol (section [10](#))

Several other small changes have been made to the data collection section of the specification for Round 13. This includes:

- If there are different categories of postage in a country (e.g. 1st versus 2nd class, priority versus non-priority), it is now required that the category that will usually ensure letters arrive more quickly must be used, for at least the invitation and first reminder mailings (for example, using 1st class rather than 2nd class postage) (section [10.8](#)).
- All national teams are now advised to include QR codes that link to the landing page in invitation and reminder letters.
- Members of the NC team must be included in the sample for the soft launch (using test access codes provided in SurveyCTRL). This will allow them to check and confirm that letters are printed as intended (e.g. with signatures, proper resolution of logos) and that the URL and access code is included correctly.

- Where fieldworkers visit an address, find no one is at home and do not leave materials (letter/questionnaire), they should always leave a calling card to show they have visited (section [10.6](#)).
- A break-off reminder has been introduced, whereby those who have started but not completed the web survey are sent a different letter (with specific information on completing the web survey) in place of the usual 3rd reminder (section [10.12](#)).
- The specification section on response rates has been updated to more clearly focus on the information relevant to NCs under the self-completion approach and to note that the AAPOR RR3 formula will be used for calculating response rates (questionnaires with at least 80% of the core 'ask all' questions answered are counted as complete (section [10.15](#)).
- A sub-section is now included regarding the feedback reports that will be produced by each national team following completion of their data collection. This will allow national teams to reflect on the experience of delivering Round 13 data collection and consider changes that might be beneficial for future rounds (both to inform future specifications and refine/improve national approaches) (section [10.25](#)).

Experimentation (section [10.21](#))

All countries are encouraged to carry out experiments as part of their Round 13 data collection as long as the risk to the data collection is minimal or there are additional resources to enlarge the sample. Suggested areas for experimentation are listed in this specification.

Subject to further discussion with the ESS Translation Expert Panel (TEP), there may be scope for national teams to carry out translation experiments as part of Round 13 (section [7.4](#)).

Adverse effects (section [10.27](#)) **and data breaches** (section [8.13](#))

All NCs are required to report any adverse effects experienced when delivering their Round 13 data collection approach to the ESS Research Ethics Board (REB), using this form: https://cityunilondon.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6xsqyUxYvdscChM. An adverse effect is defined as harm, or threat of harm to a respondent, a fieldworker, or an institution.

NCs must report any data breaches to both the ESS ERIC Data Protection Officer (DPO) and the REB.

Data entry (section [11.1](#))

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

For Round 13, where data entry is used, countries must carry out full double-entry of all paper questionnaires. This is a new requirement for this round.

Data deliverables (section [11.2](#))

The list of data deliverables has been reduced to reflect the removal of the face-to-face approach. NCs will need to deliver a main data file to the ESS Data Archive including data derived from all web and paper questionnaires.

Occupation coding (section [11.3](#))

As at previous rounds, all coding for the ESS Round 13 data must be carried out by human coders rather than machine coders/AI. However, countries are permitted (and encouraged) to carry out experiments to compare results from human coding with machine coding/AI. This means that the same responses can be coded by the two sources, but the coding to be included in the Round 13 data files must be based on the human coding only.

National funding and timetable (sections [5.3](#) and [6](#))

General Assembly (GA) representatives are reminded that funding national fieldwork is a condition of membership of ESS ERIC. In ESS Round 13, GA members are expected to ensure that national funding is in place so that data collection can start in September 2027. Countries not able to plan to complete their data collection by 15 May 2028 will be directed to postpone until the following round; however, ESS ERIC membership fees will still be payable.

To support planning and budgeting, as at Round 12, all NCs must complete a costing exercise for Round 13 and provide their expected costs to the CST by the end of February 2026. Once approved by the CST, these costs must then be sent to the General Assembly Member in the country. The CST will provide a template for this costing process to NCs by the end of November 2025.

The deadline for appointment of NCs for Round 13 is 1 October 2026.

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 St George's University of London. The Core Scientific Team (CST, section [1](#)) comprises the HQ and several other institutions.

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

- Rigorous probability sampling procedures (section [9](#)) and clear target response rates (section [10](#)) 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. This includes consistent communication materials across languages and countries, universal use of unconditional incentives where postal invitations are sent, use of a central data collection platform, and strategic deployment of fieldworkers in countries where this is required (see section [10](#)).
- Web and paper survey administration to maximise the chance of participation and to facilitate broad country coverage⁴.
- Detailed documentation of survey processes, data collection, and outcomes, disseminated freely via the ESS ERIC website.
- Provision of support to NCs through an expert Core Scientific Team and Country Contacts.
- Adherence to international quality and ethical procedures.
- Rigorous processing of data and metadata according to the FAIR principles, 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 data collection.

The ESS ERIC subscribes to the Declaration on Ethics of the International Statistical Institute (ISI)⁵ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ <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 must ensure that the national costs for Round 13 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 others to perform under their supervision are as follows (sections 7 to 12):

- Communicating with the CST and attending two NC Forum meetings per year (for Round 13, we expect one in-person meeting and one virtual meeting per year).
- Selecting and liaising with the Survey Agency or other third-party suppliers (where applicable).
- Signing a Data Processor Agreement with the ESS ERIC and sub processor agreements with any appointed by the NC (e.g. survey agency, mailing company).
- 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.
- Where applicable, briefing and training fieldworkers.
- Preparing and issuing survey materials (e.g. invitation and reminder letters).
- Identifying optimal respondent incentives and arranging their purchase and dispatch.
- Preparing for and planning data collection. This includes recording the return of paper questionnaires.
- Delivering and overseeing data collection, including 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.
- 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 and must ensure sub-processor agreements are in place for data protection, if personal data is processed.

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 13 Specification. The resources are expected to be different from those required for the mixed-mode Round 12 and previous fully face-to-face rounds. These conversations must take place prior to setting the budget and the issuing of invitations to tender.

To support planning and budgeting, all NCs must complete a costing exercise for Round 13 and provide their expected costs to the CST by the end of February 2026. Once approved by the CST, these costs must then be sent to the General Assembly Member in the country. The CST will provide a template for this costing process to NCs by the end of November 2025.

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 deadline for appointing NCs for Round 13 is 1st October 2026.

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 2026, the NC must 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 2026⁶. The deadline for appointment of NCs for Round 13 is 1 October 2026. 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 [11](#)).

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 13:

⁶ Depending on when the Round 13 NC is appointed, it may be necessary for the Round 12 NC to contribute to the review at the start of this period.

- 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 8 months' full-time equivalent on their tasks at Round 13 (over 24 months). 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.

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, self-completion methodology, and progress monitoring). In particular, where some or all elements of the data collection process are being managed 'in-house' by NCs, additional time will be needed.

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 must be conducted via the Round 13 version of the myESS project portal (myESS R13).

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 R13 correspondence between the NC and the relevant CST work package experts.

The NC will:

- serve as the link between the national ESS ERIC Member representative, 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 (four full meetings are expected over the 2-year period covered by Round 13 preparations and delivery, comprising two in-person meetings and two virtual meetings; additional virtual bespoke meetings might also be arranged from time to time),
- 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 Round 13 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 language versions agreed with the CST,
- follow translation assessment steps:
 - 1) team review and adjudication,
 - 2) external assessment (verification),
 - 3) GESIS translation quality checks, 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,
- fully check and sign-off the web and paper questionnaire and data entry form before data collection starts,
- deposit the final paper self-completion questionnaire(s) to myESS R13 before data collection starts.

Production of communication materials for self-completion approach (section [10](#))

- Translate the communication materials for the self-completion approach according to the "4-eyes principle", i.e., one person translates and a second person reviews the translation.
- Agree source text for any additional communications as part of the self-completion approach (e.g. phone script, e-mail contact) with the Country Contact prior to finalising for translation.
- Discuss any changes, omissions or additions to self-completion communication materials with the Country Contact and agree those prior to printing the materials
- For the postal-first approach, use different envelopes for each mailing.

Data protection (section [8](#))

- Sign a data processing agreement in their capacity as a Data Processor with the ESS ERIC Director (Data Controller).
- 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 processing⁷ takes place.
- Sign sub-processor agreements with any sub-processors appointed (e.g. survey agencies, printing houses)
- 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.
- 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, 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,

Quality assessment (sections 10, 11 and 12)

- complete a national feedback report summarising the experience of Round 13 data collection, including areas to review or improve for future rounds,
- as part of this reporting, provide a comparison of the achieved ESS self-completion sample to demographic characteristics from the population in a specified format.

Selecting a Survey Agency

Unless all 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 13 methodology is 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 to ensure cross-national comparability

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

and equivalence. In particular, the use of fieldworkers who contact sample units but not conduct actual interviews (aside from in exceptional agreed cases – see section [10.14](#)) 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 the pool of potential bidders for data collection (where applicable) and any other tasks. It may be the case, for example, that some agencies in the country could not deliver the face-to-face approach used in earlier rounds but can deliver a self-completion approach (partly based on the planned use of fieldworkers).

In the past, some countries have tendered for survey agencies for more than one round at a time. It is advised not to do this for Round 13 (and 14) as these are ESS's first fully self-completion rounds and there is scope for requirements/approaches to change based on emerging evidence.

Data collection preparation (section [10](#))

- Explain and discuss ESS procedures and their rationale with the Survey Agency.
- Complete an online Methodological Questionnaire (MQ) and discuss matters arising with the Country Contact; ensuring sign-off of the MQ at least **one month before data collection** starts.
- Play a key role in the design and the delivery of fieldworker briefings (where applicable).

Data collection progress monitoring (section [10](#))

- 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.

Data preparation, weighting & deposit (section [11](#))

- Monitor data preparation activities.
- Ensure that all paper self-completion questionnaires are manually keyed into the data entry form (part of Centerdata's platform) or scanned.
- Ensure the data entry process (where applicable) is quality assured (using double entry) according to the requirements in section [11.1](#).
- Check the data files as specified in the ESS Data Protocol, including identifying and documenting any errors that can be corrected in the data and/or addressed for future rounds. Use of the national data for analytical purposes is not allowed until the first official release.
- Deposit a single main data file (including web and paper responses) to the ESS Data Archive.
- Liaise as necessary with the SWEP about the calculation weights.
- Check and edit data files to minimise 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 [11.2](#).
- Provide the name and email address of a contact person at the Survey Agency (where applicable) 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 (via myESS).

- 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. Written confirmation of local institutional approval must be submitted with the final ESS deliverables. Should ethical approval not be required the NC must inform the CC who will inform the REB.

New questions for each round are submitted to the ESS Research Ethics Board (REB) by the CST prior to the finalisation of the source questionnaire. Country specific questions must be approved by the ESS REB following acceptance 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 REB. 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 reports⁸, etc. The ESS ERIC Head of Media and Communications Officer at HQ can assist NCs with those tasks. NCs will be asked to provide a short statement for each ESS ERIC annual report detailing their promotional activities.

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 parts of the self-completion approach.

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 self-completion (web and paper). That said, since a self-completion approach may be relatively 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.

⁸ <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/findings/topline-series>

The key tasks of the Survey Agency (where appointed) are preparing, conducting and monitoring of data collection as described in section [10](#), and processing data and preparing deliverables as described in section [11](#). In some instances, the 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. 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 data collection, a 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 keep NCs updated on their data collection progress, including alerting them when something untoward happens, help the NC 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 immediately.

It is expected that Field Directors from Survey Agencies (where appointed) attend one Field Directors' Meeting (timing to be confirmed).

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) via the myESS platform 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.

The raw data deposited must contain strings (open responses) from questionnaires, but not contain any direct identifiers such as names, postal addresses, email addresses, phone numbers, national ID numbers, or geo-coordinates

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 13 data collection starts from September 2027, with no countries permitted to start their soft launch later than 20 January 2028. All Round 13 data collection must be completed by 15 May 2028.

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

- testing routing and completeness of the web and paper questionnaires in each language⁹,
- pre-testing the translated web and paper questionnaire(s),
- training, briefing, and overseeing fieldworkers (where applicable),
- preparing and sending respondent materials (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 and to improve sample balance,
- NCs (in collaboration with the Survey Agency) are required to have their data collection plans discussed and approved by the Country Contact using the Methodological Questionnaire,
- monitoring data collection progress,
- reporting to/consulting with the NC and, if necessary, with the CST any measures or interventions not previously planned that are implemented during fieldwork,
- where applicable, quality assuring the data entry procedure for paper questionnaire responses,
- cleaning and editing data files,
- coding and classifying data,
- (helping) prepare data files and documents.

⁹ 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 13 is presented in Table 1, below.

Table 1: ESS Round 13 Project Timetable (January 2026-February 2029)¹⁰

Month/ Date	Action	Section
November 2025	ESS ERIC Round 13 Specification issued Template for Round 13 costing exercise sent to NCs	
March to October 2026	Appointment of NCs (final deadline is 1 October 2026)	5
February 2026	NC to share expected R13 costing with ESS HQ and Country Contact for review, before submitting it to GA representatives	5
April 2026 – October 2027	Signing Data Processing Agreements ¹¹	8
April – August 2026	Full R13 Pilot (2 countries) with Centerdata tools Advance Translation	6.1
June 2026 – June 2027	Appointment of Survey Agencies	5
July 2026	myESS Round 13 available for R13 preparations and discussions	5
July 2026 – July 2027	Sample design plans discussed between NCs and assigned sample expert & signed off by the Sampling and Weighting Expert Panel (SWEP)	9
16 th September 2026	Deadline for NC to communicate any new or repeated country-specific items in the ESS13 questionnaire	7
15 th October 2026	Penultimate draft main questionnaire sent to NCs for comments; NCs asked to highlight possible translation problems	7
29 th October 2026	Deadline for NC feedback on draft main questionnaire	7

¹⁰ Timing of some preparatory tasks for ESS Round 13 will vary between countries based on planned fieldwork dates.

¹¹ As the Data Processing Agreement Template will be available before the myESS R13 launch, this will be made available via myESS R12 and it would be possible for NC to discuss this via email until the launch of the new portal.

Month/ Date	Action	Section
11 th November 2026	Deadline for GA representative and NC to confirm funding for R13 to ESS HQ	5
16 th November 2026	ESS Round 13 Source Questionnaire released to the NCs¹²	7, 10
	R13 Self-completion data collection materials released to the NCs (letters templates, testing guidelines, specification for landing page, Methodological Questionnaire)	10
November 2026 – July 2027	Questionnaire consultations with CST on ESS items requiring adaptation beyond standard translation	7
December 2026 – October 2027	Methodological Questionnaire (MQ) completed by NCs and signed off by Country Contact and ESS HQ	10
January 2027	ESS13 Data Protocol and Dictionaries released to the NCs	11
19 th January 2027	TranslationCTRL open to all countries to start translations¹³	10
From January 2027	Centerdata to hold briefings on self-completion tools for groups of NCs	10
January 2027 – August 2027	Translation, Team review and adjudication, External assessment (Verification), GESIS translation quality checks, Sanity checks, Self-completion platform staging ¹⁴ and National pre-tests.	7, 10
From April 2027	NCs to set up and test country-specific implementations of Centerdata tools	10
From May 2027	Pre-test for self-completion questionnaires and tools	10
August 2027	National Technical Summary (NTS) made available.	10
From August 2027	Fieldworker briefings for self-completion approach, where relevant	8, 10

¹² As all countries will be using Centerdata’s TranslationCTRL tool for Round 13, 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 19th January 2027 (around eight months in advance of the Round 13 data collection start date).

¹³ This is the point that national teams will be able to start to enter their translations in TranslationCTRL (for all modes).

¹⁴ Specific intervals between the different phases of testing and deployment of the tools need to be planned to allow central tasks by Centerdata.

Month/ Date	Action	Section
1 September 2027	ESS Round 13 data collection starts¹⁵	10
September 2027 – May 2028	Monitor data collection	10
December 2027 – February 2029	Data processing and Archiving ¹⁶ Preparation of Sample design data file (SDDF)	9, 11
20 January 2028	Final deadline for R13 data collection start	10
28 February 2028	Data delivery to the ESS Data Archive (deadline for 1st release countries)	11
15 May 2028	Final deadline for completion of ESS Round 13 data collection	10
30 June 2028	Final data delivery to the ESS Data Archive (deadline for 2nd release countries)	11
June 2028 / September 2028 ¹⁷	1st data release expected	11
October 2028 / February 2029 ¹⁸	2nd data release expected	11

¹⁵ This is the earliest start date for the full data collection launch. Countries are permitted to start their soft launches in August 2027 if all preparations are complete and subject to agreement with the CST.

¹⁶ 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 28 February 2028 (first release) or 18 June 2028 (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.

¹⁷ To be confirmed depending on R12 data processing for self-completion data.

¹⁸ To be confirmed depending on R12 data processing for self-completion data.

6.2 Key documents

Please find below the list of the key documents for ESS Round 13. These will be made available on the dates specified below in myESS. **myESS R13 will open to the NCs on 1 July 2026.**

Table 2: ESS Round 13 documents

Document name	Section	R13 Publication date
Data Processing Agreement Template GDPR information sheet for respondents	8	31 March 2026 ¹⁹
Sampling Guidelines	9	June 2026
Questionnaire Consultations guidelines	10	September 2026
Source Questionnaire	6.1	16 November 2026
Invitation and Reminder letters templates Self-completion platform staging guidelines Specification for landing page Fieldworker instructions and briefing slides Documents on fieldworker-assistance with questionnaire completion Methodological Questionnaire (MQ) as myESS form	10	November 2026
Translation Guidelines	7	November 2026
ESS Data Protocol and dictionaries	11	January 2027
Translation Quality Checks Instructions TranslationCTRL manual	7	January 2027
Manuals for self-completion tools and Fieldworker Contact Form Template(s)	10	January 2027
Anonymisation Guide	8	May 2027
National Technical Summary, as myESS Form	10	August 2027
Translation Poll	7	September 2027

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 2027, but not after this date.

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 13 are:

- Welfare attitudes in Europe: social security in insecure times (repeated from ESS Rounds 4 and 8).
- Interdisciplinary perspectives on social (dis)connectedness in Europe (new module for ESS Round 13).

Each rotating module will include 30 questions (or equivalent if some questions are asked to sub-samples). For repeat modules, at least 20 of these questions need to be repeated from (one of) the previous ESS round(s) 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 13, covering self-completion web and paper versions. Any differences between web/paper 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.

ESS's self-completion approach requires all countries to use two questionnaire instruments: a web questionnaire and a paper questionnaire.

The national web and paper 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 [10.2](#).

The average questionnaire completion time in British English is expected to be around 40-50 minutes. The completion time may vary somewhat between respondents, but the questionnaire is designed to minimise 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 13 source questionnaire will be available to NCs in November 2026. 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 in January 2027.

The Round 13 questionnaire – either in source or translated form – must not be released or shared externally by NCs until it has been published by ESS ERIC. It is expected that the questionnaire will be published on the ESS website in January 2028 and is embargoed before that time.

7.1.1 Questionnaire experiments

It is not currently planned that any questionnaire experiments specified by the CST will be included for Round 13²⁰.

7.1.2 Respondent experience questions

A small number of respondent experience questions will be included at the end of the questionnaire. It is expected that these questions will be very similar to those asked at Round 12. NCs should monitor feedback at these items during data collection to look for evidence of any issues.

7.1.3 Adding country-specific questions

NCs can request to include up to five country-specific items. ESS HQ will review the proposed items and may provide suggestions for revisions to NCs. Country-specific questions need to be approved by the ESS ERIC Research Ethics Board (REB).

Once the proposed items are signed-off by the REB, ESS ERIC will then be the Data Controller for those items. The ESS Director 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 must submit requests for country-specific items by 16th September 2026.** This includes requests for any repeated country-specific items that have been included at previous ESS rounds. Any late requests for country-specific items may be refused for Round 13.

Country-specific questions must be treated in exactly the same way as the main questionnaire with regard to data collection and processing. NCs must 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.

7.1.4 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. A consultation process will only be required in cases where NCs propose changes from Round 12. In most cases, this is only expected to apply to income.

Many countries updated their education items for ESS Round 12, shortening or simplifying lists to better reflect the self-completion format. It is expected that these

²⁰ Please refer to section [7.4](#) for information on possible translation experiments.

versions will mostly be retained for Round 13, subject to a review of the Round 12 data and consultation with the CST's education expert. However, NCs should ensure they can consult on any possible revisions with a national education specialist and include 1-2 days of their expert review time. Countries that did not participate at Round 12, or who propose more significant changes to these questions, should allocate more time for this task.

7.1.5 Expected questionnaire changes

The CST are currently considering possible changes to two elements in the questionnaire: how sex/gender is measured, and the employment questions within the demographics section. Any changes to these or other parts of the questionnaire will be confirmed when the source questionnaire is released in November 2026. NCs will also be asked to provide feedback on proposed changes based on their national context during the questionnaire development phase.

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, based largely on the 'Ask the same question' approach 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 budget limitations, 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, 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 as soon as possible.

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

- questionnaire translation using a committee or team approach, starting with two parallel translations, a review discussion and adjudication step ('TRA' in TRAPD). In Round 13, a third translation of the new items will be based on a Large-Language Model (LLM) (see section [7.2.3](#) below) (Centerdata's TranslationCTRL platform must be used for all translations);
- external translation assessment by linguistic experts of some or all new questions for ESS Round 13²¹; this will be carried out in the form of 'translation

²¹ Only translations in one mode (web/paper) will be verified for Round 13. The mode will be confirmed at the point the Translation Quality Checks Instructions are released.

verification' by the external service provider cApStAn (www.capstan.be) and the costs of this part are met by the CST;

- shared language harmonisation (with or without CST involvement, depending on the language), and/or national harmonisation where applicable;
- translation checks by GESIS, e.g., to compare formal characteristics of the translated questions with those in the source language, as well as comparisons between web and paper, consistency checks within and between rounds, and possibly other round-specific checks;
- checks to ensure the completeness of translations in TranslationCTRL ("sanity checks");
- national pre-testing ('P' within the TRAPD scheme);
- sign-off on a log file prepared on the final questionnaire version before the soft-launch can go ahead;
- 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 Round 13 Translation Guidelines**. This document will also include the translation quality checklist and guidance on making changes to existing translations.

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

- ESS Round 13 Instructions on Translation Quality Checks
- ESS Round 13 Translation Queries and Answers²²
- ESS Round 13 TranslationCTRL Instructions

7.2.1 Translation procedures

NCs are required to find suitable individuals to fulfil the three key roles in the translation 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 as well as translation quality checks, translating additional materials), but they also need to be sufficiently paid for getting familiar with the ESS translation method: this includes reading or watching guidance material, such as the ESS Translation Guidelines, Translation Checks 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.

²² This document will only be created once the translation process has started.

All countries are required to use Centerdata’s TranslationCTRL tool for questionnaire translations. Repeated items from the Core Modules will be imported to the ESS13 TranslationCTRL platform by the CST, whereas repeated items from the repeated rotating module will have to be copied manually and checked by the national translation teams. TranslationCTRL will include separate fields for web and paper questionnaire translations in cases where the source questionnaire differs by mode.

New items will go through the different TRAPD steps in TranslationCTRL as described in the ESS13 Translation Guidelines.

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 to the repeat rotating module items in the welfare module linked to the switch to self-completion, which will be clearly highlighted in the source questionnaire.

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.

However, as we know that language use does change over time and some ESS items have been fielded for more than 20 years, the CST may consider changes where national teams can show that language use has changed. More information on this approach will be provided in the ESS Round 13 Translation Guidelines.

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 / translation quality checks

All translated language versions of the ESS Round 13 questionnaire are subject to three expert evaluation procedures:

- A linguistic, pragmatic and semantic quality assessment (“verification”) by the external service provider cApStAn²³;

²³ Only translations in one mode (web or paper) will be verified by cApStAn for Round 13. The verification will focus on a subset of questionnaire items (likely to comprise some or all of the new items in rotating modules). In the case of some shared languages, CST involvement in the harmonisation will be a substitute for external verification by cApStAn.

- Translation quality checks carried out by the ESS Translation Team at GESIS; and
- Checks to assess the completeness of translations in TranslationCTRL (“sanity checks”) and their readiness for the national pre-test, guided by GESIS and Centerdata.

7.2.3 Modified TRAPD in ESS Round 13, adding a LLM translation into TRAPD

In ESS Round 13, for the first time, it is planned integrate a Large Language Model (LLM) generated translation into the TRAPD approach and test its usefulness and suitability for the ESS questionnaire translation process.

For doing so, the ESS Translation Team will prepare a third parallel translation generated by a LLM for each language version. National teams will then need to use this as third option in their internal Review discussion (R in TRAPD) and further translation process. After the ESS Round 13 questionnaire translations are finalised, we will seek feedback from national teams on this step.

This third translation will be produced centrally, so the impact on national resources should be limited. However, some extra time will be needed to consider the LLM translations as part of the Review step, and to provide feedback on these translations to the ESS Translation Team.

7.2.4 Translation timings

The amount of time national teams take to translate new or adapted content can vary quite widely between countries. However, experience from previous rounds suggests that on average this may take around 4-6 weeks. This refers to the time from the start of the translation process to the point when the translations are submitted for checks (i.e. this is only the first stage in the translation process). This includes time for shared language or national harmonisation, where applicable.

Taken together, the full set of translation checks (prior to pre-testing, i.e. verification, GESIS translation checks and sanity checks) are expected to take **8-10 weeks** to complete. This is the time needed from submission of translations by national teams for the translation checks to approval of final translations / signed-off sanity checks for pre-testing.

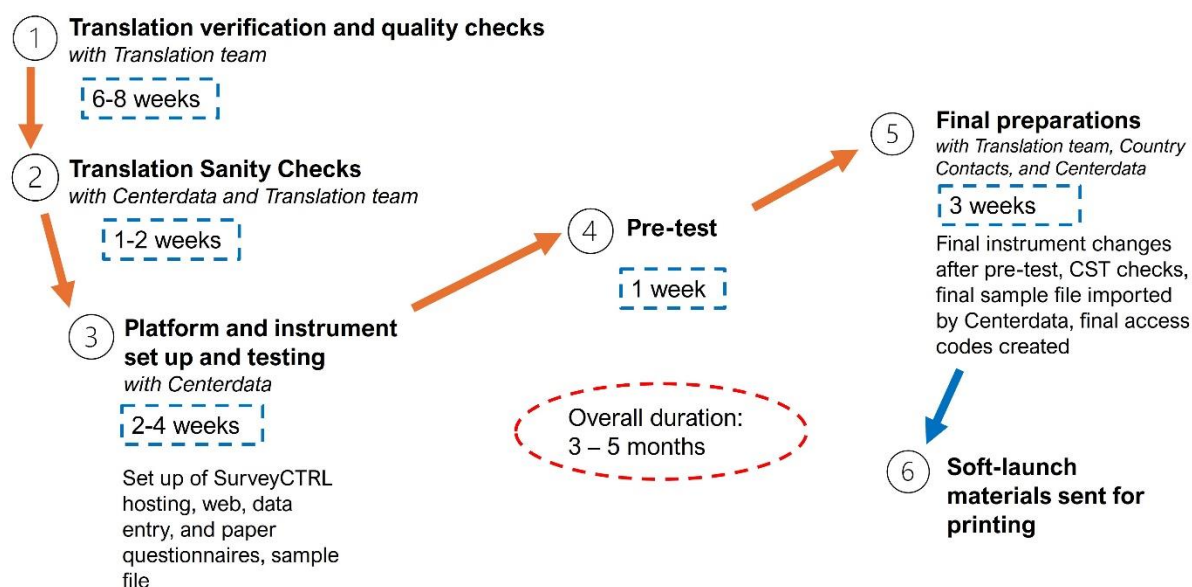
Following this approval, Centerdata will prepare the national web and paper instruments. National teams will then need to check and finalise the instruments. As noted in section [10.2](#), national teams will need to modify the paper questionnaire to their national requirements during this period. It is expected that the process of finalising the questionnaires – including tasks for both Centerdata and national teams – takes 2-4 weeks.

A period of at least three weeks is recommended between completion of the pre-test and when materials can be printed for the soft launch (see section [10.23](#) for further details on the soft launch)²⁴. This period includes time to make any necessary translation updates from the pre-test and to check the final web and paper questionnaires (including review by the Country Contact – see section [10.2](#)). Following these steps, Centerdata will import the final sample file and make the access codes available to the NCs, allowing countries to proceed with printing and preparing materials for the soft launch. Based on

²⁴ It may be possible for some countries to reduce this period from three weeks. However, this will be dependent on whether changes are needed following the pre-test, which won’t be known until after the pre-test has been completed. Therefore, countries are advised to allow at least three weeks to reduce the risk of failing to meet dates that have been committed to.

experience to date, the time needed for preparing and printing materials may vary somewhat between countries. In some countries this could be done in a week or less, but sometimes more time may be needed.

NCs should note that any delays in the translation process will lead to delays to planned data collection timings. It is unlikely to be possible to recover any lost time later in the process. The figure below shows the stages and approximate timescales from the submission of translations for quality checks (starting with verification) to the soft launch²⁵.



7.2.5 National pre-testing

All countries must carry out a pre-test of the web and paper questionnaires following completion of the translation steps detailed above. The main aims of the pre-test are to:

- check that respondents can easily navigate to the questionnaire (from the invitation letter/landing page).
- assess any problems or concerns with questionnaire translations.
- 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 must 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 must be at least 30 cases per country. In countries with more than one target language, the 30 cases must 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.

²⁵ Please remember that the 'TRA' steps from TRAPD need to be completed before submitting to the translation quality checks.

- The national web and paper questionnaires produced by Centerdata must 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 must self-complete the questionnaire (rather than an interviewer asking the questions). An interviewer/researcher must be present while the respondent answers the questions 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 willing to share their screen as they complete.
- Respondents must 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 must 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 four weeks between completion of their pre-test and planned soft launch (see section [10.23](#) for further details on the soft launch).

NCs should note that the pre-test differs from the soft launch and both of these activities need to be carried out in all countries. Please refer to section [10.23](#) for an overview of the objectives and differences between the two phases.

7.2.6 Translation documentation

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) will be documented in TranslationCTRL. In addition, national teams are asked to document how translation decisions were made, which translation issues they have encountered and how they were resolved. The "comments" fields in TranslationCTRL should be used for this type of documentation,
- documentation of changes made and discussions at shared language harmonisation and/or national harmonisation (if applicable),
- follow-up on the interventions and comments made by cApStAn and GESIS during the translation quality 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 will be asked in the ESS13 Translation Poll, administered after the ESS13 translation process.

7.3 Questionnaire language versions and gender versions

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

Where more than one language is offered, for the web questionnaire, respondents will be allowed to select their preferred language version on the national landing page. There is no functionality to switch between languages in the web survey once the questionnaire has been started. 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.

7.4 Translation experiments

Subject to further discussion with the ESS Translation Expert Panel (TEP), there may be scope for national teams to carry out experiments on translations as part of their Round 13 data collection. This may include, for example, testing different approaches to gendered language, testing the impact of offering an English language questionnaire, or testing two different versions of a translation for an item (e.g. where there is a proposal to update the translation for an item).

In most cases, it is expected that additional samples would need to be drawn for experiments rather than forming part of a country’s usual target sample size. However, this would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis with the CST.

It would be necessary for the ESS Research Ethics Board to approve any proposed experiments on a country-by-country basis. Requests would also need to be reviewed by the CST.

Any NCs that wish to suggest or to be part of translation experiments should contact the ESS Translation Team.

8. Data protection

In order to ensure compliance with the UK Data Protection Act, 2018, UK GDPR, the UK Data Use and Access Act 2025, 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 appropriate²⁶.

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 Controller²⁷. 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 13, 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.

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 main stage data collection 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 in place.

The DPA includes the requirements in the event of a breach (section [8.13](#), below). The template for the DPA for use in Round 13 will be available on the NC Intranet pages of the myESS R13 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 13, there will be a single DPA template covering the (web and paper) self-completion approach.

Where members of an NC team are based in different institutions, the authorised contact at each institution must each sign a DPA with ESS ERIC or, alternatively, one of the NC team members must take responsibility for all members of the team.

Where NCs have commissioned a Survey Agency or other third party directly, the NC is ultimately responsible for their delivery. NCs 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.

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

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(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.

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. The procedures for receiving, storing, processing and deletion including the destruction of the paper self-completion questionnaires must be clearly specified.

8.3 *Data Protection Officer*

Sikt provides the Data Protection Officer and related services to the ESS ERIC. 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 sample units (i.e. sampled individuals or households, depending on the sample frame in each country) must be given a ESS ERIC data protection information sheet containing the required data protection information.

For Round 13, there will be a single version of the data protection information sheet for the self-completion approach. **NCs must not change the information given in the source document provided, other than translating and adapting the text in square brackets.** Depending on the scale of any changes to the source information sheet from Round 12, parts of the translated content may be reviewed by cApStAn for Round 13.

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

- In countries using a postal-first approach, every sample unit must be sent the information sheet with the invitation letter, **in the same envelope.**
- In countries using the fieldworker-first approach, sample units must be given the information sheet by the fieldworker when they make contact. It must be included in the same envelope as the invitation letter and handed to someone living in the household. Where no contact is made, the envelope (including both the invitation letter and data protection information sheet) should be left in the postbox.
- All fieldworkers should carry a sufficient number of spare copies of the information sheet when they are in field to leave with respondents if required.
- Helpline staff should have copies of the information sheet and have been briefed on how to handle queries and formal data subject requests.
- The information sheet must also 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 deleted²⁹. 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 two weeks after receiving the request: dpo.esseric@europeansocialsurvey.org. Guidance for dealing with data subjects' rights will be made available for ESS Round 13.

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 NC 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).

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 13 Data Protocol describes a set of minimum requirements that all countries must follow to reduce disclosure risk. In addition, the ESS Round 13 Anonymisation Guide³⁰ 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 R13. Note that the security of servers is addressed in Appendix 1 of the DPA regarding technical and organisational measures.

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 within a defined period and by the 'deletion deadline' (specified in the DPA), including:

- The key that links the serial number to the name and address of the 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 data³¹ and the sample design.

The above requirements will be regulated in the DPA.

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.

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.

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 purposes³².

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 Research Ethics Board 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 must 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.

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@citystgeorges.ac.uk) and to the ESS ERIC Research Ethics Board.

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

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

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 12, the source questionnaire will include recontact questions. This applies to both the web and paper questionnaires. 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. In particular, efforts to continue and expand the CRONOS panel can benefit from having samples who have agreed to be recontacted.

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 13 fieldwork (May 2030), at which point they must be deleted unless permission has been given otherwise. This information, where relevant, will be communicated to respondents in the data protection information sheet.

8.15 National data linkage with ESS Round 13 data

Subject to successful piloting in France in Round 12, ESS ERIC may allow countries to ask respondents for permission to link their Round 13 survey responses to national administrative data after publication of the ESS Round 13 data. Information about the linkage must be included in the data protection information sheet. A permission to link question can then be added at the very end of the questionnaire (after the recontact questions). The information included in the information leaflet will need to be approved by the REB as would any deviation to the question being asked. NCs will need to agree the security and linkage procedures with the ESS ERIC DPO either in their DPA or in a Joint Controller Agreement that may be required. In general, linked data should only be made available through Trusted Research Environments that provide results in aggregated form.

Subject to successful funding of a Horizon Europe proposal, ESS ERIC might develop its own secure hub where data will be linked to non-administrative data (e.g. geospatial data). If successful, further details will be provided to NCs on how to take part in that pilot project.

9. Sampling

High quality probability sampling is a foundation of high-quality survey data especially when the data is designed to support inferences to the population. A separate document provides detailed **Sampling Guidelines** which each country must follow. This will be made available via the myESS Round 13 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 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 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 strongly recommended to select a reserve sample in advance of fieldwork³³. 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 data collection 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. If it is common for listed addresses to cover multiple dwellings, special procedures may be needed to select one dwelling at each address.

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

³³ The only exceptions to this should be where there is a high level of certainty on expected response rates (e.g. consistent results across previous self-completion surveys in a country) or where the main sample is issued based on the lowest possible response rate that might be expected based on previous evidence.

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 fieldworker** (in cases where fieldworker-first approach is used). Enumeration must be fully completed before the start of main data collection.

9.3 *Effective sample size*

The 'effective achieved sample size' (n_{eff}) must be at least 1,500 (or 800 in countries with ESS populations (aged 15+) of less than 2 million), after discounting for design effects. With the help of the SWEP, each country should determine the appropriate size of its issued sample by taking into account the realistic predicted impact of clustering, variation in inclusion probabilities (if applicable), eligibility rates, and response rates. The SWEP will assist in the calculation of the gross sample size required to achieve the required effective sample size.

In some cases (e.g. unequal-probability, multi-stage sampling design) the required number of completed questionnaires may be considerably larger than the required effective sample size. The gross sample size issued to field 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 ESS round, 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*

Clustering the sample produces a design effect and results in needing a larger number of completed questionnaires in order to deliver the minimum effective sample size. There are therefore benefits in an unclustered design.

Decisions about clustering will mainly depend on the extent to which fieldworkers are used to assist with data collection. For countries using the fieldworker-first approach, or carrying out a large-scale fieldworker non-response phase, 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).

If there is no fieldworker component, or where national teams judge that the fieldworker component can be delivered efficiently without clustering, an unclustered sample is recommended.

In some countries, a multi-domain design may be beneficial, with clustering only in one domain (e.g. less densely populated areas). NCs are advised to speak to their SWEP contact and their Country Contact at an early stage, as decisions on clustering can impact the cost of data collection.

9.5 *Within-household selection*

If using an address or household-based sample, one eligible person (aged 15+) in the address/household must be selected to participate in the survey. It is planned that this will be based on the next birthday approach.

The invitation and reminder letters will include instructions to the household to determine who should take part in the survey. The letters will state 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.

With the next birthday approach, there are some concerns about how often an incorrect person completes the survey. There is ongoing work to compare this approach with other possible approaches. The results of this will be shared with NCs once available, alongside any implications for the approach to be taken for Round 13 or later rounds.

All completed questionnaires (unless identified as fraudulent) will be retained in the data even if apparently completed by an incorrect person³⁴.

9.6 *Documentation of sampling procedures*

The sampling procedures to be employed in each country, 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 probabilities of units at each stage of selection;
- details of whether and how the sample is to be clustered geographically, and how the 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 completed questionnaires 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 data collection, to the CST. The SDDF must include all cases in the gross sample. 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, and domain, 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 [12](#)). The SWEP will use the SDDF information to produce integrated sample design indicators (stratum, psu and domain) and to develop weights.

³⁴ The same principle applies to countries with individual sample frames – i.e. cases where the incorrect person has responded can be retained.

Number of completed questionnaires and effective sample size

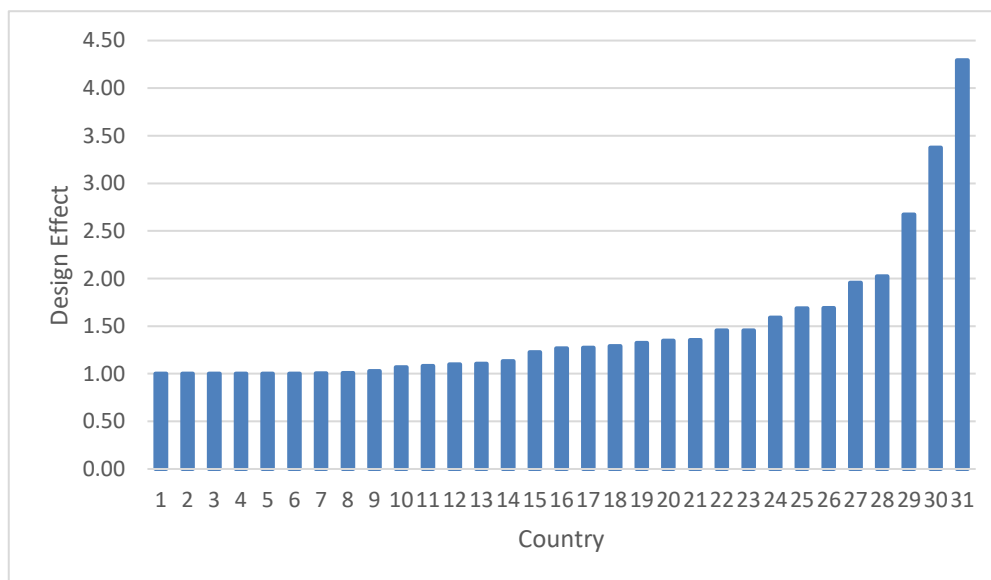
The effective sample size is a function of the number of completed questionnaires, a correction for household size (for samples of dwellings and addresses), a correction for other possible differences in selection probabilities, and a correction for intra-class correlation within Primary Sampling Units (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 need to complete the survey to achieve an effective sample size of 1,500.

There are three 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 PSUs; or
- switch to an unclustered design.

See the Sampling Guidelines on the ESS Round 13 NC Intranet.



10. Specification for self-completion data collection

This section sets out the requirements for self-completion data collection at ESS Round 13.

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 must 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.

10.1 Data collection period

The Round 13 data collection period runs from 1 September 2027 to 15 May 2028. The deadline for starting Round 13 data collection (with the soft launch) is 20 January 2028. Countries which cannot plan to complete data collection by 15 May 2028 should skip Round 13 and plan for Round 14 instead.

While 20 January 2028 is the deadline for starting data collection, countries are strongly advised to do all they can to start in September 2027. This will help ensure a consistent data collection period across countries and reduce the risk of delays to data delivery and release.

NCs should consider how long they need for their data collection and plan accordingly. When doing so, they should consider the potential impact of Christmas and other national holidays. For example, in most countries it is not advisable to send invitations or reminders in the post close to the Christmas holidays due to more uncertainty around the time it takes for letters to arrive. If countries are unable to carry out their main data collection launch by early November 2027, they may be advised to delay until January 2028 to avoid clashes with Christmas. There may also be cases where countries are advised to carry out their soft launches before Christmas and delay their full launch to January 2028, or to split some of their mailings before and after Christmas (e.g. invitation and first reminder before, and second and third reminders after).

The 1 September 2027 start date is the earliest date that countries should carry out their full launch. The soft launch can be carried out earlier (in August 2027) if all preparations are complete and subject to agreement with the CST. The pre-test can be carried out from May 2027 (subject to completion of preparations by this point).

The time needed to complete data collection may vary somewhat between countries based on the approach taken (see section [10.4](#)). In particular, countries that use the fieldworker-first approach may need a little longer than those that use the postal-first approach.

10.2 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, must be used by all countries. As part of this, Centerdata will be responsible for programming the national web and paper questionnaires for all participating countries based on the ESS Source Questionnaire and a source paper questionnaire template.

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, the signed-off translations 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 the web questionnaires, they will be shared with the NC. NCs will be able to export their paper questionnaire template directly from TranslationCTRL in the form of an Adobe InDesign document.

NCs will need to carry out minor reformatting work to finalise the national paper questionnaires after exporting from Centerdata's platform. Some examples of these tasks include removing unused response options for country-specific questions where response scales vary across countries, manually adding in any extra country-specific questions, fixing page numbers, and manually adding a cover page image and logo. NCs will also need to check the paper questionnaire thoroughly for minor errors that may not have been apparent in TranslationCTRL, such as extra spaces, spelling, or punctuation errors. A guidance document listing all of the manual changes needed and instructions on how to make them will be provided by the CST. NCs will need access to Adobe's InDesign software, or comparable software that can read and adapt Adobe InDesign documents, to perform this task.

NCs must ensure that the final paper questionnaires are consistent with the source paper questionnaire template in terms of layout, graphic design, font size, and font type.

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 the web and paper questionnaires are free of minor grammatical or stylistic errors, such as incorrect punctuation.
- That any country-specific content is included as expected.

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. NCs also need to check and approve the data entry form programmed by Centerdata (for entering responses from paper questionnaire) before starting data collection. The data entry form should reflect the final signed-off paper questionnaire.

Country Contacts need to review and approve the web and paper questionnaires following completion of the pre-test (including any changes made following the pre-test). Countries can proceed with their soft launch (see section [10.23](#)) once both the NC and Country Contact have signed off their final web and paper questionnaires.

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.

Centerdata will schedule joint online briefings meetings for multiple NCs and agencies to attend. These briefings will familiarise NCs/agencies with all aspects of the ESS self-completion platform and the staging process. NCs and agencies (where relevant) must attend at least one of these meetings. Where agencies are delivering elements of the self-completion approach, it is important that they (as well as NCs) attend. The meetings will be held at different points over the Round 13 development period to allow NCs to determine the best time to attend (e.g. based on when agencies are appointed). Additional meetings can be held with countries in case of country-specific issues or concerns.

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

NCs will need to send an anonymised sample file to Centerdata (via Centerdata's file share tool). Centerdata will then load it into their platform in advance of the data collection period. The anonymised sample file provided by NCs must include a unique ID number for each sample unit, alongside variables 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 sample file must not 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 constructed and shared.

Once the sample cases have been uploaded, and all other preparations are complete (including final sign-off of the web and paper questionnaires by the Country Contact), Centerdata will automatically assign a unique access code³⁵ for each sample unit. This access code(s) 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 paper questionnaire.**

10.4 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 post³⁶. In most cases, it is expected that a targeted nonresponse phase will be included at the end of the postal mailings phase (see section [10.7](#)).
- **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 and introducing the survey (where

³⁵ It is possible that for Round 13, two access codes will be used per sample unit for added security (e.g. a username and password). This will be confirmed to NCs in the R13 development phase.

³⁶ This can include the main national postal service or other providers or a combination thereof.

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). Targeted nonresponse activities may also be required (see section [10.7](#)).

Each country should decide which of these two 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 the postal-first approach, countries must 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. In some cases, it may also help to deliver a more representative sample, especially as lower-educated groups (who are often underrepresented – see section [10.7](#)) are often more likely to complete on paper.

NCs should decide which approach to take based on any existing evidence in their country, including based on their experience of the Round 12 self-completion approach, and other national factors (e.g. where internet penetration is lower, a concurrent approach may be preferred). Countries are permitted to change their approach from Round 12. However, any such proposals should be discussed with the Country Contact at an early stage.

Where the fieldworker-first approach is being used a concurrent approach must 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.

10.5 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 [10.11](#) for details of limited exemptions to this incentive requirement).

A minimum of four mailings must be sent in the post to all sample units that have not already completed the questionnaire, refused to take part, or been deemed ineligible.

This comprises an invitation and three reminder letters. Additional reminders can be made by other channels (see sections [10.7](#) and [10.16](#)).

The invitation letter must include the link to the web survey landing page and the access code (it is also recommended that a QR code is provided – see section [10.8](#)). This information must also be included in all reminder letters (and any other communication sent to sample units). After the invitation letter, the three reminders must be sent to the non-responding sample units, reflecting the following guidelines (Dillman et al., 2014)³⁷:

- The first reminder should be scheduled to arrive 7 days after the first invitation.
- The second reminder should be scheduled to arrive 14 days after the first reminder.
- The third reminder should be scheduled to arrive 14 days after the second reminder³⁸.

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 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 must only be sent to non-responding sample units who have not opted out or been deemed ineligible. NCs (or their appointed agencies) will therefore need to monitor completions and remove sample units from mailings where relevant as quickly as possible (information on completions will be available in Centerdata's platform). For the first reminder, there is very limited time to do this and inevitably means some who have responded will receive that reminder. Nevertheless, it is crucial that the first reminder is scheduled to arrive 7 days after the invitation mailing as this has been shown to be optimal for boosting response. A sentence will be included in the reminder letters to acknowledge that people may have already completed the survey ("If you have completed the survey in the last few days, please ignore this letter").

Paper questionnaire returns should be collected, recorded and checked for completeness at least every 2-3 days during data collection. 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 documented³⁹. When paper questionnaires are received, the date they arrive by post should be recorded as this information will be required as part of the final dataset.

10.6 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 thought that this personal contact may maximise the chances of sample units responding to the survey. Where address-based samples are used, fieldworkers can instruct

³⁷ Dillman, D.A., Smyth, J.D., & Christian L.M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail and mixed-mode surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

³⁸ If a fieldworker nonresponse phase is planned, the third reminder letter should mention that a fieldworker may visit if the survey has not been completed by this time.

³⁹ A contact log will be provided by the CST for this purpose.

household members that the survey should be completed by the person aged 15+ with the next birthday⁴⁰.

Visits to addresses should be made at times when people are most likely to be at home. 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). For any visits where no contact is made and no materials are left, the fieldworker should leave a calling card to show they have visited.

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 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, fieldworkers 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 should be scheduled to arrive 7 days after the first invitation.
- The second reminder should be scheduled to arrive 14 days after the first reminder.
- The third reminder should be scheduled to arrive 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.

Where in-person visits are being used for reminders, fieldworkers will need to have spare copies of the paper questionnaire for cases where this is requested (i.e. where the target respondent no longer has the questionnaire provided with the invitation). In these cases, fieldworkers will need to write-on the matching access code to the front of the questionnaire.

For all contacts where fieldworkers are used, they must be provided with **pre-packaged envelopes** for each sample unit they should visit, to minimise the risk that any of the materials are mistakenly not delivered. For example, the invitation letter must be included in an envelope with the paper questionnaire, data protection information sheet, and unconditional incentive (where relevant). **Fieldworkers should not need to package envelopes as part of their task.**

Countries using the fieldworker-first approach will need to determine how completed paper questionnaires are returned. Where there are concerns with the postal system, it

⁴⁰ 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 must raise this with their Country Contact.

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 fieldworker can also make contact by SMS or phone to confirm arrangements with the respondent where these contact details are available. The approach to collection and return of paper questionnaires needs to be specified in the Data Processing Agreement (see section [8.1](#)).

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, countries should also assess the relative burden of returning paper questionnaires via the freepost return envelope. Even in countries where the postal system is reliable, if respondents would need to travel a notable distance to post their completed paper questionnaire, then it would be advisable to have fieldworkers offer collection as an alternative option.

Where in-person visits are made, details of the visits will need to be recorded for inclusion in the contact data file. This will include the date/time and outcome of each visit. An electronic contact form will be provided by Centerdata for this purpose.

Where in-person visits are used for reminders or to collect completed paper questionnaires, fieldworkers will need to be kept updated 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.

A set of fieldworker guidelines and a template of slides to use in fieldworker briefings will be produced by the CST and shared with NCs during the Round 13 development phase.

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

Two important quality indicators of ESS’s self-completion approach are to deliver the highest possible response rates and to represent the target population as accurately as possible. The core data collection approaches, outlined in the sections above, are designed to maximise response rates across the sample. However, there is evidence from ESS’s self-completion data so far (and other studies) that even where good headline response rates are achieved, certain population subgroups can be significantly under or over-represented⁴¹. A key part of the self-completion protocol is therefore to assess groups which may be under-represented and introduce targeted measures to encourage their participation. This is covered in the next section ([10.7](#)).

Countries are also encouraged to implement additional measures – beyond the core contact strategies described above – to increase overall response rates, particularly in countries where response rates are below ESS’s target of 45%. Section [10.16](#) outlines a range of possible measures to maximise response rates.

⁴¹ For example, the UK Survey Futures project released the following statement on the relationship between response rates and survey quality in June 2025: https://surveyfutures.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Response-Rates-Posititon-Statement_Survey-Futures.pdf

10.7 Targeted nonresponse phase to address nonresponse bias

In previous ESS self-completion surveys, men, people under the age of 25, groups with lower educational attainment, and noncitizens have been underrepresented in some countries.

It is required for NCs to analyse the results of their Round 12 self-completion survey and assess which population subgroups, if any, were underrepresented in the data collected after applying design weights to correct for uneven selection probabilities. For countries that did not participate in Round 12, or for countries whose Round 12 achieved self-completion sample is too small to reliably estimate the proportion of population subgroups, comparable self-completion surveys should be consulted. Where no comparable self-completion surveys exist, countries should anticipate underrepresentation of people with lower educational attainment, as this is the most common underrepresented population subgroup. The CST will provide guidance on what represents an unacceptable level of underrepresentation and share this with national teams.

Countries are then required to plan a targeted nonresponse phase for contacting certain population subgroups that they expect to be underrepresented. This involves making additional contact attempts to a **targeted subgroup of nonrespondents** in at least one of the following ways:

- Carrying out targeted fieldworker visits following the initial contact phase
- Sending SMS, email, or digital post reminders where contact details are available
- Sending an additional mailing that is distinctive from the primary mailing sequence, agreed with the Country Contact ahead of data collection (e.g. additional mailing via private mailing service, in a small box, with a handwritten address).

Mailings prepared at this stage may be tailored to appeal to the underrepresented subgroups. For example, if men are underrepresented, NCs should consult the literature on which survey topics men tend to be interested in and consider changing the topics listed in the invitation letters. NCs may also consider varying incentive amounts for different parts of their sample to increase the survey appeal for underrepresented groups.

NCs should review the effectiveness of any targeting approach they used at Round 12 when considering a suitable approach for Round 13.

Where the representation of groups with lower educational attainment is a concern (i.e. the level underrepresentation is above the acceptable threshold set by the CST), a targeted fieldworker nonresponse phase must be undertaken. It is thought that this personal contact (or additional personal contact for fieldworker-first countries) may be particularly effective in encouraging the participation of individuals in lower educated groups, rather than simply relying on them to read the letter sent in the post and complete the survey.

Where fieldworker visits are used as part of the nonresponse phase, the fieldworkers must make a minimum of two contact attempts. 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 selection of sample units to target in the nonresponse phase may be done via additional information on the sampling frame. In countries where no additional information is available, targeting should be done at a municipal or subregional level by matching the sampling frame with external data, such as indexes of mass deprivation⁴². Targeting may also focus on small geographical areas that are underrepresented generally.

The requirements for nonresponse targeting apply to all countries where there is an underrepresentation in one or more subgroups. This includes those who are using a fieldworker-first approach.

Ideally, responsive designs would be used whereby the sample composition is assessed after the initial contact phase. It can then be determined whether nonresponse targeting is required, and which groups should be targeted. However, it is acknowledged that countries may need to commit to the level and type of targeting at an earlier stage (e.g. when tendering for a fieldwork agency, where this applies). Therefore, if adopting a responsive design based on initial Round 13 outcomes is not possible, NCs should plan targeting based on evidence from the Round 12 sample compositions in their country alongside other national evidence. Even where this applies, flexibility is encouraged – for example, where feasible, an agreement with an agency could state that 20% of sample units receive in-person visits from fieldworkers but there may be scope to determine *which* 20% of cases these are after the initial contact phase.

It is acknowledged that final sample compositions from ESS Round 12 won't usually be known at the point NCs are required to provide their first costing for Round 13 (by the end of February 2026), which may make it hard to assess the level and type of targeting that may be required. Where this applies, and where there is no other robust national evidence, NCs should produce two costing options – one without and one with a targeted nonresponse phase.

10.8 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 with the same care as the Round 13 questionnaire. Minor wording changes may be needed depending on the specific approach taken in the country. However, other changes must not be made as the source versions are based on extensive testing and expert advice.

NCs should first make any changes they propose to the English-language version of the invitation letter to reflect their national context. The adapted English-language letter must then be shared with ESS HQ to review and approve. Only the version approved by ESS HQ should be used for translation. Any changes made to the invitation letters through this process should be reflected in reminder letters.

Subject to assessing the degree of changes from Round 12, the translated invitation letter may be included as part of the translation checks to assess consistency with the source version.

⁴² For an example of such an approach, see the 'DCMS Participation Survey goes digital' Presented by Penny Gaight-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).

NCs also need to consider if the invitation letter 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).

Countries are strongly encouraged to include a bulky item with one of the mailings – for example, a tote bag. It's thought that this should increase the chances of the envelope being opened. In most cases, we recommend this being done for a letter-only reminder (i.e. not the invitation mailing or when the paper questionnaire is being sent). In most cases, we expect the 1st reminder to be most suitable for this.

If there are different postal 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.

If there are different categories of postage in a country (e.g. 1st versus 2nd class, priority versus non-priority), the category that will usually ensure letters arrive more quickly must be used for at least the invitation and first reminder mailings (for example, using 1st class rather than 2nd class postage for these mailings).

In countries where an individual sample is available, the invitation letters and reminders must 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.

It is recommended that all letters include a QR code (as well as a URL) that will direct to the national landing page without needing to type the URL. This reflects evidence that use of QR codes can improve response rates to web surveys (Endres et al., 2023)⁴³.

It is **not** proposed that countries send a pre-notification letter that doesn't provide access to the questionnaire in advance of the invitation letter. However, if sending a pre-notification is felt to be beneficial in any country (drawing on previous evidence), this can be allowed. This should be **additional** to the other contacts described above – it would **not** be accepted to remove one of the main four contacts with a pre-notification letter. Additional contacts to maximise response and/or reduce nonresponse bias should also be prioritised above pre-notification letters if there is a need to choose between them (e.g. for budgetary reasons or to stay within the 10 contacts limit – see section [10.17](#)), unless there is evidence from other national studies that a pre-notification is more effective.

⁴³ 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.

10.9 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. Any proposal to add information not indicated by country specific adaptation sections needs to be checked with the Country Contact and DPO. The translated information sheet may be included as part of the translation checks (depending on the extent of changes from Round 12). See section [8.4](#) for further data protection details on the information sheet.

10.10 Landing page for web survey

NCs will need to set up a landing page for the survey in their country in line with a landing page specification provided by the CST. The URL for this page must appear on all invitation and reminder letters. The URL must be short and simple to allow people to type this easily and minimise 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. If the NC institution's website does not offer sufficient flexibility in the design of webpages for this purpose, the CST may require NCs to purchase a separate domain and create the landing page from scratch for via a website builder application.

The landing page specification will describe the content that must be included on the landing page, such as 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 must be made very prominent on the landing page so this can be easily seen without needing to scroll (including on mobiles).** The landing page should also include the same logos as the letters to help reassure respondents that the web page is genuine.

The national landing page must be reviewed and approved by the Country Contact before the pre-test (and again after the pre-test if any changes are made).

10.11 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. Entry into prize draws or lotteries are not classified as monetary incentives and should be avoided in any case. Where vouchers are used, these should be for widely known (but uncontroversial) 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 should be sent in the same envelope as the invitation letter unless agreed otherwise with the CST. It should also be attached to the letter (e.g. with a paperclip) to minimise the risk that it not seen by people when opening the envelope.

Where the fieldworker-first approach is used, an unconditional incentive is not required but is likely to 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 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 (at least €10 or equivalent). The conditional incentive is not mandatory, but for a fairly long self-completion survey such as the ESS, it is 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.

10.12 Break-off protocol

All countries (regardless of the approach taken) must employ a break-off protocol to target respondents who have started the web survey but have yet to complete it. This involves replacing the final (3rd) reminder letter with a tailored reminder that acknowledges that the respondent has started the web questionnaire but requests them to complete it. A template for this communication will be provided by the CST.

NCs will be provided with a cut-off point in the questionnaire to be used to define break-off cases selected for the break-off protocol, to avoid sending mailings to participants who only neglected to answer the final few non-substantive questions in the survey.

10.13 Respondent helpline

Regardless of the data collection approach used, a helpline for respondents must be provided throughout the data collection period. This must 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 that has contacted 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). All contacts must be logged in a contact log file which will be provided by the CST.

10.14 Interviewer assistance with questionnaire completion

The ESS Round 12 Specification did not allow any interviewer or fieldworker assistance with completing the questionnaire. This reflected the decision to move the ESS to fully

self-completion data collection, meaning consistency of approach across the sample and removal of interviewer effects.

While requiring all target respondents to self-complete the questionnaire has clear benefits, it also means that some people may be less likely to take part in the ESS now than they were under an interviewer-administered approach. This includes individuals with low literacy or certain disabilities, who may feel unable to self-complete a fairly long written questionnaire. It is important for the ESS to be inclusive to all members of the target population and try to increase the participation of currently underrepresented groups. There is already evidence that underrepresentation of lower educated groups is larger with self-completion in many countries compared with the face-to-face approach.

For Round 13, interviewers (or fieldworkers) are therefore permitted to assist respondents in completing the questionnaire where it is judged that the only alternative would be their non-participation. It is important to carefully control and monitor these cases to ensure that this assistance is only provided in essential cases.

There are two different protocols for assistance with questionnaire completion depending on how contact is made, as detailed below:

- Where letters are sent in the post
 - Target respondents will be able to contact the helpline (see section [10.13](#)) in cases where they would like to participate but are unable to self-complete the questionnaire.
 - The person(s) handling the helpline should be instructed to check if there is anyone else who could assist the respondent with completing the questionnaire (e.g. a family member or friend) assuming the respondent is comfortable with this.
 - If no one else is available, the person on the helpline can ask if the respondent would be able and willing to complete the questionnaire with an interviewer.
 - If the answer to the above is 'yes', an interview should be arranged to complete the questionnaire with an interviewer. This can either be done by a video interview or in-person interview.
- **Where fieldworkers visit addresses**
 - Fieldworkers will be asked to record information on cases where target respondents would like to complete the survey but say they are unable to self-complete.
 - In these cases, the fieldworker should be instructed to check if there is anyone else who could assist the respondent with completing the questionnaire (e.g. a family member or friend) assuming the respondent is comfortable with this.
 - If no one else is available, the fieldworker needs to log a request with the NC/agency (depending on the arrangement in the country) for the person to be interviewed.
 - The NC/agency then reviews the request and considers if arranging an interview is suitable. In most cases it is expected that permission would be given, but the level of requests at a fieldworker level should be reviewed; for example, a high number of requests from a fieldworker may suggest they are overly pushing this option which should be avoided.
 - **If the request is accepted, the NC/agency arrange for the interview – either to be carried out by the fieldworker (if they have suitable training) or another interviewer. A video interview could also be arranged if this is preferred.**

As noted, we expect the scale of requests for support with questionnaire completion will be low, though this is difficult to predict with certainty and is likely to vary between countries. For costing purposes it's recommended to assume around 2-3% of cases in the gross sample request this option, unless national evidence suggests a higher or lower assumption would be more appropriate. Costs should also cover training/briefing of interviewers to carry out this task.

National teams will be required to record when these requests are made and the reason for them – either via the contact log or fieldworker contact form depending on the approach being taken. This information is also expected to form part of the Round 13 data, subject to further discussion in the CST.

Additional documentation will be provided by the CST to NCs to support planning this approach, including a flow chart to help determine when this assistance should be offered, an outline script for fieldworkers/helpline handlers to follow to deal with requests, and guidance on how to administer these interviews.

The experiences of this approach at Round 13 will be assessed before determining whether it should be retained for future ESS rounds (and in what form). Outcomes from Round 12 – when such assistance was not permitted but the questionnaire captured the extent to which this may happen anyway – will also be assessed when considering future rounds.

10.15 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 rate specified reflects the state of the art in the field whilst being realistic. 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. As of Round 12, the ESS will be using the AAPOR RR3 response rate formula⁴⁴ to calculate published response rates:

$$RR3 = \frac{\text{Complete questionnaires}}{\text{Cases of known eligibility} + \text{Cases of unknown eligibility} * (\text{estimate of eligibility rate})}$$

Complete questionnaires will be classified as questionnaires where respondents have answered 80% or more of questions in the ESS core modules that are asked to all respondents.

Several countries that have already adopted ESS's self-completion approach achieved response rates of between 35% and 40% (and in a few cases, over 40%). With more development time and additional response maximisation 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 was achieved for the self-completion component at ESS Round 12 (for countries that participated in that round). Other countries can base assumptions on feasibility testing or evidence from other national surveys. Where NCs are unsure on the

⁴⁴ The American Association for Public Opinion Research. 2023 Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys. 10th edition. AAPOR.

likely response rate due to a lack of prior evidence, it is recommended to assume a 25% response rate when designing the sample.

NCs should note that response rates are only one measure of quality and largely reflect process quality and not output quality. It is also important that the achieved sample represents the target population as closely as possible. A higher response rate can help reduce nonresponse bias, but it does not guarantee this. NCs therefore need to balance steps to deliver the most representative sample and overall response rate maximisation when setting their Round 13 approach.

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

10.16 Response rate maximisation

It is possible that many (but not all) countries may achieve a lower response rate for the self-completion approach than has previously been achieved based on face-to-face fieldwork. It is important that ESS achieves the highest possible response rates 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)⁴⁵.

It is expected that all countries work towards and, where possible, exceed ESS’s target response rate for its self-completion approach of 45%. We are confident based on evidence to date that adopting the contact strategy outlined in this specification will deliver good response rates, but NCs should consider other measures that can be adopted to increase these rates further. This is particularly important for countries who expect to fall below the 45% target based on evidence to date.

Below we list some possible strategies for increasing response rates across the full sample (please refer to section [10.7](#) for details on how to target underrepresented sub-groups). Each NC should consider which measures can be applied in their country and discuss plans with their Country Contact.

- For countries where contact via an additional mode is possible from contact information that is available on or can be matched to the sampling frame (phone call, text message, email, digital post, or a combination)⁴⁶, additional contact can be made via these channel(s).
- A mailing could be sent that differs from the other mailings in one or more ways (this could either be one of the later reminders or an additional mailing). For example:
 - Using a private mailing service with distinctive packaging
 - A small box/package rather than a standard envelope
 - Using handwritten envelopes
- Adopting one or more of the following measures:
 - Using a high conditional incentive (greater than €15), either from the outset or increased in later reminders
 - A non-monetary unconditional incentive included in one of the reminders (e.g. a tote bag) (see section [10.8](#))

⁴⁵ Improving Survey Response: Lessons learned from the European Social Survey.

⁴⁶ Countries will need to assess whether the availability of additional contact information (e.g. phone numbers and email addresses) has notable lapses in coverage, and whether additional contacts could therefore bias the sample towards already overrepresented groups.

- Promotion of the results of the survey and its purpose beyond the standard contents of the invitation letters and data protection information sheets (e.g., a postcard with where to find the topline reports)
- Online and/or social media campaigns to promote awareness of the survey, its importance, and its credibility
- Seeking permission from government funders or ministries to use their logos on envelopes letters, landing pages, and paper questionnaires
- Having a noteworthy person sign the letters, such as the President of the NC Institution or government official, whose identity can be easily verified online
- Changing the name of the survey (e.g., for the UK, "Living in the UK" instead of the European Social Survey) to have wider appeal.

It's acknowledged that some of the methods listed above are similar to those suggested to selectively target underrepresented groups. NCs will need to consider how these are combined. For example, if a country has access to additional contact details (e.g. phone number of email addresses) they may consider sending two reminders via these channels to all nonresponding cases, and then a further two reminders (with targeted messaging) to only those in groups that are underrepresented.

10.17 Maximum contact requirements

A balance should be struck between taking steps to maximise response rates (section [10.16](#)) and/or improve sample composition (section [10.7](#)), 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. This limit has been set by the ESS Research Ethics Board and cannot be exceeded.** A confirmed contact includes the delivery of a letter, a phone call (even if unanswered), 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 must be a clear process in place for target respondents to opt out of further contact at any point during the data collection phase.

The contact data must record which contacts respondents received at the case level.

10.18 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 rate 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 (e.g. any countries that did not take part at Round 12 or where elements of their approach have changed). However, taking such a batched approach also comes with challenges. There are more mailings to schedule and organise with agencies or 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 discussed with Country Contacts and the SWEP.

10.19 Monitoring data collection progress

NCs and their appointed parties will be able to monitor data collection progress using Centerdata's platform. The platform interface will show which, and how many, cases have started/finished the web survey up until the present moment during the data collection phase. The interface will also provide a breakdown of responses against different categories (depending on the information uploaded with the sample).

NCs and their appointed parties will be able to freely download a sample file with case-level information on each sample unit at any time during data collection to confirm cases to include in reminder mailings. They may also use this downloaded data to analyse data collection progress over time.

During the data collection phase, NCs should update variables providing certain case-level information, either on the platform interface or by exporting, updating, and re-importing the sample file. These variables concern how many mailings have been sent to each sample unit, whether a sample unit has opted out of participation, and whether a sample unit has been deemed ineligible. Updating this information will both help with monitoring progress and support with preparation of the contact data.

Centerdata will provide guidelines for NCs on how to perform these tasks.

NCs (or their agencies) can enter responses from paper questionnaires using the data entry form in the Centerdata platform (see section [11.1](#) for more information on this) or choose to scan these separately and merge the paper and web data later. NCs must ensure that paper questionnaires are logged in the system on a rolling basis (at least every 2-3 days) by initiating the data entry form for each received paper questionnaire, even if they are not to be fully entered until a later stage (or, if scanning is used, are not to be entered at all).

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.

10.20 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 [10.7](#) for details).

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, unless this is agreed in exceptional circumstances (see section [10.14](#)). 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 human 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). The CST will provide fieldworker guidelines and briefing slides.

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 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. If possible, fieldworkers should receive feedback on how many complete questionnaires their work generates. This should help motivate fieldworkers to encourage sample units to complete the survey.

NCs should carefully reflect on the experiences from Round 12 and apply any learning from this when planning fieldworker tasks for Round 13.

10.21 Experimentation

The CST encourages all ESS national teams to carry out experiments as part of their Round 13 data collection. This is the ESS's first fully self-completion round and it is expected to improve and refine the approach over time. It is important that any future modifications are based on strong empirical evidence, and ESS national teams can play a central role in contributing to this.

Following consultation with the ESS Scientific and Methods Advisory Boards, the CST has produced the following list of areas for possible experimentation:

- Comparing sequential and concurrent approaches.
- Experimenting with communication materials, including:
 - Targeted approaches in letters – e.g. noting the importance that younger or low educated groups participate where they are underrepresented, testing the impact of localisation by referring to the respondent's local area in the letters.
 - Testing digital post services.
 - Experiments with branding/logos – e.g. testing impact of including NC institution logo on envelopes; adding second logo of agency or funder; adding ESS logo.
 - Testing different letter designs – e.g. more text versus use of icons.
 - Landing page hosting – comparing hosting on university website versus standalone website.
 - Experiments with use of QR codes, including potentially enabling tracking of their usage to fully assess impact.
- Incentive experiments, including:
 - Targeted incentives where sample frames or information added to them allows this.
 - Comparing visible and non-visible unconditional incentives.
 - Potentially testing with very large conditional incentives.

NCs should closely review the above list and consider which experiments they wish to prioritise in their country. They should then contact the CST with their proposals.

In most cases, it is expected that additional samples would need to be drawn for the experiment rather than forming part of a country's usual target sample size. However, this will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis with the CST.

As experiments would have country specific elements it would be necessary for the ESS Research Ethics Board to approve these on a country-by-country basis.

10.22 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 13 data collection. If the self-completion approach went very badly in Round 12, (e.g. response rate below 20%, or serious sample composition deviations) a feasibility test in advance of Round 13 is also likely to be required.

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 targeted nonresponse phase excluded). Following completion of the test, NCs must submit a report to the CST (based on a template provided) summarising the outcomes. This report will be reviewed by the Country Contact and facilitate discussion regarding any changes to make before the main stage.

All countries are required to carry out a questionnaire pre-test (see section [7.2.5](#)) and a soft launch (see section [10.23](#)) even if a feasibility test is completed.

10.23 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 have impacted 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).

Members of the NC team must be included in the sample for the soft launch (using test access codes provided in SurveyCTRL). This will allow them to check and confirm that letters are printed as intended (e.g. with signatures, proper resolution of logos) and that the URL and access code is included correctly.

Following the soft launch, NCs should check that the rate of completions is as expected⁴⁷ 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 issues or concerns arising from the soft launch must be flagged to the Country Contact. It is recommended to include at least two weeks between the soft launch and full 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

⁴⁷ To support this, the CST will provide NCs with graphs showing web completions over the data collection phase based on countries who carried out the self-completion approach at Round 12.

questionnaires). A meeting needs to be scheduled between the NC and Country Contact following completion of the soft launch to review outcomes and to give the go-ahead to proceed with the full launch (assuming no issues).

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 [10.5](#) and [10.6](#). 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	1 st September	1 st October
1st reminder	8 th September	8 th October
2nd reminder	22 nd September	22 nd October
3rd reminder	6 th October	5 th November

As noted above, the soft launch differs from the pre-test (described separately in section [7.2.5](#)). 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 13 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 13 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 three weeks before the planned date for printing materials for the soft launch (see section 7.2.4 for further details).	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 must 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 must fully reflect what has been agreed in a country's methodological questionnaire for their self-completion data collection.

	Pre-test	Soft launch
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). A report template will be provided by the CST.	National teams should a) review the printed materials by including themselves in the sample and including the mailings; b) check that target respondents are starting and finishing the web survey (monitoring progress on SurveyCTRL); c) review any contacts/complaints from target respondents; d) review the data from the web questionnaire to make sure it looks as expected (i.e. all relevant questions being answered); and e) (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.
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 13 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.

10.24 Methodological Questionnaire

All countries 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, to allow the approach to be finalised with their Country Contact.

The Methodological Questionnaire must be signed-off at least one month before the start of the planned data collection start date. However, the process of completing the methodological questionnaire should start much earlier (we advise 2-3 months before the planned start of data collection) to allow time for queries and multiple iterations. It is expected that details of planned approaches will be discussed between NCs and Country Contacts at a much earlier stage, beginning from the national costing process.

10.25 Feedback report

All NCs will be required to complete a feedback report summarising their experiences of delivering Round 13 data collection. This will include suggestions for any areas that should be reviewed or improved for future rounds. Where parts of the data collection are sub-contracted, it may be necessary for NCs to seek feedback from others to help collate this report (e.g. survey agencies). A report template will be provided by the CST.

10.26 Sample assessment

As well as maximising response rates, it is 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 nonresponse assessment 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.

10.27 Adverse effects

All NCs are required to report any adverse effects experienced when delivering their Round 13 data collection approach to the ESS Research Ethics Board, using this form: https://cityunilondon.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6xsqyUxYvdscChM. An adverse effect is defined as harm, or threat of harm to a respondent, a fieldworker, or an institution.

11. 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.

11.1 Data entry or scanning from paper questionnaires

Centerdata's data entry form 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 form. It is recommended to do this on a rolling basis during fieldwork and not wait until the end.

The data entry task needs to be carried out by trained coders/data entry personnel from the NC institution, survey agency or appointed third party. It is not permitted to use fieldworkers who are carrying out the data collection approach to also carry out data entry.

The design of the data entry form will mimic the paper questionnaire, with all questions available. Responses must 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 form.

Countries should 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 form 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 form is used, the web and paper data can be automatically merged).

It is crucial that quality control measures are put in place to ensure accuracy of the data entry process. For Round 13, it is required that all countries carrying out data entry use **double entry** for all completed paper questionnaires. This involves two coders separately entering responses from each paper questionnaires. Any discrepancies must then be checked and the correct responses confirmed. It is planned to make modifications to Centerdata's data entry form to support this process. The CST will also provide guidance on processes to follow in cases where discrepancies are found.

11.2 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 must adhere to the specification provided in the ESS Data Protocol and dictionaries. The ESS Data Protocol for Round

13 will be made available on the ESS Round 13 NC Intranet (on myESS13) in January 2027.

All electronic deliverables are to be uploaded to the ESS Round 13 NC Intranet (on myESS13) by the end of February 2028 for the first release and the end of June 2028 for the second release. Prior to deposit of data, each NC is responsible for checking and assuring anonymity of their data files a and b (see section 8.6). In addition, NCs must make sure that the raw data does not contain any information that can directly identify the respondents – such as Names, Address, email, phone numbers, ID numbers or geo codes.

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 13 NC Intranet, the Archive reserves the right to ask for new deliverables.

NCs must deliver a combined Main questionnaire data file, including cases responding on web and paper. 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 must include all cases to start the survey, regardless of how many questions have been completed. It is currently expected that the published data will include all cases where at least 50% of 'ask all' questions in the core questionnaire have been answered.

NCs will need to deliver a self-completion contact data file. There will be a single specification for the contact data for all countries, regardless of the data collection approach used. However, some variables will only be relevant for certain countries (for example, those using a fieldworker-first approach). Information from different sources will need to be collated by NCs to produce the contact data, including the fieldworker contact form (where relevant) and helpline contact log. NCs should review the self-completion contact form specification in the ESS Round 12 Data Protocol to familiarise themselves with the requirements (which are not expected to change much for Round 13). If any NCs do not have access to the Round 12 Data Protocol, they can contact the ESS Data Archive.

ESS deliverables

Data files:

- a) Data from Main questionnaire (combined web and paper), including country-specific questions and respondent experience questions
- b) Self-completion Contact data
- c) Sample design data file (SDDF)
- d) Raw data from main questionnaire (separate files for web and paper, including verbatim answers from open questions from both web and paper questionnaires (including ancestry))

Documents:

- a) National Technical Summary (NTS) with appendices (education, income, political parties, marital and relationship status)
- b) Population statistics according to a central specification
- c) Main paper self-completion questionnaire(s) (all language versions)
- d) Contact form(s) (or code used for collection programme)
- e) Fieldworker instructions, briefing and training material
- f) 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

11.3 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. 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.
- Ancestry: 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.

All coding for the ESS Round 13 data must be carried out by human coders rather than machine coders/AI. However, countries are permitted (and encouraged) to carry out experiments to compare results from human coding with machine coding/AI. This means that the same responses can be coded by the two sources, but the coding to be included in the Round 13 data files must be based on the human coding only.

Further details regarding standards and bridging will be available in the ESS Data Protocol and from the ESS Round 13 NC Intranet. To ensure optimal comparability, the standards that are provided on the ESS Round 13 NC Intranet must be used, and care must be taken to ensure compliance.

11.4 Weighting

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

11.5 Processing and dissemination

The processing is organised into multiple steps, each implemented in Jupyter Notebooks, culminating in a standardised processing report. This report includes an HTML file and a spreadsheet that summarises 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 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 myESS13 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 must 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 the ESS Data Portal at 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 myESS13 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.

12. 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 13 will be ESS's first fully self-completion round, disruption to the time series is anticipated as some changes in sample composition and measurement necessarily result from 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 processing of personal data begins (including the pre-test),
- field the complete ESS Round 13 questionnaires using web and paper instruments,
- deliver a Sample Design Data File (SDDF) which allows the calculation of inclusion probabilities,
- make a complete delivery of ESS Round 13 data and documentation to the ESS Data Archive no later than the 2nd deposit delivery deadline (June 2028).

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, countries must finalise the following before data collection starts:

- the translation steps and translation checks for the ESS Round 13 questionnaire and communication materials,
- technical checks on the translations and the questionnaire instruments as required by Centerdata (sanity checks),
- the questionnaire consultations,
- the sign-off procedure for the sampling design,
- the sign-off procedure of the Methodological Questionnaire.

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

rate⁴⁸, 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 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 or to publish it at all. In these cases, the representative for that country in the ESS ERIC General Assembly will be informed of this decision, which will be final.

⁴⁸ 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.

13. Changes from previous version of specification

This section will be updated, as necessary, in any subsequent versions of the Round 13 Specification that are issued.

Appendix 1. Glossary and abbreviations

<i>Term</i>	<i>Abbr.</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Country Contact	CC	CST member, assigned by the Director, who oversees the entire national survey life cycle for that country.
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. Contact forms will be used in cases where contacts are carried out by fieldworkers.
Core Scientific Team	CST	Team comprising HQ and several 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 form		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.
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 Organisation 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.).
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, Deputy Directors and the CST. 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 13 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 (TRAPD), 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; additional translation checks by the ESS translation team, called 'GESIS translation checks'; (3) National pre-testing (TRAPD); (4) Sign-off on translations and documentation of the translation process (TRAPD).