

8th May 2025

ESS Team Austria

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# The transformation of the European Social Survey

Presentation prepared for the 3rd ESS SHARE GGP User Workshop



## Overview

The ESS measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations. The main aims of the ESS are to:

- 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;
- continue the development of 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.



**NONRESPONSE**  
Too many don't reply.



**BIASED ANSWERS**  
Social desirability and acquiescence bias.



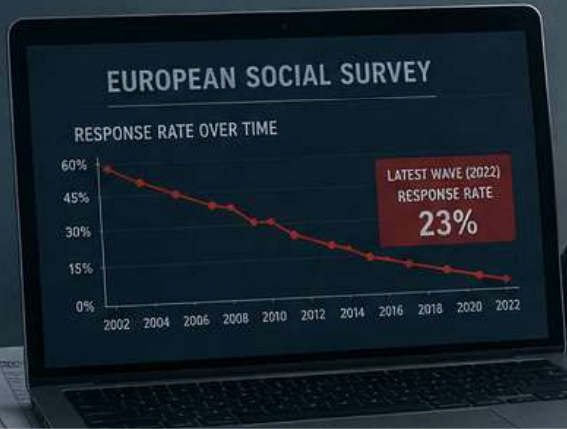
**UNCLEAR QUESTIONS**  
Hard to understand, hard to answer.



**DATA ERRORS**  
Missing values, inconsistencies, coding mistakes.



**LOW RESPONSE RATE  
THREATENS DATA QUALITY  
AND REPRESENTATIVENESS**



There are challenges ....



The ESS faced several challenges since its inception in 2001, of which the most recent are:

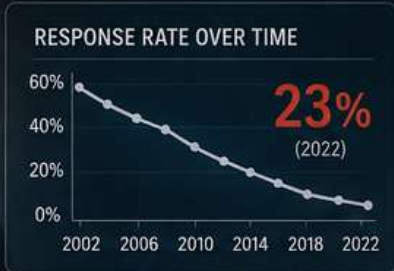
- The COVID19-Pandemic in 2020 (ESS R10), in this round p2w has been replaced f2f in some countries (also AT) because of social restrictions;
- The COVID-19 pandemic made problems connected with f2f-interviewing more visible and more severe, but problems with f2f already existed before;
- Thus, the ESS prepared itself for a mode change;
- The current ESS Round 12 used two modes: f2f & p2w;
- From ESS R13 onwards only p2w (incl. paper questionnaires) will be used....

## Sample composition of Round 12 self-completion

Composition	Web	Paper	Total	Population
<b>Women (%)</b>	51 %	57 %	52 %	51%
<b>Age 15–34 (%)</b>	27 %	10 %	24 %	27%
<b>Age 65+ (%)</b>	18 %	49 %	24 %	24%
<b>Low education (ISCED 0–2) (%)</b>	12 %	16 %	13 %	24%
<b>Tertiary education (ISCED 5+) (%)</b>	47 %	22 %	42 %	29%
<b>Foreign nationality/ citizenship (%)</b>	14 %	7 %	13 %	20%

FROM FACE-TO-FACE  
TRADITIONAL INTERVIEWING

TO PUSH-TO-WEB  
ONLINE SELF-COMPLETION



DECLINING PARTICIPATION  
THREATENS DATA QUALITY  
AND REPRESENTATIVENESS

- Envelope icon: 3
- Envelope icon: 3
- Star icon: ★★★★★
- Person icon with down arrow
- Line graph icon with red downward trend

COGNITIVE BURDEN

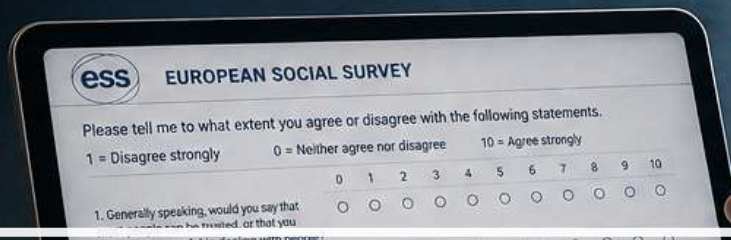
- Long grids
- Complex wording
- Multiple concepts

SURVEY FATIGUE

- Drop-offs
- Break-offs
- Speeders

These questions are too complicated...

# Challenges with p2w...



5/11/2026

## Challenges ahead!

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The switch to a full self-completion approach poses several challenges:

- Mode change – differences between f2f and p2w - > ESS provides an additional harmonized (imputed) dataset (as if the same mode has been used!);
- No interviewer-assistance -> impact of functional illiteracy;
- Complex survey designs, e.g. survey experiments impose a huge workload (different paper questionnaires, mailings), which is also error-prone;