

The European Social Survey Round 12 Call Specification for Question Module Design Teams

The Director of the European Social Survey (ESS), Rory Fitzgerald, is inviting proposals from multi-national teams to design modules for the questionnaire for Round 12 of the ESS, to be fielded between February and December 2025.

1. Background

The ESS is a biennial, academically-driven social survey that charts and explains the interactions between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. Ten rounds of the survey have already been conducted covering over 30 nations and employing the most rigorous survey methodology. A fully-documented multinational dataset is publicly available from the ESS [Data Archive](#). Fieldwork for Round 11 will start in February 2023. Further information about the ESS is available at www.europeansocialsurvey.org.

Following an application to the European Commission, the ESS was awarded European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) status on 30th November 2013. ESS ERIC is funded by participating countries - its Members, Observers and Guests.

ESS ERIC, directed by Rory Fitzgerald, has its Headquarters (HQ) at City, University of London. ESS HQ is supported in the design and implementation of the survey by six other institutions that collectively comprise the ESS ERIC Core Scientific Team (CST): Sikt, Norway; GESIS, Germany; The Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP, Netherlands; Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain; University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; University of Essex, UK.

ESS ERIC is advised by a Methods Advisory Board (MAB) and a [Scientific Advisory Board](#) (SAB). The SAB is responsible for selecting the rotating modules in each round.

The questionnaire for each round consists of two elements: a **core module** of substantive and socio-demographic items; and two **rotating modules**, each including up to 30 items. Each rotating module covers a single academic and/or policy concern within Europe and is drafted by a competitively selected team. Each Question Module Design Team (QDT) works closely with, and is guided by, the CST in developing its module.

A list of the topics covered by the rotating modules in Rounds 1-11 and applications from the successful QDTs can be found on the [ESS website](#) (see also Appendix 1).

2. Types of QDT applications in ESS Round 12

We wish to attract social scientists across Europe who are interested in comparative survey data to apply for the opportunity to design a module of 30 items. Applications are invited from multinational teams of a minimum of three and up to five subject specialists. Team members should be based in at least three different ESS countries with **at least one team member from an ESS ERIC Member or Observer country** (see Appendix 2).

Applications are invited for both 'new' rotating modules and for 'repeats' of prior modules.

New modules may either cover a wholly new topic to the ESS or cover a topic or module that has previously been included but using a different approach.

Repeat modules provide an opportunity to explore how attitudes and behaviour towards a given topic may have changed over time. At least two-thirds of the items in the repeat module must be administered in an identical format to those in the earlier module. Applications for repeat modules are invited both from teams who designed the original ESS module on the topic and from new teams.

Two modules will be selected for Round 12. The SAB may decide to select two new modules, two repeat modules or one new and one repeat. This decision is entirely at the discretion of the SAB. In Rounds 5 to 11 the SAB selected one new and one repeat module.

3. ESS module requirements

The SAB is looking to select modules which will address a key academic or policy concern within the European arena, which will add significantly to the European knowledge base, and will have wide appeal within academia and beyond. Modules should be underpinned by a strong theoretical model and coherent conceptual framework.

Each ESS rotating module contains up to 30 standardised closed survey questions¹ and must be suitable to be fielded as part of a general social survey alongside questions on other political and social topics. Modules must be suitable to be fielded as part of a repeated cross-sectional survey, rather than requiring a panel design. It is possible that Round 12 may include a mix of data collection approaches between countries, with some national teams carrying out face-to-face fieldwork and others using self-completion or mixed-mode approaches. Academic teams will therefore need to give consideration to how their module can be implemented across modes (including face-to-face interviewer-administered surveys, web and paper self-completion).

¹ Note that complex questions (for example vignettes) that take longer to administer may be counted as more than one item in the final module.

The ESS is a representative general population survey of individuals and therefore particularly lends itself to topics that can be asked of everyone rather than specific sub-samples of the population. **Therefore, the majority of questions in proposed modules should be relevant to all ESS respondents (adults aged 15+).** Any routing that targets particular sub-groups should be kept to a minimum. It must be possible to develop equivalent questions to be fielded in a range of cultural and institutional settings across Europe, including countries outside of the EU.

Where a repeat module is proposed, there should be clear evidence that the previous module achieved its intended measurement objectives and that the data have been widely used. There should be a convincing case for repetition in 2025.

Further information on module requirements can be found in Section 8 of this specification and the relevant “Guidance for Stage 1 applicants: [New modules](#) or [Repeat modules](#)”.

4. The module design process

The two teams selected will work closely with the CST and others on the design of their module. The head of each team will be expected to coordinate internal discussion within their team and to communicate with the CST (although they may delegate this role to another member of their team).

The module development process includes several stages of expert review and both qualitative and quantitative pre-testing of items. A system of documentation of questionnaire design will be used to make the process transparent throughout. In the first instance, teams will be asked to complete a template provided by the CST, which outlines the aims of the module and its proposed framework. This will need to be updated at regular intervals to provide a detailed narrative on the development of the questions. The template will be divided in two sections. The first will contain the proposed framework and theoretical background of the module, specifying its aims, the concepts to be measured and their anticipated relationships. The second section will outline the dimensions that form part of each concept and how each of these is likely to be measured by specific questions. Ultimately the rationale for selecting each chosen item will be described so that it is transparent to users. The template will also be used to record the results of data analysis of pre-testing and pilot findings. The final version of the module will be accompanied by the above documentation and will be published on the ESS website. A copy of the templates produced for Rounds 4 to 9, including narrative between the two QDTs and the CST, are available from the [ESS website](#).

All proposals, documents and meetings will be in English, the ESS’s working language. Successful teams are expected to sign up in full to the questionnaire design timetable set out by the CST (see Appendix 3 for details of the provisional Round 12 timetable) and to be fully involved at each stage of the process.

Final decisions on the form and content of the modules are the responsibility of the CST, taking into account the views of the QDTs, results from pre-testing, comments from National Coordinators and the Scientific Advisory Board, as well as translation

considerations.

The ESS is committed to free, open and non-preferential access to all data collected as part of the survey. Round 12 data will be released via the ESS website in 2026. QDTs will have early access to data around a month before the final data release in order to check and 'prove' the provisional dataset. This will provide them with the opportunity to consider (but not publish) articles prior to the dataset's official release.

5. QDT obligations

Successful question module design teams will have free access to methodologically rigorous data on their chosen topic collected from a random sample of around 1,500 adults in at least 25 European countries. To ensure the success of the rotating modules the QDTs are expected to fulfil the following obligations with regard to design and dissemination:

Design:

- Members of each QDT are expected to attend up to four meetings with the CST to discuss questionnaire development (normally held face-to-face in London, though some meetings may be held virtually). They will also be expected to attend at least two meetings with National Coordinators (NCs), the individuals responsible for the survey in participating countries. These are held in one of the participating countries. Further discussions will take place between meetings electronically as appropriate.
- Each QDT is expected to attend at least one meeting of the Scientific Advisory Board to discuss the operationalisation of the conceptual model.
- Each QDT is expected to respond to comments on the questionnaire received from the CST and NCs as specified in the timetable set out in Appendix 3.
- Each QDT is expected to work with the CST to document the questionnaire design process fully using the template referred to in Section 4 above.
- Each QDT is expected to feed into decisions about pre-testing and piloting and to contribute to analysis of survey data collected during pre-testing/piloting as appropriate.
- The head of the QDT (or delegated individual) will be responsible for coordinating internal discussions within the team and communicating with the CST.

Dissemination:

Within one year of the release of the Round 12 data:

- Each QDT is expected to produce analysis based on the module for the ESS Topline Findings series. ESS Topline Findings are concise cross-national summaries of particular topics covered in the questionnaire. Examples based on rotating modules from previous rounds can be found [here](#). QDTs are expected to include data from all countries where the CST has made this available. The ESS ERIC will cover publication costs but cannot cover analysis and writing time.
- Where the topic is appropriate, the QDT will be expected to present findings from the module at a policy seminar organised by the CST. This seminar will bring together ESS scientists, other academics and policy makers from across Europe with a shared interest in the module topic. Previous QDTs have participated in seminars held at the European Parliament, European Commission, OECD, and the European Policy Centre among others. ESS ERIC will cover travel and subsistence costs but cannot cover staff attendance.

Within two years of the release of the Round 12 data:

- It is anticipated that each QDT will make a substantive presentation to an SAB meeting, at which key findings will be presented and further dissemination plans

outlined.

Within three years of the release of the Round 12 data:

- Each QDT is expected to have had at least one article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal based largely on the ESS data from their module.

QDTs may also be asked to contribute to other ESS dissemination activities, for example writing for the ESS blog, as appropriate.

No budgetary provision exists to cover salary or associated costs for the team. However, it is anticipated that travel and accommodation costs will be met for up to two QDT members to attend the meetings with the CST and NCs described above. Once appointed, QDTs are encouraged to apply for additional funding as appropriate to facilitate analysis and dissemination of the module.

6. How to apply

For Round 12 there is a two-stage application process for rotating modules. The application process is the same regardless of whether a new or repeat module is proposed, although the information required for each type of proposal differs slightly.

At Stage 1 eligible teams interested in applying for either a new or a repeat module are invited to submit a short proposal outlining: the relevance and timeliness of their proposed module for cross-national research, its suitability to be fielded as part of the ESS, and their credentials as a potential Question Module Design Team (QDT).

THE DEADLINE FOR STAGE 1 APPLICATIONS IS 6TH MAY 2022.

The [Scientific Advisory Board](#) (SAB) to the ESS ERIC will decide which Stage 1 proposals meet the criteria to be shortlisted. Their decision is final. Shortlisted teams will be invited to submit a full proposal at **Stage 2**, which will contain more details including the theoretical and conceptual model underpinning the module, how it will be operationalised cross-nationally in a 30-item module, and plans for analysis and dissemination. Shortlisted teams may also be asked to make a short in-person presentation on their proposed module to the SAB prior to final module selection. The head of each applying team or a named substitute should be available to reply to questions of the SAB within five working days. The SAB will select two rotating modules from the proposals submitted at Stage 2.

Please refer to the appropriate “Guidance for Stage 1 applicants: [New modules](#) or [Repeat modules](#)” documents available via the ESS website when preparing your application. There are separate guidance documents covering Stage 1 and Stage 2 applications and for applications for new and repeat modules.

- Applications must be made in English and in the format specified in the guidance documents.
- Applications should be emailed to ess@city.ac.uk with “Round 12 module application” as the subject. Only applications submitted by email will be

accepted.

- All applications must be received by **17.00 UK time on the day of the submission deadline**. Any applications received after this time will not be considered.
- All applications will be acknowledged within a few days of receipt.

7. Eligibility

- Applications must be made by teams of between 3 and 5 scholars, located in at least three different ESS countries. At least one applicant must be from an ESS ERIC Member or Observer country (See Appendix 2 for a list of ESS countries).
- No SAB member may apply (or be part of an extended team that applies) for a question module.
- If a member of the SAB wants to participate in any way in an ESS question module application, he or she should indicate this in due time and resign from the SAB.

8. Selection criteria and procedures

The two Round 11 rotating modules will be selected by the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) to the ESS. Applications will be judged according to the following criteria:

Stage 1

- **Relevance**
 - Is the proposed topic relevant and timely to academic and policy debates in Europe?
 - How will the module add to our understanding of the topic theoretically and/or empirically?
 - Will the module have wide appeal to academic and non-academic audiences?
- **Suitability for the ESS:**
 - What is the value of fielding the module as part of the ESS i.e. a cross-national general social survey of the general population rather than a more specialist survey?
 - Is the design of the ESS (a cross-sectional general population survey fielded in diverse institutional and cultural settings) appropriate for the module? Is the topic relevant to all respondents?
 - Will the module be suitable for both face-to-face and self-completion administration?
- **Research team:**

- Does the proposed QDT have the necessary substantive and survey experience and expertise to make the module a success?
- Does the team contain representatives from at least three different ESS countries, including an ESS ERIC member or observer country?

The SAB will judge whether an application is considered to meet each of the three requirements outlined above on a simple pass/fail basis. Applications which fail to meet one or more of the three requirements will be rejected.

Applications which are judged to meet each of the three criteria outlined above will be shortlisted and invited to submit a more detailed proposal for consideration at Stage 2.

Stage 2

Stage 2 proposals will be evaluated according to the three criteria used at Stage 1 (with more detail expected at Stage 2) plus the following additional criteria:

- **Theoretical coherence:**
 - Is the module underpinned by a well-defined conceptual theoretical model?
- **Feasibility of implementation:**
 - Is it viable to operationalise the proposed concepts cross-nationally using 30 items in the time available (c. 18 months)?
 - Are there any anticipated methodological or practical difficulties in developing the module and, if so, suggestions for how these might be overcome?
- **Dissemination plans:**
 - Do the team have a well thought out and credible plan for the timely dissemination of findings from the module to different academic and non-academic audiences?

The SAB will select the two Round 12 rotating modules from among the Stage 2 applications received.

The following procedures govern the selection of modules:

- If a scientist from the research institute of an SAB member is involved in an ESS question module application, the SAB member should take no part in the discussion of that application, and will be excluded from that part of the meeting at the discretion of the chair.
- The SAB may choose to consult external experts to assist it in its decision making.
- One module will normally be on a new topic, i.e. a module not previously included as a rotating module in the ESS although, at the discretion of the SAB, two new or two repeat modules may be selected.
- The decision of the SAB is final.

- Applicants will be notified whether their Stage 1 application has been shortlisted for Stage 2. No further feedback on unsuccessful Stage 1 applications will be given.
- Feedback will be given to unsuccessful applicants at Stage 2 where appropriate.

9. Timetable

Deadline for Stage 1 applications	6th May 2022
Applicants informed of Stage 1 outcome	Late June 2022
Deadline for Stage 2 applications	14 th October 2022
Successful module teams notified	End November 2022
QDTs work with ESS CST to develop R12 Modules	January 2023 to September 2024
QDTs assist with translation queries	October 2024 to July 2025
Round 12 Fieldwork	From February 2025
QDTs check preliminary ESS Round 12 data	2026 (dates to be confirmed)
First release of ESS Round 12 data	2026 (dates to be confirmed)

10. Further information

Please refer to the separate “Guidance for Stage 1 applicants: [New modules](#) or [Repeat modules](#)” documents available via the ESS website.

If you have any queries regarding the call for ESS rotating modules please email ess@city.ac.uk or contact Rory Fitzgerald on +44 (0) 207 0404901.

A document summarising any queries received (suitably anonymised) together with the response from ESS ERIC HQ will be published on the ESS website. The document will be updated fortnightly. The final date for queries regarding Stage 1 applications is 8th April 2022.

Appendix 1 ESS rotating modules Rounds 1-11

	Topic
Round 1 (2002/03)	Immigration Citizenship, involvement and democracy
Round 2 (2004/05)	Family, work and well-being Economic morality in Europe Health and care-seeking
Round 3 (2006/07)	Personal and social well-being The timing of life
Round 4 (2008/09)	Welfare attitudes in a changing Europe Experiences and expressions of ageism
Round 5 (2010/11)	Trust in police and the courts Work, family and well-being (Repeat of R2)
Round 6 (2012/13)	Europeans' understandings and evaluations of democracy Personal and social well-being (Repeat of R3)
Round 7 (2014/15)	Social determinants of health inequalities Attitudes to immigration (Repeat of R1)
Round 8 (2016/17)	Public attitudes to climate change, energy security and energy preferences Welfare attitudes in a changing Europe: Solidarities under pressure (Repeat of R4)
Round 9 (2018/19)	Justice and fairness in Europe: Coping with growing inequalities and heterogeneities The timing of life (Repeat of R3)
Round 10 (2020/21)	Digital Social Contacts in Work and Family Life Europeans' understandings and evaluations of Democracy (Repeat of R6)
Round 11 (2021-23)	Gender in contemporary Europe: rethinking equality and the backlash Social inequalities in health and their determinants (Repeat of R7)

Appendix 2 ESS Rounds 1-10: Participating countries
(ESS ERIC Members and Observers as of 6th January 2022 are indicated with a ^)

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10
Albania						X			X	
Austria	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	(x) ^
Belgium	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Bulgaria			X	X	X	X			X	(x) ^
Croatia				X	X				X	(x) ^
Cyprus			X	X	X	X			X	(x) ^
Czechia	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Denmark	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Estonia		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Finland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
France	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Germany	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Georgia										(x)
Greece	X	X		X	X					(x)
Hungary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Iceland		X				X		X	X	(x) ^
Ireland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Israel	X			X	X	X	X	X		(x) ^
Italy	X	X				X		X	X	(x) ^
Kosovo						X				
Latvia			X	X			X		X	(x) ^
Lithuania				X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Luxembourg	X	X								
Montenegro									X	(x)
Netherlands	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
North Macedonia										(x)
Norway	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Poland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Portugal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Romania			X	X						
Russian Federation			X	X	X	X		X		
Serbia									X	(x)
Slovakia		X	X	X	X	X			X	(x) ^
Slovenia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Spain	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Sweden	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Switzerland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Turkey		X		X						
Ukraine		X	X	X	X	X				
United Kingdom	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(x) ^
Total	22	26	25	31	28	29	22	23	30	32

(x) Data not yet released

Participation for Rounds 11 and 12 has yet to be confirmed but is likely to include all current ESS Members, Observers and guests.

Appendix 3 Provisional questionnaire design timetable for Round 12: Key milestones

Month/Year	Milestone
Jan 2023	Questionnaire design process starts. First draft of module entered in template
Jan-Feb 2023	Meetings with QDTs
March 2023	Initial feedback from National Coordinators (NCs)
Apr 2023	Meetings with QDTs to update module template
April-May 2023	Agree questions for first phase of pre-testing (online testing in 2-3 countries).
June 2023	First phase of pre-testing
July 2023	Analysis of pre-testing data
July to September 2023	Meetings with QDTs; agree questions for next phases of testing (cognitive interviewing and face-to-face omnibus in selected countries)
September to December 2023	Second phase of pre-testing
January to February 2024	Analysis of pre-testing data; meetings with QDTs; agree module for 2-3 nation pilot
April to May 2024	2 nation pilot Advance translation Application of Survey Quality Predictor coding
June-Jul 2024	Analysis of pilot data
July to August 2024	Meetings with QDTs
Sept 2024	Feedback from NCs; Final revisions to modules
Early October 2024	Round 12 Source Questionnaire issued
October 2024	Translation starts
Feb 2025	Round 12 fieldwork starts

* Depending on the module and its state of readiness, the exact timing and nature of pre-testing may be subject to change.

