European Social Survey

ESS Round 8 Guidelines on Fieldwork Progress Reporting

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The ESS Round 8 Survey Specification for ESS ERIC Member, Observer and Guest Countries states that "Survey agencies should closely monitor the progress of fieldwork and should provide information to the NC to allow reporting to the CST on at least a weekly base (fortnightly if fieldwork takes longer than 10 weeks according to the planning) and provide this to the NC."(p. 33) This includes detailed information on fieldwork outcomes, response rates in different regions, among different subgroups (where possible), and by different interviewers. The survey agencies should also collect information on the average length of interviews for each interviewer and investigate interviewers who are outliers in case this indicates quality problems." (Section 10.7 of the Specification). Each country is assigned a Country Contact from the Core Scientific Team (CST) before the start of fieldwork. This Country Contact will be your contact person within the CST and is responsible for monitoring overall fieldwork progress (including preparations, fieldwork and archiving) in that country. In addition, the Country Contact will be advising the country if problems occur.

The present document provides an overview on fieldwork reporting strategies and supporting documents and intends to help National Coordinators (NCs) when monitoring progress of fieldwork in their countries[2]. The document includes recommendations about what is essential or useful to request from the survey organisation in fieldwork progress reports, and gives guidance on what NCs should look out for when reading those reports. Appendix A presents a checklist table summarising the recommendations made in the text; in appendix B, examples of simple but useful fieldwork reports are offered.

Please note that the progress monitoring activities do not affect the information NCs and survey agencies have to collect on the contact forms – the present document only refers to interim information that is useful to the NCs (and the CST) while fieldwork is in progress.

1. Fieldwork projections

NCs are requested to obtain from projections from the survey agencies regarding the target number of complete interviews to be achieved for each week of fieldwork. The projections need to be sent to the CST Country Contact assigned to the country **at least 14 days before the start of fieldwork**. The CST also provides information on the number of interviews achieved on each week of fieldwork in the previous ESS rounds to help NCs set or assess targets for this round—please see the document 'ESS R7 Fieldwork Figures and R8 Projections', which will be accessible from the ESS8 intranet (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/intranet/nc/) from May 2016 onwards. Written instructions regarding the fieldwork projections will be sent to each NC well in advance of the start of fieldwork.

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[1] The CST requests that the following citation for this document should be used: Koch, A., Fitzgerald, R., Halbherr, V. & Villar, A. (2016). *ESS Round 8 Guidelines on Fieldwork Progress Reporting.* London: ESS ERIC Headquarters.

[2] The document builds on recommendations from earlier rounds of the ESS that were also authored by Annelies Blom and Nathalie Aye Maung.

2. Essential information on fieldwork outcomes and interviewer performance

During the fieldwork period, NCs should provide their Country Contact with fortnightly or – in the case of short fieldwork periods – weekly progress reports. These reports will include, at a minimum, the general information outlined in section 2.1. However, the NC should ask the survey agency to also provide more detailed information (see sections 2.2 and 2.3) which allows for better monitoring of fieldwork activities. If problems occur, the NC and Country Contact might need this detailed information to identify the best ways to intervene.

2.1. General outcome information

All progress reports sent to the Country Contact must contain the following information:

	Number to date
Total selected sample [must match figures in signed off sampling design]	
Number of sample units where no contact has been attempted yet	
Number of achieved interviews	
Number of confirmed ineligibles[3]	
Number of non-contacts (with either household or respondent)	
Number of refusals	

The number of achieved interviews is probably the most important measure to obtain, as they can be directly compared to the fieldwork projections and help detect problems with fieldwork early on. Nevertheless, it is also important to monitor the number of refusals and non-contacts, as they give insight into possible strategies for re-issues and conversion efforts. The number of ineligibles should also be monitored; if there are no changes in the sampling frame the rate of ineligibles should remain reasonably stable across rounds.

From this information NCs or the survey agency will be able to work out the ESS response rate calculated as follows:

$$Response\ rate = \frac{number\ of\ achieved\ complete\ interviews}{number\ of\ individuals, households, addresses\ selected\ MINUS\ ineligibles}$$

If problems are encountered during fieldwork, the more information is available, the easier it is to diagnose and attempt to solve them. The NC should review and evaluate the basic information regarding fieldwork at least once a week. See table 2.1 for suggestions on how to interpret the information on general outcomes.

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[3] For details on calculating response rates and what constitutes 'ineligibles' see the Round 8 Survey Specification for ESS ERIC Member, Observer and Guest countries (Section 10.4.1). Some survey agencies use the label "ineligible" if the address on file is not traceable/reachable, if the respondent is not available throughout the fieldwork period (because they are too sick, are away, or have moved to an unknown destination), does not speak the language, or are members of a research opt-out register. These cases should be reported separately in progress reporting.

Table 2.1 Points to monitor in general outcomes reports

Measure	How to use/possible further enquiries	Possible actions (not exhaustive)
Number of achieved interviews	• Is the number of achieved interviews in line with projections? • Can (a) the required sample size be achieved and (b) can fieldwork be completed on time?	(i) Check number of interviewers currently working or starting work; (ii) Check scheduling of interviews; (iii) Recruit more interviewers, arrange additional briefings.
Number where no contact yet attempted	• If high, why is this? • Have all the addresses been allocated to interviewers? • Are there any interviewers unable to start work?	(i) Allocate remaining addresses (discuss challenges); (ii) Encourage interviewers to start work promptly; (iii) Recruit more interviewers, arrange additional briefings.
Response rate	• Is the response rate in line with projections?	Discuss early with survey agency: (i) response maximisation strategies; (ii) refusal conversion strategies; (iii) number and timing of calls to reduce noncontact rate; (iv) refer also to ESS8 Guidelines for Enhancing Response Rates and Minimising Nonresponse Bias.
Number of refusals	• Is the refusal rate in line with projections?	
Number of noncontacts (after 4 attempts)	• Is the noncontact rate in line with projections?	
Number of ineligibles	• Is this higher than projected? • Were the initial assumptions correct? • Are interviewers assessing eligibility correctly?	(i) Request definition of ineligibles used and check if outcome codes included are correct (see footnote 3); (ii) If definition is correct, discuss with survey agency possible reasons for high level of ineligibles.

2.2. Full list of outcome codes and detailed breakdowns

A detailed breakdown of sample units into the outcome codes specified in the contact forms will allow NCs to pinpoint where problems might be occurring. The full list of outcome codes will be made available to NCs in the ESS8 Interviewer Training Manual, which will be accessible from the ESS8 Intranet (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/intranet/nc/) from May 2016.

Further breakdown of outcome codes by region, interviewer ID, and demographic variables if these are available (e.g., in sampling frames of named individuals) should also be obtained. NCs should also obtain and share with their Country Contact the number of achieved interviews and the assignment sizes for each interviewer.

See table 2.2 for suggestions on how to interpret the information on detailed outcome codes.

For further information see the document 'ESS Round 8 Guidelines for Enhancing Response Rates and Minimising Nonresponse Bias'.

Table 2.2 Points to monitor in detailed outcomes reports and breakdowns

Measure	How to use/possible further enquiries	Possible actions (not exhaustive)
Breakdowns by region	This can be used to highlight those regions where allocation or response is poor, where interviewers are getting off to a slow start.	Liaise with survey agency about: (i) specific measures to address areas with poorer response; (ii) scheduling of interviews; (iii) possible re-allocation of interviewers to different areas.
Breakdowns by interviewer	This information can highlight problems with individual interviewers.	Liaise with survey agency about: (i) supervision and support strategies for interviewers with poor response; (ii) re-issue strategies for interviewers with poor response.
Breakdowns by demographic information	This can be used to check whether there are subgroups with particular response rate difficulties.	Attempts to enhance response rates should try to bring response rates to a more consistent level across subgroups, if possible. This can mean targeting efforts to groups who are disproportionally underrepresented. Liaise with the survey agency about targeted letters or incentives for these groups or changes to the interviewer payment schemes.

2.3. Interviewer performance

During fieldwork, NCs should monitor interview length and contact patterns for all interviewers as this can provide useful information on interviewer compliance with standardised interviewing and the agreed contact strategy. Loosveldt and Beullens (2013)[4] found large variation in interview length in the ESS resulting in measurement error related to the interviewer. Where outliers in interview length are found during fieldwork, reasons for particularly short or long interviews should be discussed with the interviewers. It may then be necessary to remind interviewers of correct interviewing techniques, or even to discard an interview as invalid on the basis of implausible length.

Monitoring contact patterns during fieldwork may be possible by asking the survey agency to provide interim sets of contact form data.

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[4] Loosveldt, G., & Beullens, K. (2013) 'How long will it take?' An analysis of interview length in the fifth round of the European Social Survey. *Survey Research Methods,* 7(2), 79-78.

Table 2.3 Points to monitor in interviewer performance

Measure	How to use	Possible actions (not exhaustive)
Data on fieldwork processes (e.g., time/day of calls)	Is there any evidence that certain times or days are better for obtaining interviews? Are there any unusual patterns of calling? Is there any evidence of non-compliance with calling strategy requirements?	(i) Feedback to interviewers any evidence about best times to call; (ii) investigate reasons for unusual call patterns; (iii) emphasise minimum calling requirements to interviewers.
Calling patterns by individual interviewers	Can be used to identify unusual or unproductive interviewers, as well as particularly "productive" interviewers who are using good strategies.	Liaise with survey agency about unusual calling patterns, or interviewers working well (could be used for training of others).
Data on interview duration	Can be used to identify interviewers conducting particularly short or long interviews and enables outliers to be investigated.	(i) Investigate reasons for unexpected interview lengths; (ii) remind interviewers of correct interviewing procedures; (iii) discard invalid interviews.

3. Additional information on fieldwork outcomes

3.1. Number of cases in progress

One useful item can be the number of interviews in progress. This refers to the Contact Form outcome codes:
- appointment made,
- partial interview if the interviewer expects to still complete the interview
- respondent moved within country, where a new address is looked for or has already been obtained.

This can provide a more complete picture of progress, offering insight on likely progress over the weeks of fieldwork to follow.

3.2. Number of completed interviews not received yet

A related issue which is sometimes more relevant: the number of completed interviews not yet returned to the survey agency. If interviewers do not send back realised interviews to the organisation in a timely manner, it can be difficult to ascertain how response rates are progressing.

4. Information on re-issues and back-checks

The following information might not be available on a regular basis, but the NC may find it useful to obtain it monthly during fieldwork.

4.1. Information about re-issues

NCs should have, during fieldwork, early discussions with the survey agency about whether re-issues will be needed. A re-issue occurs when an interviewer returns a non-productive sample unit to the survey agency after having finished working on it. The survey agency may then decide to re-issue this sample unit, usually to another interviewer, in an attempt to still turn a non-contact or a refusal into an interview. The survey agency should provide NCs with information about the number of addresses that can be re-issued and how these addresses are to be selected. Ideally this would be broken down into:
- number of 'soft' refusals to be re-issued (and how these are defined);
- number of 'hard' refusals to be re-issued (and how these are defined);
- number of non-contacts to be re-issued (and how these are defined).[5]

The most productive groups—in terms of increasing the response rate *per se*—are typically 'soft' refusals and non-contacts. However, reducing the number of 'hard' refusals may be more important in terms of reducing nonresponse bias, given that one might expect such respondents to be less similar to initially co-operative respondents than 'soft' refusals. Nevertheless, in some countries re-approaching 'hard' refusals will not be possible due to data protection laws.

It will be useful for NCs to monitor the re-issuing process and try to have the survey agency re-issue some of the more reluctant persons, as this may be more effective in reducing non-response bias than re-issuing 'soft' refusals only.

Please refer to the document 'Field Procedures in the European Social Survey Round 8: Enhancing Response Rates and Minimising Nonresponse Bias' for further details.

4.2. Information about back-checks

It may also be useful to monitor that back-checking procedures are in place and working according to specification. If possible, NCs should try to do some back-checks themselves. Basic information includes:
- the number of back-checks conducted and their outcome;
- the type of back-checks (on productive interviews, refusals, non-contacts, ineligibles, etc.).

5. Interim dataset of achieved interviews during fieldwork period

If it is possible to obtain one (or several) interim datasets of achieved interviews during the fieldwork period, this can be extremely valuable. This can help to detect problems, such as CAPI programming errors or PAPI printing errors that went unnoticed during pre-testing stages, problems with the data template, or syntax problems with recoding of variables (such as country-specific variables that need to be harmonised).

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[5] Some survey agencies may not define an address as a non-contact until the end of the fieldwork period, so that only refusals can be re-issued during early stages of fieldwork.

Table 5.1 Points to monitor in interim dataset of achieved interviews

Measure	How to use	Possible actions (not exhaustive)
The structure of the data can be checked	Are all the bases to questions—i.e., the number of people responding to a question—correct, taking into account the relevant filtering? Are there any low bases (not explained by filtering)?	Incorrect bases often indicate routing errors or problems with the set up of the data file.
Demographic composition of the achieved sample compared to official statistics or other benchmarks	Are the survey findings generally in line with other sources? If not, how and why?	Discuss strategies on how to target particular groups where response is low, such as incentives for respondents.
Levels of missing answers, refusals or don't know responses	Do any questions have unexpectedly high levels of missing answers, refusal or don't know?	This could indicate problematic questions where it may be worth providing interviewers with extra guidance.
Data on fieldwork processes (e.g., time/day of interview)	When are most interviews being conducted (time/day of week)?	Feed back to interviewers any evidence about best times to call.
Interview length	Is the interview length in line with assumptions? Are there are unusually short or long interviews occurring? Check "outlier" interview lengths – is this related to particular groups of respondents or particular interviewers?	If longer, check impact on schedule of fieldwork completion. If some interviewers are particularly slow or fast, have the supervisor talk to them and identify causes.
Days and time elapsed between interviews of the same interviewer	Are there any unusually short time intervals between interviews?	(i) Feedback to survey agency on individual interviewers; (ii) request back checks.

CHECK LIST AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When	Action	Section
BEFORE FIELDWORK		
January 2016	CST to release the document 'Field Procedures in the European Social Survey Round 8: Enhancing Response Rates and Minimising Nonresponse Bias'	2.2
May 2016	CST to release Interview briefing instructions (includes instructions to complete Contact Forms)	2.2
June 2016	CST to send 'Instructions for Fieldwork Projections' and 'ESS R7 Fieldwork Figures'	1
More than 14 days before fieldwork	**NC to obtain fieldwork projections from survey agency**	1
14 days before fieldwork	**Send fieldwork projections to Country Contact**	1
DURING FIELDWORK		
At least once a week	Evaluate number of achieved interviews, refusals, noncontacts and ineligibles; check the number of sample units where no contact has been attempted yet against projections. See table 2.1	2.1
If possible once a week	Check number of cases in progress and completed interviews not received yet.	3.1, 3.2
At least fortnightly throughout fieldwork	**Check detailed outcome codes and whether any specific groups of sample units or interviewers show unexpectedly low or large numbers. See table 2.2**	2.2
At least fortnightly throughout fieldwork	**Send progress report to Country Contact (see examples in appendix)**	2
At least monthly	**Check interview length and other aspects of interviewer performance. See table 2.3**	2.3
At least monthly	Check information on re-issues from survey agency.	4
At least monthly	Check information about back-checks and conduct back-checks.	4
During fieldwork, as stated in contract with survey agency	Obtain interim datasets from survey agency and check possible problems. See table 5.1	5

Note: text in bold font indicates procedures that are part of the Specifications for Participating Countries.

APPENDIX B. EXAMPLE OF PROGRESS REPORT.

EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY ROUND 8
3rd WEEKLY PROGRESS REPORT (September 30th 2016)
Report produced by: [Survey agency name or National Coordinator name]

Table 1. SUMMARY OF OUTCOME CODES

	1	2	3
Report number	1	2	3
Week in field	1st and 2nd	3rd	4th
Date data updated	14th September	21st September	28th September
Date of report	16th September	23rd September	30th September
Total sample units allocated to interviewers (cumulative)	1102	2038	2263
Sample units not yet allocated to interviewers	1766	830	605
Total selected sample size	2868	2868	2868
Status of sample units allocated to interviewers			
No contact attempted yet	150	234	199
Achieved complete interviews	314	745	895
Incomplete interviews	3	3	3
Refusals	153	292	365
Non-contacts (with either household or respondent)	260	382	370
Ineligibles	39	93	113
Appointments pending	84	109	75
Cases no longer being pursued (unavailable, language barrier, address not traceable, etc.)	99	180	243
Response rate (%)	11.1%	26.8%	32.5%

Table 2. USE OF OUTCOME CODES TO COMPUTE RESPONSE RATES (RR)

RR formula
$$\frac{\text{Nº of completed interviews}}{\text{Total selected sample size} - \text{ineligibles}} * 100 = RR$$

Week 2
$$\frac{314}{(2868 - 39) = 2829} * 100 = 11.1\%$$

Week 3
$$\frac{745}{(2868 - 93) = 2775} * 100 = 26.8\%$$

Week 4
$$\frac{895}{(2868 - 113) = 2755} * 100 = 32.5\%$$

Table 3. COMPARISON OF THE WEEKLY TARGET-SCHEDULE AND RESULTS:

Week	Expected cumulative sample units allocated to interviewers	Actual cumulative sample units allocated to interviewers	Diff.	Expected completed interviews	Actual completed interviews	Diff.	Expected cumulative completed interviews	Actual cumulative completed interviews	Diff.
1	369	1102	+320	96			96		
2	782			143	314	+75	239	314	+75
3	1322	2038	+716	202	431	+229	441	745	+304
4	1862	2263	+401	217	150	−67	658	895	+237
5	2103			217			875		
6	2459			236			1111		
7	2671			225			1336		
8	2774			160			1496		
9	2868			147			1643		
10	2868			127			1770		
11	2868			87			1857		
12	2868			87			1944		
13	2868			52			1996		
14	2868			63			2059		
15	2868			63			2122		

COMMENTS ON DATA COLLECTION PROGRESS

Field Report for Weeks 1 and 2 (1st September to 14th September).

Fieldwork started on September 1st. 314 interviews have been completed to date. During these two weeks, 43 out of 72 interviewers have been in the field. Fieldwork has started in all regions but X, Y, and Z. The remaining 29 interviewers, which have been assigned the sample units of these regions, start will work on September 17th, after all the individual letters have been sent.

Supervision of interviewers and case incidents (refusals, non contacts, etc…) has also started. The first interview of each interviewer is being supervised to detect errors or systematic problems as early as possible and to correct them from the beginning. No problems were detected.

All the field rates (completed interviews, refusals, ineligibles, etc.) are in acceptable levels.

Field Report for Week 3 (15th to 21st September).

745 interviews have been completed to date. During this week, all interviewers have been in the field. Fieldwork has started in all provinces except in four provinces (X, Y, Z, and V), because these regions have small samples and interviewers were working in regions with large samples.

Supervision of interviewers and case incidents (refusals, non contacts, etc…) continued. Also, the first interim dataset was received and time data analysed. Problems were found with one interviewer who had a longer average completion time (above 2 hours); she has been reminded of appropriate interviewer behaviour when the respondent digresses from interview content. Another interviewer seemed to be getting higher refusal rates than normal (above 50%) so he was contacted by the supervisor to discuss how to approach the household and the opening script.

All the field rates (completed interviews, refusals, ineligibles, etc.) are in acceptable levels.

Field Report for Week 4 (22nd to 28th September).

895 interviews have been completed to date. Fieldwork has started in all regions. 50 cases have been re-issued to different interviewers: 20 were refusals, 23 were noncontacts, 2 were unavailable and 5 were cases possibly wrongly classified as non-traceable. Progress this week was slower than projected (150 interviews as compared to the 217 projected) but it might be related to the long holiday weekend and to the re-issued cases being "slower"; overall progress is still ahead of projections.

All the field rates (completed interviews, refusals, ineligibles, etc.) are in acceptable levels.