Visibility, accessibility and reachability of ESS data at policy levels – A scoping study

Final Report

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1   Introduction

The European Social Survey (ESS) is an international, comparative survey of social and political values and attitudes, which was launched in 2002. In June-November 2022 they released data from the Round 10 survey, are currently running Round 11 (2022/23), and are preparing for the Round 12 (2024/25) survey. The survey measures "change (and stability) in the living conditions, social structure, public opinion and attitude" in more than thirty nations. As a research infrastructure ESS "promotes the highest scientific standards in cross-national comparative research in the social sciences, facilitates training in the effective use of ESS data and ensures 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" . [1]

In 2013, ESS was given the legal status of a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) and in 2016 it was named the landmark of the European Strategy Forum of Research Infrastructures (ESFRI). The ESS ERIC currently has 16 member countries and one observer country. In total, 32 countries (including 'guest' countries) participated in the data collection of the Round 10 survey (though data is only available from 31). Data collection until Round 10 was performed every two years through face-to-face interviews with cross-sectional samples of respondents. Due to the pandemic, some Round 10 countries were allowed to field the questionnaire using self-completion methods for the first time. The ESS data is available free of charge for non-commercial use and can be downloaded from the ESS Data Portal.

This scoping study was conducted for the ESS ERIC in the frame of the Horizon2020 funded ESS-SUSTAIN-2 project from December 2022 until July 2023. It explores in-depth the policy impact derived from the usage of the ESS data with particular attention to European and international level institutions and distilled lessons learned for designing more effective ESS interactions with policy audiences in the future. In other words, the study objective was to **analyse the uptake and usage patterns of ESS data for policy purposes and outline areas, means and channels how this usage could be improved**. The study built on the conceptual and empirical findings from different previous studies[2], but looked beyond examples of policy impact by also exploring in-depth rationales behind the use of the ESS data in policy making. In particular it shows how the use of the ESS data creates (or has a potential to create) impact at different points in a policy cycle.

2   Methodological approach

The study was structured around four tasks: kick-off phase, desk research of relevant documents and data on the impact of ESS, interviews with current and potential users of ESS data, and synthesis and reporting.

The EFIS Centre study team met with the ESS ERIC team for a virtual kick-off meeting on 8 December 2022. During the meeting the objectives of the study and client expectations were discussed. The kick-off participants also revisited the proposed study methodology, reviewed the workplan and the planned timeline of activities, and agreed on the communication during the project and the key elements of project management.

The desk research focused on reviewing relevant studies, reports and quantitative evidence related to policy uptake of the ESS data. The review was predominantly based on the functionalities offered by Overton.io – the world's largest searchable index of policy documents, guidelines, think tank publications and working papers. It collects data from 188 countries and over a thousand sources worldwide with more being added all the time, thus covering more than 9 million policy documents where references can be traced to specific concepts, terms, authors and keywords. The database allows to filter organisations that most frequently cite ESS data, as well as related document types, source countries,

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years, funders and other factors[3]. The study's desk research also included screening the abstracts of the documents and a process of forward and backward reference check to form a more fully-fledged view on the scale and nature of the ESS data uptake in policy documents. Outcomes from exploring this database were summarised in charts, graphs and tables to characterise the hotspots of the ESS data uptake. It is important to note from the methodological perspective that Overton.io database is compiled using tailored machine learning algorithms that web scrape the content of published policy documents from an approved list of sources. As some policy documents are published by more than one source, a thorough data cleaning process was undertaken using automated and manual cross-checks to ensure that the listed documents are unique. Overall, around 10% of the total retrieved documents were found to be duplications. The statistical data presented in this report cover the cleaned list of retrieved documents that cite ESS. As Overton.io also includes documents in various languages, further duplications of documents are not excluded, but the number of such duplications is regarded as negligible. In sum, as Overton.io database is built automatically using various machine learning algorithms that parse the websites of approved list of sources, the results derived from this database should be regarded as an illustration of the trends of ESS data uptake by various organisations, countries, and policy thematic areas, rather than a proof of the absolute values of references to ESS data in policy documents.

The overview of the hotspots of ESS data use prepared during the desk research was the initial input into the selection of potential interviewees for the study. In addition, considerations were made about the inclusion of non-users or potential users. As such, the composition of a long-list of potential interviews was done through four iterations:

1. First, the study team explored the list of author names most frequently associated with the policy documents citing ESS data as shown in the Overton.io database. Individuals were considered as frequent users of the ESS data if they were authors in six or more policy documents that reference ESS data.

2. The second round of document screening from the Overton.io database focused on identifying further names, this time including also more occasional users of the ESS data. Individuals were considered as occasional users of the ESS data if they were authors in five or less policy documents that reference ESS data.

3. As one of the angles of the study was to understand the barriers in using ESS data, which may result in some individuals intentionally not using data, the study team searched for names of potential occasional users or current non-users of ESS data. This was done by matching policy fields with the key topics of ESS. The emphasis was placed on such organisations as the European Commission with its Directorates-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), Health and Food Safety (SANTE), Justice and Consumers (JUST).

4. Finally, a 'snowball method' was used encouraging the contacted individuals to recommend further existing or potential users of ESS data.

A thorough cross-check of the authors' organisational affiliations and fields of expertise allowed the drafting of a long-list of 51 candidates for interviews. The thematic keywords from Overton.io that best describe the thematic focus areas of these individuals are presented in Figure 1.

The long-list of interviewees was subsequently narrowed down to a short-list of 20 interviewees. In total, 13 interviews (with 15 individuals) were carried out with selected stakeholders and reaching a level of saturation in the derived qualitative information. The interviewed individuals are or have been involved in various policy-related activities from across the policy cycle, such as coordinating research studies feeding into the policy making process, designing specified studies with policymakers as the targeted end users, deciding on the policy directions within the international organisations as well as advising policymakers at different levels, including national governments, trade unions, employers' associations, European Commission, European Parliament, WHO, OECD. The breadth of the interviewee involvement in various stages of the policy cycle allowed the interviews to delve a bit more into how data is and/or can be applied in advancing policy making. The work of the interviewed stakeholders covered the following themes:

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[3] For more detailed information on Overton.io data please see: https://help.overton.io/article-categories/about-the-data/

happiness and well-being; loneliness and social inclusion; health economics and policies; employment and working conditions; social capital and trust; productivity and trust; trust and voting; inequalities; health inequalities; employment conditions and inequalities; inequality of opportunities; vulnerable groups and fairness; skills for green and digital transition; economic and financial resilience.

Figure 1: Thematic keywords describing selected potential interviewees

Source: WordItOut based on Overton.io data

The interviews enabled the collection of views from representatives of different stakeholder groups in terms of governance levels, different policy sectors, geographic coverage (incl. representatives from the USA, New Zealand, United Kingdom and several EU countries) and gender (of the 15 people who joined the interviews, six were women). The interviews focused on gathering insights from users of ESS data in policy making networks and potential users (current non-users that may be interested in the uptake of ESS data). They addressed questions on the purposes of using the data, barriers and limitations and ways in which they use the data. An interview guide is available in the annex to this report.

The final task of the study covered synthesis of the study findings and reflection on the existing pathways to strengthening ESS policy impact. This task built on the results from the desk research and interviews to understand the visibility, accessibility and reachability of ESS data to policy users. The discourse analysis of interview notes and synthesis of findings allowed the elaboration of five concrete causal mechanisms – impact pathways - of ESS policy impact. A comprehensive mapping of ESS impact pathways helps not only to appraise the policy impacts of ESS ERIC but also to meaningfully support decision-makers in the upgrade of the ESS questionnaire. Thus, there is an inherent formative value.

In addition to the tasks described about, the methodology of the study and the preliminary findings were presented to the ESS ERIC General Assembly during the Impact showcase workshop which took place in Brussels on 29th March 2023. The final results of the study were also presented virtually during the ESS-SUSTAIN2 Technical Review meeting on 16th June 2023.

3   Key findings

3.1   Overview of ESS data use in policy making

3.1.1   Setting the scene

The ESS potential for policy impact is substantial. Assessing the role of Research Infrastructures (RIs) in triggering various socio-economic impacts, the Horizon 2020 funded project '*Charting Impact Pathways of Investment in Research Infrastructures*' (RI-PATHS) concluded that **Social Science RIs relatively to other scientific domains showcase more significant effects on policy formulation**. The research project showcased that most frequent avenues of RI policy impact include direct effects on policy deliberation, standards, regulations, and institutions, e.g. contribution to evidence-based policy making through data and expert advice, as well as influence on strategies, new standards, regulatory frameworks and data management policies. Other avenues towards policy-related impacts cover aspects like promotion of international political and cultural understanding, role in building international partnerships to address common problems, effects from development and uptake of ethical codes of conduct in research and guidelines for responsible research and innovation[4].

The two ESS impact studies completed in 2017 and 2022 also looked in more detail into the non-academic impact areas of the research infrastructure. These two studies recognised the non-linear pathways of how the use of ESS data can feed public debate, political and policy deliberations. **Policy makers can be direct users of ESS data, can take up academic analysis using ESS data or can be influenced by the translation of ESS data through various intermediary organisations**, such as media, social media, individual policy influencers. The case study examples included in the latest ESS impact study published in 2022 point out that policy uptake of the data is realised through:

- **General intelligence and insight** for NGOs or government ministries, agencies or advisory bodies

- **Agenda setting by using ESS data** to highlight a particular problem or challenge, triggering various types of policy action

- **Influence on public debate** or **highlighting certain issues to the general public** through presentation of ESS data or ESS-based findings in the news media

- **Monitoring**, i.e. using ESS data as indicators to track certain aspects of societal progress, e.g. to help assess whether certain policies are achieving the desired outcomes[5].

3.1.2   Findings from the analysis of Overton.io data

For a more quantitative appraisal of the possible uptake of ESS data in policy making, the study team employed the functionalities of the Overton.io database. As of August 2023, references to the European Social Survey were found in 3,183 policy documents stemming from 380 sources[6]. The database shows that governments (45% of documents) and think tanks (38% of documents) are among the most frequent citers of ESS data, followed by international governmental organisations (IGOs) (16% of documents). Figure 2 shows the overview of the types of policy sources citing ESS data. While a more detailed view on the types of organisations citing ESS data is hampered by the lack of policy source specifications in Overton.io database (only 23% of policy documents have specified organisational sub-type), Figure 3 provides some further detail on the available data. From this partial data the most frequent organisations citing ESS

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[4] Griniece, E., et.al. (2020) Guidebook for socio-economic impact assessment of research infrastructures, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3950043 and ri-paths-tool.eu

[5] Technopolis Group (2022) SUSTAIN-2: Impact study of the European Social Survey

[6] See the methodological disclaimer included in section 2

data are government agencies[7], university affiliated think tanks, international development banks, as well as international and national healthcare agencies. Also other types of organisations use ESS data, but perhaps more sporadically (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Types of policy sources citing ESS data
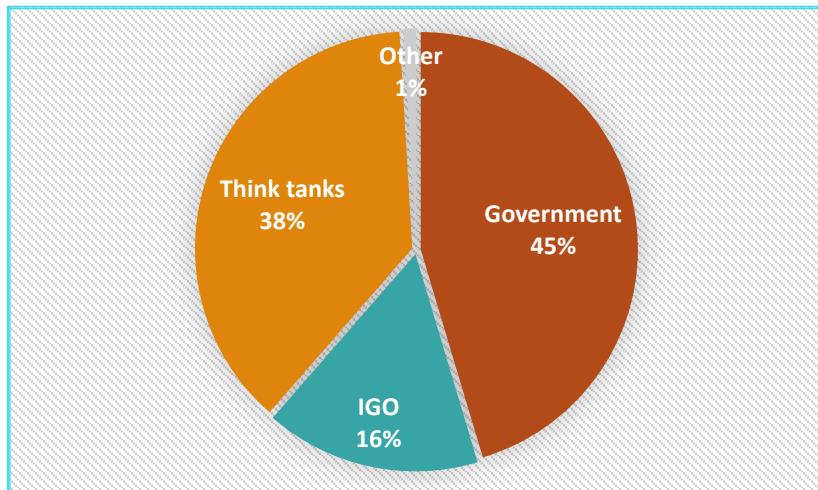
Source: Authors based on Overton.io data

Figure 3: Types of sub-sources citing ESS data

| Organisation type	Organisation sub-type	Count of documents	Percentage
Government	Agency	222	7.0%
Government	Healthcare agency	48	1.5%
Government	Legislative research	33	1.0%
Government	Bank	26	0.8%
Government	Technology assessment	11	0.3%
Government	Academy	8	0.3%
Government	City	7	0.2%
Government	Food and drug safety	4	0.1%
Government	Legislation	4	0.1%
Government	Auditor	3	0.1%
Government	Transcripts	2	0.1%
Government	Research centre	1	0.0%
Government	*Unspecified*	*1075*	*33.8%*
IGO	Development bank	77	2.4%
IGO	Healthcare agency	62	1.9%
IGO	Research centre	1	0.0%
IGO	*Unspecified*	*370*	*11.6%*
Think tank	University affiliated	112	3.5%
Think tank	Research centre	33	1.0%
Think tank	Industry association	21	0.7%
Think tank	Consultancy	6	0.2%
Think tank	*Unspecified*	*1026*	*32.2%*
Other	Aggregator	30	0.9%
TOTAL	Industry association	3183	100%

Source: Authors based on Overton.io data

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[7] No strict definition of what constitutes 'government agencies' was found in the Overton.io data descriptions. However, screening of files indicates that the term covers ministries (or directorates in case of EU and OECD) and executive agencies subordinated to ministries.
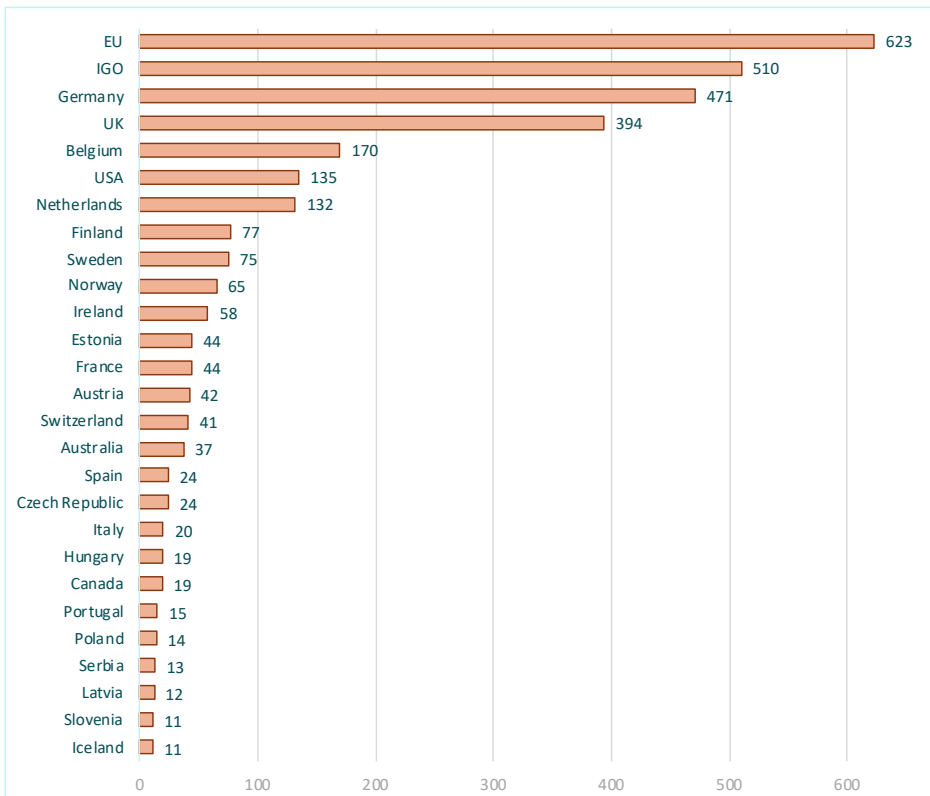
There is a wide geographical spread of organisations that cite ESS data. In total, citations of ESS data were identified in reports of organisations from 57 countries worldwide (see Figure 4). The vast majority of these policy documents are related to the European Union institutions (623) and international governmental organisations (510). From the national sources, organisations from Germany, UK, Belgium, USA and the Netherlands show the most active uptake of ESS data in policy documents (see Figure 5).

Figure 4: Geographical distribution of countries where policy sources are citing ESS data
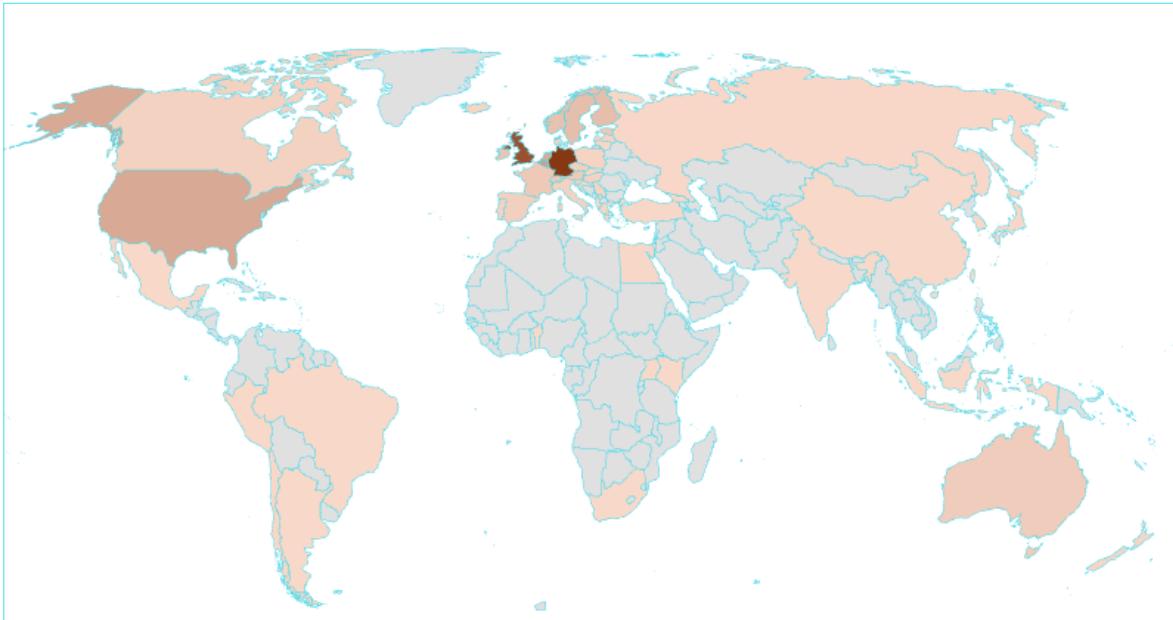
Source: Authors based on Overton.io data

Figure 5: List of countries of organisations citing ESS data in policy documents

Country	Value
EU	623
IGO	510
Germany	471
UK	394
Belgium	170
USA	135
Netherlands	132
Finland	77
Sweden	75
Norway	65
Ireland	58
Estonia	44
France	44
Austria	42
Switzerland	41
Australia	37
Spain	24
Czech Republic	24
Italy	20
Hungary	19
Canada	19
Portugal	15
Poland	14
Serbia	13
Latvia	12
Slovenia	11
Iceland	11

Source: Authors based on Overton.io data

Figure 6 lists the organisations which publications include references to ESS data in order of frequency. The EU Publication Office accounts for the most numerous of such policy documents. A more granular view on the European institutions behind this category indicates that the most active uptake of ESS data among the European Commission services is by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (10% of all sources under the category EU Publication Office). It is followed by Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (9.5%), Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (6.5%), Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union (4%), Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (3%) and Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Planning (2%). Among other European Commission services, the Joint Research Centre, Eurofound and Eurostat are flagged as the most active users of ESS data at European level. Other frequent users include organisations like European Institute for Gender Equality, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Eurostat, European University Institute and the European Central Bank.

Figure 6: Organisations mostly frequently citing ESS data as per count of policy documents

Organisation	Count	Organisation	Count	Organisation	Count
EU Publications Office	386	Irish Economic and Social Research Institute	28	European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research	14
IZA Institute of Labor Economics	220	Norwegian Fafo Research Foundation	28	Swedish Parliament	14
OECD	211	European Economic and Social Committee	26	Peace Research Institute Oslo	13
Joint Research Centre	84	Nordic Council	24	Federal Planning Bureau	13
Netherlands Institute for Social Research	78	Government of Estonia	24	Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies	12
The UK Government	73	Government of the Czech Republic	23	Dutch Central Government	12
Eurofound	66	RAND Corporation	22	ESFRI	12
Government of Flanders	66	European Parliamentary Research Service	21	Government of Latvia	12
World Health Organization	64	UNESCO	20	Bank of Italy	12
World Bank	61	European Trade Union Institute	19	UNDP	12
German Institute for Economic Research (DIW)	58	New Economics Foundation	18	Institute for Public Policy Research	12

Government of Finland	57	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung	18	Bertelsmann foundation	11
Ifo Institute for Economic Research	50	UK Parliament Select Committee Publications	16	Government of Serbia	11
US National Bureau of Economic Research	48	Federal Government of Germany	16	Demos - UK	11
Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER)	44	UN Economic Commission for Europe	16	United Nations CEPAL	11
Government of Switzerland	39	CEPS	15	Government of Poland	11
blogs.lse.ac.uk	32	Pew Research	15	International Organization for Migration	11
Swedish Government Offices	29	CEU Centre for Policy Studies	14	Government of Austria	11
Analysis & Policy Observatory	29	Robert Koch Institute	14	Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion	11

Source: Authors based on Overton.io data

The Overton.io database also allows to gather a more aggregated view on the most frequent policy-related topics that the sources citing ESS data include. This information is based on the results of an automated keyword analysis excluding the results of specific terms and concepts not explicitly linked to certain policy areas. As Figure 7 illustrates, most of the policy sources deal with labour economics covering such aspects as employment, unemployment, economic inequality. Other major thematic areas include migration, research, education, inclusion, quality of life, social capital, well-being and the welfare state.

3.1.1   Findings from the interviews

The interviewees frequently complemented the ESS team on the excellent work done. Overall, the **ESS data is perceived to be replicable and trustable**. It is regarded as a well-documented dataset, designed by people who actually use the data, thus significantly increasing its quality. The topic of Human Values was specifically mentioned in terms of the produced data. The measure of trust was given as a good example comparing ESS with other surveys, i.e. while other surveys are asking binary questions, the introduction of distributional questions with proper scales (1-10) allows capturing more nuanced insights.

On a more technical note, **the portal interface is considered to be user-friendly and simple to navigate** as one can access, download and analyse data very easily with the possibility to dig into various background information. Methodologically, ESS has a good online analytical tool and well-documented metadata with in-depth documentation. **The methodological section** (i.e. response rates, sample, methods) **is transparent and helps in understanding how the data was collected.** For each single country and module, the user can always know what happened during the sampling and other phases.

Figure 7: Most frequent policy topics of documents citing ESS data

Source: Authors based on Overton.io data

Note: Each policy document may have multiple associated policy topics. This graphic is a visual representation of the frequencies of various topics. Neither total values nor shares is a very accurate depiction of this information. Some documents had just one policy topic, others more than six. Moreover, some categories are merged to enable a cleaner representation of the information in a graph.

Also, the methodology used for some questions (e.g. scales from 1-10), the accessibility of data and the analytic weights included in each round were mentioned by the interviewees as good practices. More experienced data users commented that the protocols for collecting data seem to be very good as the ESS manages to successfully provide information from random samples. Another valuable aspect that was mentioned concerned the speed with which ESS adds new data and combines the data sets that as soon as data is ready as users find it convenient to have all data updated in one place.

The ESS data is being used in multiple ways and formats depending on the needs of the users. They **use both aggregated and raw data, and both core and modular data**. Some users start from the reports to see what kind of data is available and then go further into the portal to analyse raw data. The digested data is also being used when users do not have sufficient time or sufficient expertise to dig into and analyse the raw data themselves; or if some aspects of the data are being covered by other sources and the ESS data is used to complement it or put the analysis in a specific contextual setting. More frequent users report using blocks of data from the core module (e.g. on well-being, for which the two-year reporting period is considered sufficient).

Several interviewees mentioned that they use **ESS data to complement other data and /or cross-check the work** they do. For designing their own surveys, several interviewees mentioned that it is useful to check if the topic or the phenomenon was measured before. In these cases, looking at the ESS and its specific questions can be of use. For example, the voting topic information about the list of parties used in the ESS questionnaire was considered beneficial.

On the migration topic, the users got inspired by a question about the second or new waves of immigration as used in the ESS (i.e. ESS round 7, D17b Compared to people like yourself who were born in [country], how do you think the government treats those who have recently come to live here from other countries?). On the topic of loneliness and trust, one interviewee commended that it was useful to understand how to better ask a question on 'trust' and look into its longitudinal patterns in order to see that something is very stable. The ESS is addressing this topic in every round.

Another way of using the ESS is to look at the results of the surveys that user organisations are running and **compare the results with the ESS for validity reasons**. For example, a team of one of the interviewees was designing a survey on loneliness. They had a combination of specific questions and more general questions, like the one on generalised trust. When the results came out, they compared those with the ESS data, primarily to see if they were finding the same patterns on the topic which should be stable (like 'trust'). Another example was mentioned in relation to the topic on income, i.e. how this question was asked in the ESS and which data was used.

On some topics **ESS data serves as a solid base to contextualise studies**. For example, on the topic of (un)employment, Eurostat is considered to be more relevant data source. ESS data, however, serves to contextualise studies. For instance, in some studies that served as a basis for the development of the EU Resilience Dashboards, ESS data was used to contextualise different resilience characteristics. Even though interviewees highlighted the reliability of the ESS data, longitudinal data was not enough, and thus the missing blocks were covered with data from Eurostat, EU-SILC and the EQLS from Eurofound.

Some interviewees, when designing their own surveys, used **ESS as a reference standard for survey design**. They look at it for guidance on the design of questions (i.e. what is the best way to ask certain questions), understanding the non-response rate, translation of questions, etc. For example, the quality of ESS is considered higher compared to the questions included in Eurobarometer, and one user organisation looking into the topic of loneliness compared the responses from the ESS and Eurobarometer to conclude if answer distribution was roughly the same.

When speaking with the current and – more importantly – potential users it was evident that **different surveys and data sources are being used in combination or instead of the ESS**. Quality, coverage and frequency of some of the sources mentioned above were commented as not being at the same quality level. The ESS produces data on trust very often, while, for instance, the World Value Survey is perceived to be very irregular in terms of time and quality. The ESS provides a user-friendly interface with easy-to-process data. This was especially mentioned in comparison to other sources (which the interviewees chose not to disclose) where the users need to build complete datasets, thus making it a time-consuming exercise. Figure 8 presents a summary of these sources.

Figure 8: Surveys and data sources used by the interviewees in addition / instead of ESS

Survey / data source	Observations from interviewees
WVS – The World Values Study https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp	• It contains larger sample of countries but it is irregular on some topics in terms of time and quality.
Gallup World Poll https://www.gallup.com/178667/gallup-world-poll-work.aspx	• It has a better ESS country coverage.
EU-SILC – EU statistics on income and living conditions (by Eurostat)	• A good survey with a good country coverage. • It has good coverage in terms of income data but lacks some angles (attitudes) which are covered by the ESS.

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-statistics-on-income-and-living-conditions	• Often useful in combination with the ESS to complement some variables not included in one or another survey. • Surveys are good but when there are panels it is even better. SILC is a panel dataset. Panel questions are fixed and they are repeated in each wave. • It is possible to add questions into the ad-hoc modules but only panel questions are repeated. The IDs of ad-hoc respondents cannot be matched with the responses of these people to the panel questions of the previous or the next wave. This makes the ad-hoc module a one-off survey and perhaps not so useful. • Probably the standard survey used by many in the European Commission. Many DGs want to put their ad-hoc questions and there is a long internal queue (now the questions are being validated to be used in 2026).
EHIS – European health interview survey (by Eurostat) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-health-interview-survey	• Mentioned by one interviewee but without any specific observations.
EU LBS – European labour force survey (by Eurostat) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-labour-force-survey	• Mentioned by several interviewee but without any specific observations.
EQLS – The European Quality of Life Surveys (by Eurofound) https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys	• Mentioned by several interviewees but without any specific observations.
EWCS – European Working Conditions Survey (by Eurofound) https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-working-conditions-surveys-ewcs	• Mentioned by several interviewees but without any specific observations.
Eurobarometer – Public opinion in the European Union https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home	• No raw data are available. • Perceived as not always having the highest quality (sampling, response issues, etc.). • Has some similar questions with the ESS but the data is not well documented. • For cross-country comparison the ESS is perceived to be better than Eurobarometer.
PSID – The Panel Study on Income Dynamics (by the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, USA) https://psidonline.isr.umich.edu	• Mentioned by one interviewee but without any specific observations.

GSS – General Social Survey (Canada) https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/4d2b890f-2fa4-4ebf-9f9c-1b2570b42e5f	• Mentioned by one interviewee but without any specific observations.
GSS – General Social Survey (New Zealand) https://datainfoplus.stats.govt.nz/Item/nz.govt.stats/2ed50ad6-8ab8-47df-883d-210a51b50043	• Mentioned by one interviewee but without any specific observations.
National statistics	• When it comes to data on wellbeing, some national statistic offices do not have data on some dimensions or data collection is lagging (e.g. social capital and civic engagement). In that case ESS data is useful. • National statistics do not touch on attitudes and perceptions, whereas the ESS does.

Source: Authors based on the interview notes

When deciding on which sources of data and information to use for their work, interviewees mentioned several examples. In one case, the use of ESS data was due to the modules on ageing and health, which were essential for the reports the stakeholders were preparing. Another interviewee mentioned two main concrete modules – on Fairness (ESS9) and Climate Change (ESS8) –, whereas other interviewees exploited several rounds, e.g. inequality, intergenerational mobility, preferences for redistribution. Indicators for society were mentioned as interesting data, where one consulted for this study user praised ESS for asking questions that interviewee themselves has not even considered. To that particular individual it was very interesting, inspiring and offered a learning opportunity, but for some other topics the ESS data might not be so useful. For example, in the theme of happiness of immigrants (that some of the interviewee worked on), life evaluation is assessed on very local characteristics of the destination country, which the ESS does not offer. Also, anything related to labour or general demographics are not something the ESS is associated with.

Despite many positive comments, the **users highlighted several limitations or barriers in the ESS uptake**:

- In general, one of the main factors for using ESS data is the country coverage as the available data allowed interviewed stakeholders to do a cross-country analysis, which is also part of the European policymakers' needs. Although some interviewees highlighted the good and large country coverage of the ESS that provides comparable evidence across European countries, others were less positive about the coverage mentioning that although the ESS was designed for EU28, not all countries are covered. On some topics this can be overcome by including data generated by the interviewees themselves. This, however, is not a common practice. In another example, ESS data was fine for a contextualising exercise but was then no longer kept as part of the final set of data used for the studies/tools developed. Some interviewees suggested even moving beyond the focus on the European countries. This would attract more attention to the survey but of course it will be a much larger and more expensive exercise, not to mention potential difficulties in collecting data in low-income countries (an issue that even the OECD is facing).
- On a more technical note, one limitation that was mentioned regarded the process of requesting a topic module for the survey. While open to include new modules, the process could be eased. The interviewee unfortunately did not specify any part of the process.

- The ESS could perform better in terms of the regularity of data collection. It was perceived by some interviewees that topics change too often and that sometimes it would be better to measure change from year to year and not wait long periods before bringing back a topic in the questionnaire.
- Some topics are perceived to be insufficiently covered. For example, the topic of health is quite important, including the attitudes and perceptions towards health institutions and public sector. The topic is a determinant for well-being, the quality of health, and quality of health care services. Attitudes and perceptions change quite quickly, and thus there is a comment on the need to include this kind of themes regularly and systematically. If the data on health are available in each module, interviewees (to whom this topic is important) commented that they would have used data more frequently and widely. Instead, data was used for a limited time and for specific reports instead.
- On some occasions, linked to the specificities of the field and purposes of the analysis being performed by ESS users, the data is perceived as not sufficiently objective. It is understood that the ESS focuses on perceptions and attitudes, but this could be a limiting factor as answers could depend on the mood of the people. Thus, inclusions of some comparable objective questions could be of benefit.
- The comparability of data between countries based on perceptions was also mentioned as a potential limitation, since much depends on how questions are translated. There is a strong perception that significant work takes place at Eurostat to make data comparable. Improved comparability of data would make people use the ESS resources more as users need the re-assurance of validity of data in comparative studies.
- Also, linked to the survey design, a suggestion was made to consider including some questions allowing to collect "relative data" (i.e. you compared to others). For instance, how wealthy an individual perceives themselves to be in comparison to the wealth of others.
- In several cases the interviewees commented that in general the studies developed by the ESS are not necessarily aligned with the policy agenda. Although a limitation if there is a need to exclusively view the ESS data as input into the policymaking process, the data does have a broader role and use (academic, etc.). One way to address this is to include data which could be of interest from the policy point of view while exclude data which is less relevant. It is understood, however, that there are difficulties linked to such redesign of the questionnaire.
- Also, regarding policymaking, some interviewees commented that the ESS is viewed as a very general survey when it comes to the specific topics needed to be addressed and which are better covered by other tools. In some cases, the ESS is not often referred to in the policy cycle as data is used in previous stages as a way to check the robustness of studies with reliable information (reasonably sound from a methodological point of view).
- Finally, there is a strong perception that the ESS could benefit from communicating better and more actively what they do and which topics they cover.

3.2 Pathways to impact

European Social Survey data has directly and indirectly contributed to the policy process in the European context. Through exploration of the uptake and use of specific modules of the ESS survey (climate change, justice, democracy, welfare, immigration, etc.), this section investigates the similarities and differences of data use in various thematic policy areas. The conducted study helps to expand insights on the role and importance of the direct and more indirect (reports with already processed data by intermediaries and academia) use of ESS data for policy purposes. The study team have identified **five different pathways that indicate how the use of ESS data and its integration in studies have paved the way to policy impact**. While the use of ESS data has been part of many policy-related studies, it should be noted that it is impossible to disaggregate whether ESS data has played a central role in the policy pathways.

Instead of focusing on generic impacts on policy, this study analyses **the contribution of ESS data to create impact in different phases of the policy cycle**. The policy cycle allows to understand recurrent patterns and procedures ultimately leading to the creation of public policies[8]. Howlett and Ramesh's policy cycle model[9] identifies five stages: agenda setting, policy formulation, adoption (or decision-making), implementation and evaluation. Linked to the policymaking process, policy consultations can also increase the information available to governments for decision-making. In particular, the availability of evidence-based studies and development of concrete analytical tools can provide valuable insights to the way policies are designed. Moreover, the capacity to provide policy advice enriched by evidence-based analysis is dependent, among other factors, on the availability of reliable socioeconomic data[10].

The developed pathways can be aligned up to a certain extent to the policy cycle: agenda setting, policy formulation, policy decision-making, implementation, evaluation, and feedback. The five identified ESS policy impact pathways are:

- Pathway 1: Contributing to agenda setting
- Pathway 2: Informing the policy design
- Pathway 3: Providing tools to support the policymaking process
- Pathway 4: Uptake of findings in policy formulation
- Pathway 5: Improving policy monitoring and evaluation.

[8] Savard, J.-F. with the collaboration of R. Banville (2012). "Policy Cycles," in L. Côté and J.-F. Savard (eds.), Encyclopedic Dictionary of Public Administration, [online], www.dictionnaire.enap.ca

[9] Howlett, M. & Ramesh, M. (2003). Studying public policy: Policy cycles and pol- icy subsystems. Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press Canada

[10] Head, B. (2015) Policy Analysis: Evidence Based Policy-Making, in James D. Wright (Ed.) International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition), Elsevier, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.75030-6

Figure 9: The ESS policy impact pathways
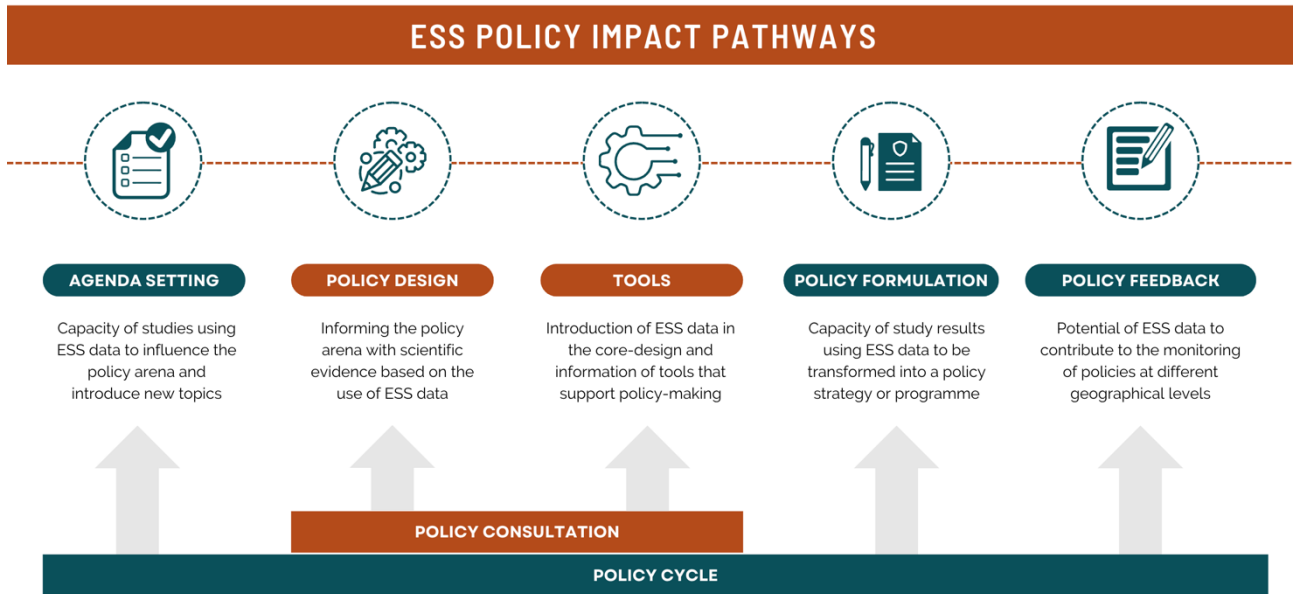
Source: Authors

3.2.1   Pathway towards contributing to agenda setting

'Agenda setting' is considered an essential step in the policy cycle. It refers to the moment at which different topics and challenges are introduced on the public agenda drawing the attention of policy actors and initiating a debate for potential solutions. This **pathway focuses on the capacity of studies using ESS data to influence the policy debate** and introduce the topics for discussion both at national and international level. The use of ESS data has driven the agenda setting in multiple thematic areas. Typically, studies are discussed at policy conferences, summits or through participation of the study authors in thematic committees.

Figure 10: Pathway 1: Contributing to agenda setting
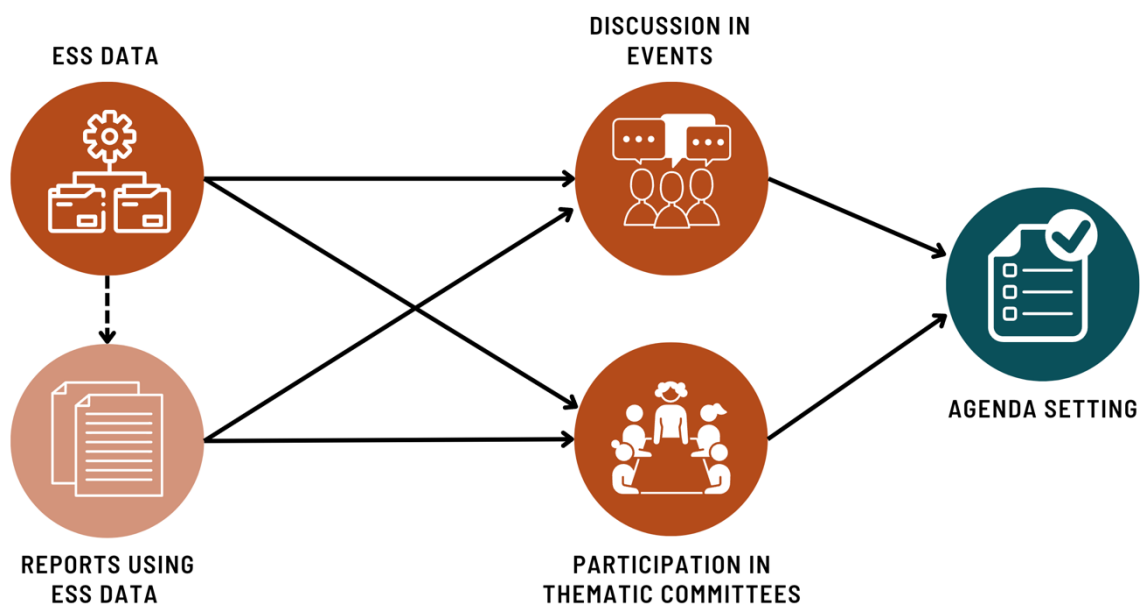
Source: Authors

ESS data is influencing the policy agenda across different international organisations – not only the European Union institutions, but also the OECD, the World Health Organisation, etc. – as well as reaching national policymaking levels. This is the case on topics such as well-being or happiness, that includes different reports using ESS data and presentations at international conferences influencing the national agendas (e.g. Nordic countries) to the level that policy actions on these topics are now quite prominent, including launch of dedicated centres of studies on these topics.

Box 1: Setting agenda on social rights

In 2017, the European Union as part of its strategy set up the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), including 20 principles that guide policy action. There are multiple studies that are contributing and influencing different thematic policy areas aligned with the topics of social rights, such as employment, fairness or happiness. The interviews showcased multiple examples of reports using ESS data that feature strongly as evidence basis in policy debates exhibiting a notable influence on the agenda setting process.

'*Employment and Social Developments in Europe*' is an annual review prepared by the European Commission Directorate-General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion that provides an overview of the current employment and social trends in Europe and discusses related policy options. ESS data was used in the report editions of 2019 and 2020, including data from the rounds on climate change (ESS8 in 2016) and fairness (ESS9 in 2018). The first report was presented in the ESDE 2019 conference 'Sustainable growth for all: choices for the future of Social Europe'. This is a policy conference, where findings and policy options are discussed between policymakers, civil society organisations and academia.

Another example is the '*Flagship Report on Fairness Perception*' developed by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. The second edition of the flagship report '*Beyond averages - Fairness in an economy that works for people*' was launched in 2019 and written before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes a chapter using ESS data and analyses some of the most pertinent dimensions of fairness in relation to the agenda for a fair, inclusive and social Europe. As explained in the report: *"By focusing not only on short- and long-term trends in income inequality but also on inequality of opportunities and spatial disparities across a range of areas, including health and education, the report contributed to building a multidisciplinary knowledge base to support the European Commission's agenda on fairness."*

3.2.2   Pathway towards informing the policy design

One of the key roles of science is to inform the policymaking process, in particular the policy design. The policy design *"integrates different understandings of a policy problem with different conceptions of the [potential] policy instruments to be utilised, and the different values according to which a government assesses the outcomes pursued by this policy as expected, satisfactory, acceptable, and so forth"*[11]. In this sense, ESS data is typically included in studies that will ultimately inform on multiple potential policy options that may emerge in the policymaking process. The **focus of this pathway is on informing policy makers by providing relevant evidence** without interfering in the policy process as such.

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[11] Peters, B.G. & Fontaine, G. (eds.) (2022). Research handbook of policy design. Edward Elgar Publishing

Figure 11: Pathway 2: Informing the policy design
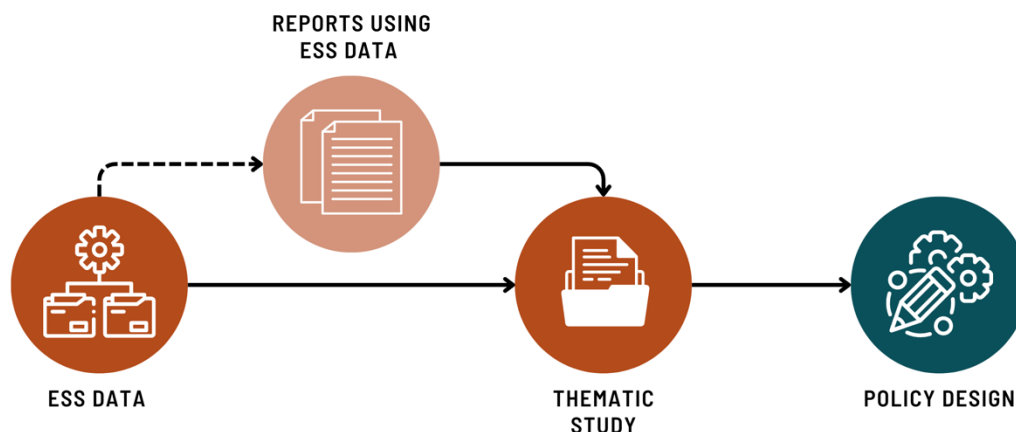
Source: Authors

Box 2: OECD support to the design of well-being policy

A key role of the OECD is to support national and supranational governance levels with policy options based on scientific evidence. As an example, this has been done in the area of well-being by developing a well-being framework. The OECD Well-being Framework[12] is divided into current and future well-being. Current well-being includes 11 dimensions such as income and wealth, job quality, subjective well-being, and resources for future well-being covering four capitals: natural, social, economic and human capital. ESS data is currently being used to analyse some dimensions of this framework for which the data are not currently collected by national statistical offices or is lagging (e.g. social capital and civic engagement). OECD is also studying the feasibility[13] of including other dimensions to measure well-being such as trust, for which ESS data is being considered.

This pathway is about providing policymakers with policy options. In the case of well-being policy, an interviewee elaborated that the agenda can be focused on budget issues rather than transformative policy changes, highlighting that some investments can lead only to marginal improvements in the quality of life while others can contribute more to this societal goal. Thus, investment decisions emerge as a policy option, where investment in some societal areas (i.e. mental health) can have a great impact on well-being. If sustained over the time, this policy option may have a substantive impact.


3.2.3 Pathway towards providing tools to support the policymaking process

The third identified pathway refers to the development of tools that introduce ESS data as part of their components and support the policymaking process at European and national levels. This pathway takes one step forward from the mere provision of evidence-based information to introduction of **ESS data and methodologies as part of the design of a policy support tool**. Figure 12 highlights the pathway from data creation to its uptake in the policy process.

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[12] https://www.oecd.org/wise/measuring-well-being-and-progress.htm
[13] González, S. and C. Smith (2017), "The accuracy of measures of institutional trust in household surveys: Evidence from the OECD trust database", OECD Statistics Working Papers, No. 2017/11, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/d839bd50-en.

Figure 12: Pathway 2: Providing tools to support the policymaking process
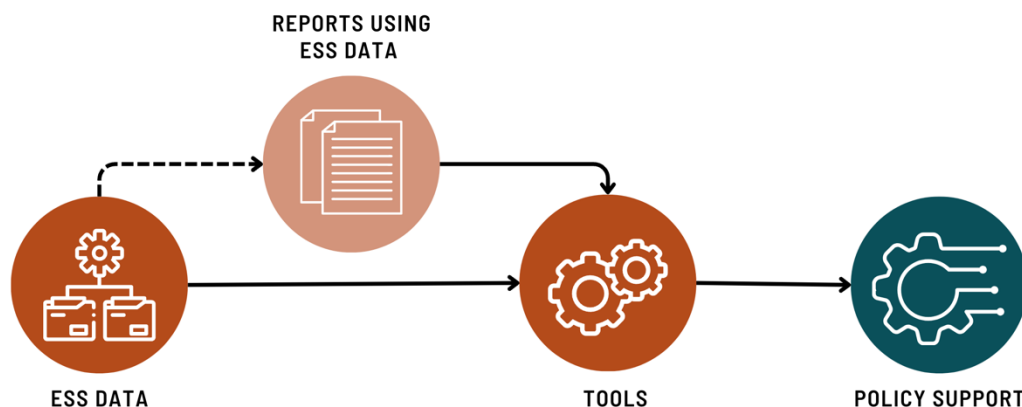
Source: Authors

**Box 3: The design of the resilience dashboards**

While resilience as a concept has been part of the EU public agenda for more than two decades, it is currently raising an increased policy interest in the face of the multiple and overlapping shocks that are impacting our lives. The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission prepared two reports that looked at the ways the resilience concept could be used in the policy making process: *"How resilient are the European regions? Evidence from the societal response to the 2008 financial crisis"* and *"The resilience of EU Member States to the financial and economic crisis What are the characteristics of resilient behaviour?"* These reports were discussed with multiple EC Directorate-Generals and influenced three key policy outputs at the core of the EU policy agenda: '*Beyond GDP*' initiative, the '*2020 Strategic Foresight Report*' and the resilience dashboards.

Interviews indicated that ESS data was part of the discussions during the design of the resilience dashboards, in view of the need to broaden the analysis covering also more societal aspects. Variables including perceptions and values were considered in the process. However, eventually these variables were not included as there were two key barriers. First, the resilience dashboards needed longitudinal data that is not accessible from the ESS biennial structure. Second, the geographical coverage needed for the dashboards did not align with the coverage provided by the ESS. (While the dashboards were intended for EU28 countries, not all ESS rounds covered the full spectrum). Hence, the ESS-related variables were used as part of the first draft designs of the resilience dashboards but were not kept in the final set of indicators. This impact pathway is an opportunity to consider for ESS to contribute in the future to key tools supporting policy design at European and national level.

3.2.4   Pathway towards uptake of findings in policy formulation

Policy formulation represents a key step in the policy process and refers to the translation of topics and the deliberated policy options into concrete policy strategies and programmes. The pathway on uptake of findings in policy formulation focuses on the **capacity of study results using ESS data to be transformed into a policy strategy or a programme**. This pathway represents a step forward from the agenda setting and includes discussion processes at high-level policy events, deliberation of staff working documents and various consultation materials and drafting of final strategic documents. This pathway usually takes a long time to materialise due to the iterative nature of the policy formulation process.

Figure 13: Pathway towards uptake of findings for policy formulation
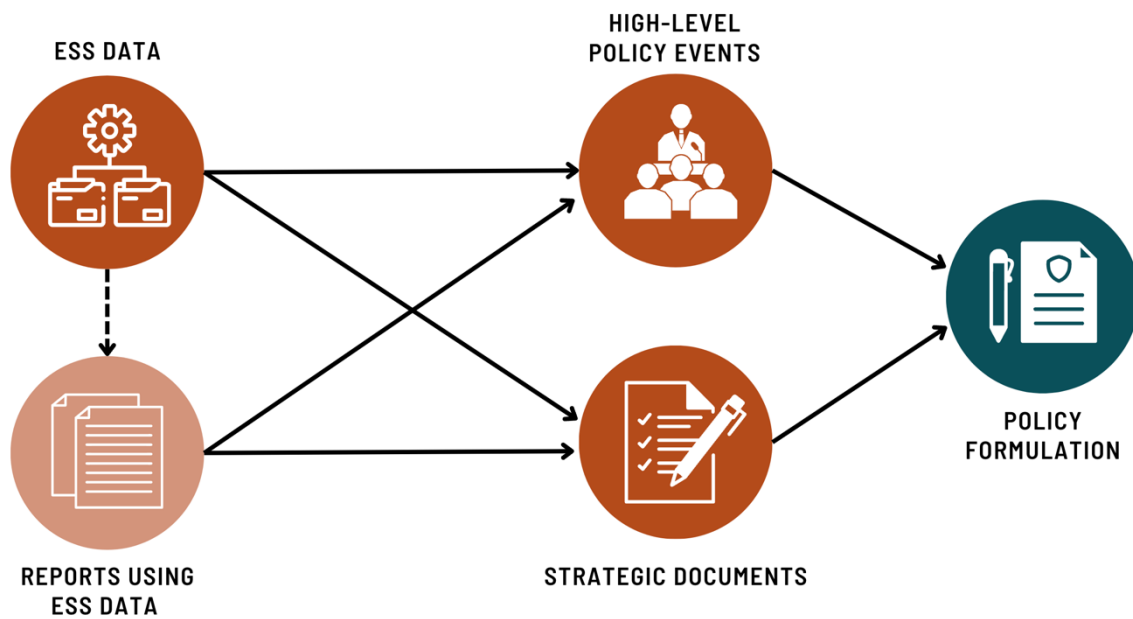
Source: Authors

Box 4: A path to the Youth Guarantee

The report "*NEETs - Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe*" prepared by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) was published in 2012. The report examined the labour market situation of young people in Europe, with a specific focus on the NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) group. The study investigated the dimensions of trust, political engagement and civic participation using data from the ESS 2008 round and complemented by the 2008 European Values Study data.

The report looked at the determinants of belonging to the NEET group and measured the economic and social costs of NEETs. The report also assessed how Member States through policies and interventions have sought to support young people to gain a foothold in the labour market showcasing that successful policy initiatives address specific, disadvantaged subgroups in the NEET population.

The European Commission prepared the ground for a policy intervention due to evidence of social and economic burden being high and increasing youth unemployment having dramatic consequences for our economies, our societies and young people themselves*.* As expressed by an interviewee, the report included a 360º picture of NEETs status in Europe. It focused not only on the economic aspects (trends, costs, drivers) but also on the social implications of the NEETs. The European Council discovered the report within the frame of developing a communication document accompanying the '*Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Establishing a Youth Guarantee*'. In 2012, the Commission launched the Youth Employment Package and formulated a proposal for a Council Recommendation on establishing a youth guarantee, which was adopted in 2013. Even though not legally binding, the recommendation was adopted by Member States across Europe.

3.2.5   Pathway towards improving policy monitoring and evaluation

This pathway can be regarded as a potential impact that ESS may create in the future. While there is no evidence on the ESS data used for monitoring a policy process at European level, different interviewees expressed this kind of potential impact in the future. The regularity of data provision and the consistency of questions in the core module may create a window of opportunity for policymakers to analyse the policy and societal impact of the implementation of certain sectoral policies. Previous impact studies have drawn together examples of such ESS data use for monitoring at the national level (e.g. evaluation of the Universal Basic Income (UBI) trial in Finland, or monitoring of attitudes towards Swiss foreign, security and defence policy)[14]. Complementing existing indicators or contributing towards the development of specific modules are among the key mechanisms to make ESS data part of monitoring and evaluation processes. In particular, interviewees expressed the **potential that ESS data could have for monitoring of policies at different geographical levels**, in particular regional levels.

Figure 14: Pathway towards improving policy monitoring and evaluation
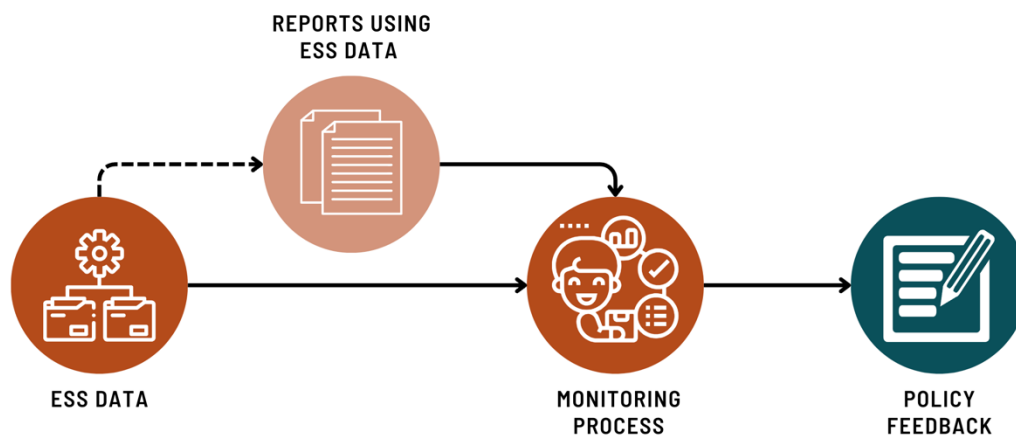
Source: Authors

### 3.2.6   Policy impact of research infrastructure landscape

Research Infrastructures play an important role in supporting and impacting the policymaking process. This has been confirmed by different impact studies of European RIs in various policy areas. These studies showcase RI influence in different phases of the policy cycle – from the agenda setting, provision of better evidence-based insights for policymaking, to contributing to policy design by developing strategic policy documents. For instance, different RIs in the field of life sciences (e.g. ELIXIR, EATRIS) have contributed to shaping the policy debate by preparing strategic documents, providing fora and networking opportunities or developing common understanding on standards and regulatory issues. These effects on policy making comprise more awareness and improved understanding of key topics among policymakers, funders and regulators, more evidence-based insights for policy formulation and more effective research funding allocation. Another example concerns RIs in natural sciences (e.g. European Southern Observatory) that beyond the influence on policy debate also show effects on the promotion of international political and cultural understanding, shaping of the European Research Area and being a role model in R&D cooperation.

It should be noted that an impact pathway is not a linear process well defined in time. Certain outputs in the policy cycle may trigger intermediary processes leading to a new pathway. For instance, once a topic is put on the policy agenda

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[14] Technopolis Group (2022) SUSTAIN-2: Impact study of the European Social Survey

policymakers can initiative further consultation, including the commissioning of new studies that use ESS data. In a similar vein, policy options derived from evidence collected in thematic studies could lead to new topics that may become relevant for the policy agenda. The following figure summarises the identified ESS policy impact pathways.

Figure 15: Graphic representation of ESS policy impact pathways
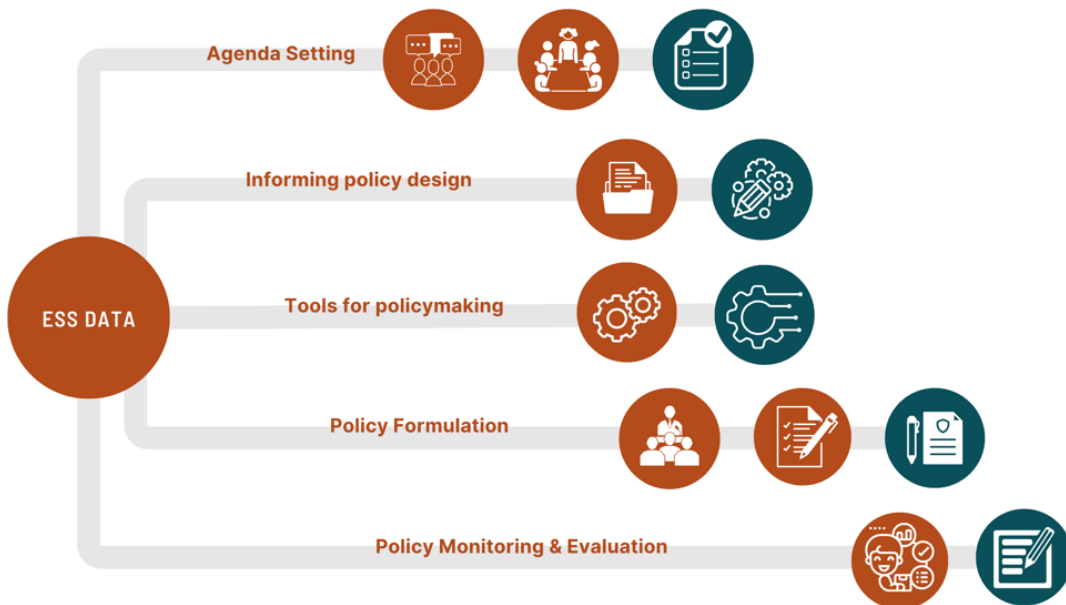
Source: Authors

4 Conclusions and recommendations

This study brings to light several conclusions and recommendations which could be of use to ESS ERIC to help increase the uptake and usage of ESS data, with policymaking cycle and policy makers as the final target audience in mind. These observations cover three main areas of this study: survey design, uptake of the ESS data among users and non-users; and pathways approach to strategically creating impact.

4.1.1   Conclusions

I Survey design

On the survey design, the overall conclusion coming from the interviews is that the quality of **ESS data is considered to be high**. As eloquently put by one interviewee: "*Do not compromise and keep the existing quality standard*". This **quality can even be increased** further by expanding the geographical coverage. The study team acknowledges the fact that ensuring the geographical coverage and making the sample size large enough is an expensive endeavour, but more efforts need to be put in place to make users trust that the survey is meeting their requirements for data. The participants in this study shared their views on the requirements for data they have when conducting their work. These include geographical coverage, large enough sample size to be able to do a sub-group analysis, representativeness of the sample, comparability of data between the countries, high quality longitudinal data with some form of recurrency. On the meta-data level, the dataset should be well codified and with good data dictionary, e.g. how variables were selected, their definitions, etc. On some occasions the **perceptions-based data raise some reservations and could lead to a lesser usage**. Several interviewees consulted during this study had an opinion that such data is less reliable. Finally, when it comes to the survey design, although this study team did not analyse the ESS questionnaire itself but have

gathered a number of useful observations from the interviewees which are presented in the last recommendation for this area.

II Uptake among the users and non-users

When it comes to maintaining and increasing the number of ESS users, **the technical side around the data use remains to be critical**. At the moment, users have to download raw data to be able to use it. There are various examples of surveys (e.g. the General Social Survey in the USA) which allow working with the data very easily online without downloading it, i.e. simply by dragging needing questions, getting correlations etc. This echoes the observation made in the 2022 ESS impact study: "*For non-academic impacts, many consultees for this study continue to see problems with the complexity and presentation of ESS data. Whilst academics generally find the ESS user interface to be of high quality and useful for their endeavours, non-academic audiences tend to find the data portal and raw data bewildering. 'Translation' into simple data snippets or clear descriptive and well-visualised findings are needed. When these are missing, there is effectively a 'barrier to entry'.*"[15]

It is not, however, only the technical aspect around the use of data which potentially creates an obstacle to the increase of usage. It is also the **visibility of ESS**. For example, it is not widely known that the ESS has been funded through Horizon 2020, the European Union Research and Innovation Funding Programme. European funding by itself brings a seal of approval which will make some users engage more with the ESS. Looking geographically, the European Commission (EC) is the key policy user of ESS data. Although this is shown by the desk research in this study, it also became clear that the ESS does not have sufficient exposure to the EC and the JRC which de facto is the 'research arm' of the various policy DGs at the Commission. In early 2023 (when this study was already running), the ESS ERIC team started discussions with the JRC, which is the right first step forward.

III Pathway approach to creating impact strategically

This study identified five generic causal mechanisms how the ESS is bringing impact on policy. These impact pathways need to considered also when thinking about how to increase ESS impact more strategically. Charting impact diffusion as a process, it is possible to identify those interactions and linkages where ESS data uptake is already working well and those areas where more targeted action would bring important effects strengthening ESS visibility and influence in the European and national policy landscape.

- Pathway 1 (towards policy agenda setting processes): **the relevance of ESS data to shaping policy debates appears to be high**. The data are used not only by the EU Member States and European organisations, but has significant uptake also internationally (e.g. by the OECD, the WHO, the World Bank, UNESCO) and by governments in third countries (e.g. the US National Bureau of Economic Research, Government of Switzerland). While a quantitative appraisal of policy documents citing ESS data does not provide enough of granularity to evaluate the centrality of findings supported by ESS data in the shaping of concrete policy agendas, interviews confirm that in some thematic areas like well-being, happiness, social rights, fairness the ESS contribution is indeed paramount.

- Pathway 2 (towards informing the policy design): the ESS data is frequently included in studies as evidence that ultimately informs multiple potential policy options. However, previous studies and interview findings infer that the **ESS full contribution to policy formulation may not be always visible** and could ultimately be underrepresented in data. This underrepresentation may have several causes. One relates to the way policy researchers inform policymakers. They provide details on the full evidence-base in lengthy technical reports but summarise the main findings in internal memos and policy briefs where references to the ESS do not usually appear. In a similar vein, previous impact studies found multiple instances where policy impact occur, but

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[15] Technopolis Group (2022) SUSTAIN-2: Impact study of the European Social Survey

visible links back to the ESS are lost. This tendency is present also on social media where the ESS is sometimes either poorly acknowledged or not acknowledged at all[16].

- Pathway 3 (towards providing tools to support the policymaking process): ESS provides important analytical angles towards the design of concrete policy tools such as dashboards, barometers, composite indicators, yet frequently the data are not fully fitting to the specific policy needs. Thus, the **integration of ESS data in tools that support policymaking presents a major opportunity** to increase ESS policy impact in a strategic and systematic way.

- Pathway 4 (towards the update of finding in policy formulation): This pathway usually takes a long time to materialise due to the iterative nature of the policy formulation process. While it is clear that ESS data is currently used and will continue to be used in all stages of policy formulation, also in this phase of the policy cycle **more targeted interactions with policy making organisations would be helpful to improve the ESS reach and weight** as a policy-relevant research infrastructure.

- Pathway 5 (towards improving policy monitoring and evaluation): Here the opportunities for the ESS are similar to those that are expressed in Pathway 3. **A closer alignment of the ESS data with policy monitoring and evaluation needs**, for instance, by complementing existing indicators or contributing to the development of specific modules, **can be major mechanisms how to ensure a wide, sustained and profound policy impact** of the ESS.

4.1.2   Recommendations

Recommendation 1: To 'future-proof' the survey (1) expand the geographical coverage in Europe ensuring that all countries are covered across years and/or (2) investigate feasibility of running a survey on a regional level. If such data is available, this could create a different impact and broader use. However, this may require changes to the sampling and it may be difficult to achieve representative samples.

Recommendation 2: To further build trust of the existing and future users of ESS, clearly communicate all aspects and methodology around the ESS data. This is already done by the ESS team with having a solid description on the portal but some further amendments can be done. For example, (1) add in more detail in the methodological description an explanation of how the uniformity is being achieved across countries (in terms of methods and timing) and (2) include a detailed step-by-step explanation around the methodology in the proactive communication with possible users in policymaking.

Recommendation 3: To counteract some existing reservations around the perceptions-based data, (1) engage in explanatory discussions with users in general about the validity of the data based on perceptions and (2) investigate possible linkages of ESS data (incl. with Eurostat or Eurobarometer) thus raising the ESS data profile even higher. There could be different ways of linking ESS data with other sources, e.g. with the official registry data, hospital data, official tax data. Getting needed consents is critical here and navigating with the official data in different countries may be a challenge. As some users utilise ESS data to complement other sources or cross-check certain topics, it would be beneficial to investigate how to position the survey strategically and in communication terms vis-à-vis the various other sources.

Recommendation 4: Consider the following suggestions made by existing users in relation to specific questions and topics of the survey. Prior their adoption, these should be discussed within ESS ERIC in consultation (where relevant) with policymakers:

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[16] Technopolis Group (2022) SUSTAIN-2: Impact study of the European Social Survey

- One key question that would benefit for further policy development is 'the wallet question', related to active benevolence: How likely is it that your lost wallet would be returned if found by a police officer, by a neighbour, or a stranger? This is a question that contributes to determine how happy people are with their lives, building on the concept of social capital and social experiments conducted in the 1990s. The results of these experiments evidenced that there was a positive correlation with measures of social trust. With the inclusion of this question in the ESS, there is a potential to link ESS data with the uptake on policy for improving social and institutional trust.

- In the resilience dashboards, data is changing constantly and presented with arrows representing historical/longitudinal distribution. As such, ESS data may not necessarily be available to use on historical records: for instance, some dimensions used on resilience dashboards are not collected in each ESS round – and ideally may be interesting to have annual data.

- Some topics such as 'societal polarisation', included in the top risks for the next decade on the Global Risk Report, are key for the discussions within the Beyond GDP initiative of the European Commission about "developing indicators that are as clear and appealing as GDP, but more inclusive of environmental and social aspects of progress"[17]. ESS data could be used with a more prominent role for monitoring, but this requires data to be produced more regularly than biennially.

- Specifically linked to the discussion on the policy impact, the survey topics would benefit from the alignment with the policy agenda. For example, after the COVID-19 pandemic health will continue to be an important topic. If the data on health becomes more regular (i.e. included in each survey) this might be of a bigger use in the health-related policy cycle.

Recommendation 5: To further increase the uptake of the survey, work with panels of the same people across several years and on specific topics which are of interest to the policymakers. This may also need a potential reconfiguration of the sample.

Recommendation 6: On a more technical side, ease-of-use of data without downloading the full set should be discussed in more detail. This could be one easy improvement for the use of ESS data in a short-term. In addition, continue having various pre-digested findings based on raw data.

Recommendation 7: Increase and proactively target communication about ESS and engage stakeholders involved in the policy cycle and especially the end users, such as the supranational organisations starting with the European Commission. For example, in relation to the communication with JRC, work proactively with the JRC to understand their needs and the policy related topics they are planning to work on in the future, explain in detail how ESS data can be of use here and discuss a possibility of a joint roadshow across the European Commission's DG. The roadshow should focus on two groups of people in the EC: (1) policy officers who are in a position to discuss a more-long term view on policy aspects that the DGs plan to approach in the future (e.g. 3-5 year time horizon) and (2) the data management teams, who will understand how to increase the use of a particular dataset, and how to make it available to the people who provide policy officers with data inside our organisations. If the ESS is consulted at an early stage of the design of a specific policy support tool, it is more likely that questionnaires and data set-up can be aligned to these future policy needs. The mechanisms of reaching relevant individuals in different policy-making institutions are likely to vary but the interviews consulted for this study did not provide any examples.

Recommendation 8: To make existing users more engaged in the update of ESS data and to encourage potential users, engage these users in a co-creation process, e.g. contribute to ad-hoc modules or by helping introduce panels. Recently held discussions between the ESS team and JRC where (among other things) a possibility of adding questions to the

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survey was discussed is a start of a co-creation process. By ensuring a periodic and strategic dialogue on data and future data needs with selected policy making bodies and selectively adapting future rounds of questionnaires, the ESS policy impact can be increased in a medium-term from important to very significant.

Recommendation 9: Work on improving acknowledgements of the ESS data. As such, this recommendation is of relevance to all European research infrastructures and the question has been raised by multiple research infrastructures. Bring the topic back to the discussion at the ESFRI Forum.

To conclude, research infrastructures are a core element of the European Research Area (ERA). The ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 has defined a set of updated priorities to strengthen the European R&I landscape including Action 8: To strengthen the sustainability, accessibility and resilience of RIs in the ERA.[18] The Action comprises a set of activities to boost the RI ecosystem through a strategic analysis leading to broader and more sustainable access for all countries to European RIs and their services. Key issues addressed include funding models that ensure sustainability, enhanced socio-economic impact, and greater focus on specific scientific and policy needs. In addition, in December 2022 the Competitiveness Council have asked "*ESFRI to look into the approaches by Member States, the Commission, international organisations and RIs to assess scientific, societal and economic impacts of investments in RIs, identify good practices, develop a monitoring framework, test it and elaborate recommendations to national and regional RI stakeholders by the end of 2023*".[19] In response, ESFRI has prepared a Policy Brief (to be published in June-July 2023) addressing from an ESFRI perspective how to define and assess impacts concluding with the recommendations to RIs, ESFRI and the EC. The importance of impact assessment for public policy is explicitly mentioned in the report.

This scoping study aims to assist the European Social Survey ERIC in advancing in understanding the mechanisms how ESS data lead to policy impacts, thus helping to align on expectations towards RIs in the frame of ERA Action 8 goals and ESFRI.

[18] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf
[19] Council of the European Union (2022) Outcome of Proceedings: Research Infrastructures - Council conclusions, 15429/22, Brussels

5 Annex – Interview guide

A scoping study to understand the visibility, accessibility and reachability of ESS data at national and international policy levels

The **European Social Survey (ESS)** is an international, comparative survey of social and political values and attitudes, which was launched in 2002 and has recently completed the 10th round of data collection. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations.

This **study goal** is to explore in a systematic manner the rationales behind the use of ESS data in policy making. Particularly, we will explore how perceptions and understanding of policy makers on data use as well contextual factors could play a significant role in the way data is taken up and used in advancing the policy initiatives.

We are delighted that you have agreed to have a short interview in relation to this study. Thank you!

If you have any questions related to this study, please don't hesitate to contact the project lead, Jelena Angelis at EFIS Centre at angelis@efiscentre.eu.

Before the interview

In preparation for the interview, we recommend reviewing a list of questions we would like to discuss with you. Should you be aware of documents or other information relevant to the topics described in the questions (for instance, concrete examples of results or impacts) which you can share, this could be a very useful addition to the study.

Use of the interview data

As the study involves identifying policy impacts of ESS survey, we are keen to gather quotations, stories and reflections that highlight them. If required, we will contact you for the **permission to use any material that you provide during the interview**. As a rule, we will not attribute quotes to you in the final report, unless we have your written agreement.

Interviews will be conducted using Microsoft Teams, or other online communication platform. We may ask to record the interview for accuracy and notetaking purposes. If you consent, the recording will be immediately deleted after the study is completed. We would be happy to share our notes with you after the interview and give you an opportunity to ensure that we accurately captured the content of the discussion.

We would like to assure you that all the information received during this study (either through an interview or from any internal documents) will be treated with confidentiality and will not be shared outside the core study team.

Guiding questions

1. Introductory questions
1.1 What is your field of work and areas of interest in the organisation you represent?
1.2 What is your role in the policy-making process? If your work is not in a policy-making position, how does your work intersect with the policy making process?

2. About data use
2.1 What kind of data do you use in your work?
2.2 Are you aware of the data collected by ESS?
2.3 Are you aware and/or use information from other similar surveys, such as SHARE, European/World Values Study/ General Social Survey (US)?

2.4 Which kind of data from ESS do you use (e.g. downloaded datasets, interactive analytical tools, digests of findings)?

2.5 What field of data produced by ESS are you interested in? *See table below*

2.6 Would you give an example of initial expectations on the use of ESS data and how you actually used the data?

2.7 What benefits did you and your organisation get through using the ESS data? How has it made your life easier?

2.8 What were the main barriers while dealing with the ESS data?

2.9 What is your overall opinion of the use of ESS data in your organisation / country / region?

3. Questions for non-data users

3.1 What are your reasons for not using ESS data? Have you interacted with the ESS questionnaire / results before?

3.2 What field of data produced by ESS would you be interested in? Are these topics included in the previous ESS rounds? *See table below*

3.3 Which concrete aspects from the questionnaire could be improved to motivate the data use?

4. Pathways to impact

4.1 Could you describe an example of concrete results in your policy area from using the ESS data?

4.2 Was this policy part of a broader country or regional strategy? Did you work with other organisations (e.g. universities, NGOs, etc.)?

5. Closing questions

5.1 Do you have any other comments related to the use of ESS and its impact in your country?

ESS covered topics

• Crime	• ESS5: Work, Family and Well-being
• Democracy and politics	• ESS5: Trust in Police and Criminal Courts
• Human values	• ESS6: Personal and Social Well-being
• Media use	• ESS6: Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy
• National and ethnic identity	• ESS7: Immigration
• Perceived discrimination	• ESS7: Social Inequalities in Health
• Religion	• ESS8: Attitudes to Climate Change and Energy
• Social exclusion	• ESS8: Welfare Attitudes
• Social trust/trust in institutions	• ESS9: Justice and Fairness
• Subjective wellbeing	• ESS9: Timing of Life
• Socio-demographics	• ESS10: Digital Social Contacts in Work and Family Life
• ESS1: Citizenship, Involvement and Democracy	• ESS10: Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy
• ESS1: Immigration	• ESS11: Gender in Contemporary Europe: Rethinking Equality and the Backlash
• ESS2: Family, Work and Well-Being	• ESS11: Social Inequalities in Health and their Determinants
• ESS2: Health and Care Seeking	
• ESS2: Economic Morality	• ESS12: Personal and social wellbeing
• ESS3: Personal and Social Well-being	• ESS12: Attitudes to immigrants and refugees
• ESS3: Timing of Life	
• ESS4: Ageism	
• ESS4: Welfare Attitudes	