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The European Social Survey during COVID-19: using video interviews and other innovations

Tim Hanson

Senior Research Fellow, ESS ERIC HQ
2021 AAPOR Annual Conference



europeansocialsurvey.org

ESS is a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC)



Introduction to the European Social Survey (ESS)

- Academically-driven cross-national survey measuring attitudes and behaviour across Europe
- Conducted every two years since 2002; nine rounds of fieldwork to date
- 38 countries have participated in total; 30 at Round 9
- Fully face-to-face approach across all participating countries; consistency of methodology important
- Central fieldwork specification and central planning/oversight – but decentralised fieldwork contracting and delivery
- Random probability sampling; mix of sample frames across countries (individual/dwelling/address)
- Interview length c. 1 hour
- Alongside core survey methodology, conduct developmental/experimental work with online methods

ESS Round 10 and COVID-19

- Fieldwork for Round 10 of ESS was due to run from September 2020 to January 2021 using the usual face-to-face approach in all countries
- Following consultation at start of pandemic, agreed to continue to plan for a face-to-face approach but allow more flexibility with fieldwork timings – can now be conducted any time between September 2020 and December 2021
- Felt important to retain a face-to-face approach to assess impact of pandemic in mode-consistent time-series; also practical and quality concerns with other modes
- But concerns about feasibility of / impact on face-to-face fieldwork, so adopted contingency plans:
 - Adapting Round 10 specification but retaining face-to-face approach
 - Planning alternative data collection approach (self-completion – web and paper)
- So far only a few countries have started face-to-face fieldwork – several others hoping to start soon; some now planning to switch to self-completion

Video interviewing

Video interviewing as a back-up option

- Expected that even if face-to-face fieldwork was broadly possible, some people would still be reluctant to do an in-person interview
- Made decision to allow video interviewing as a back-up option
- Decision followed demand from some national teams, consultation with others who have tested video interviewing, and positive informal testing

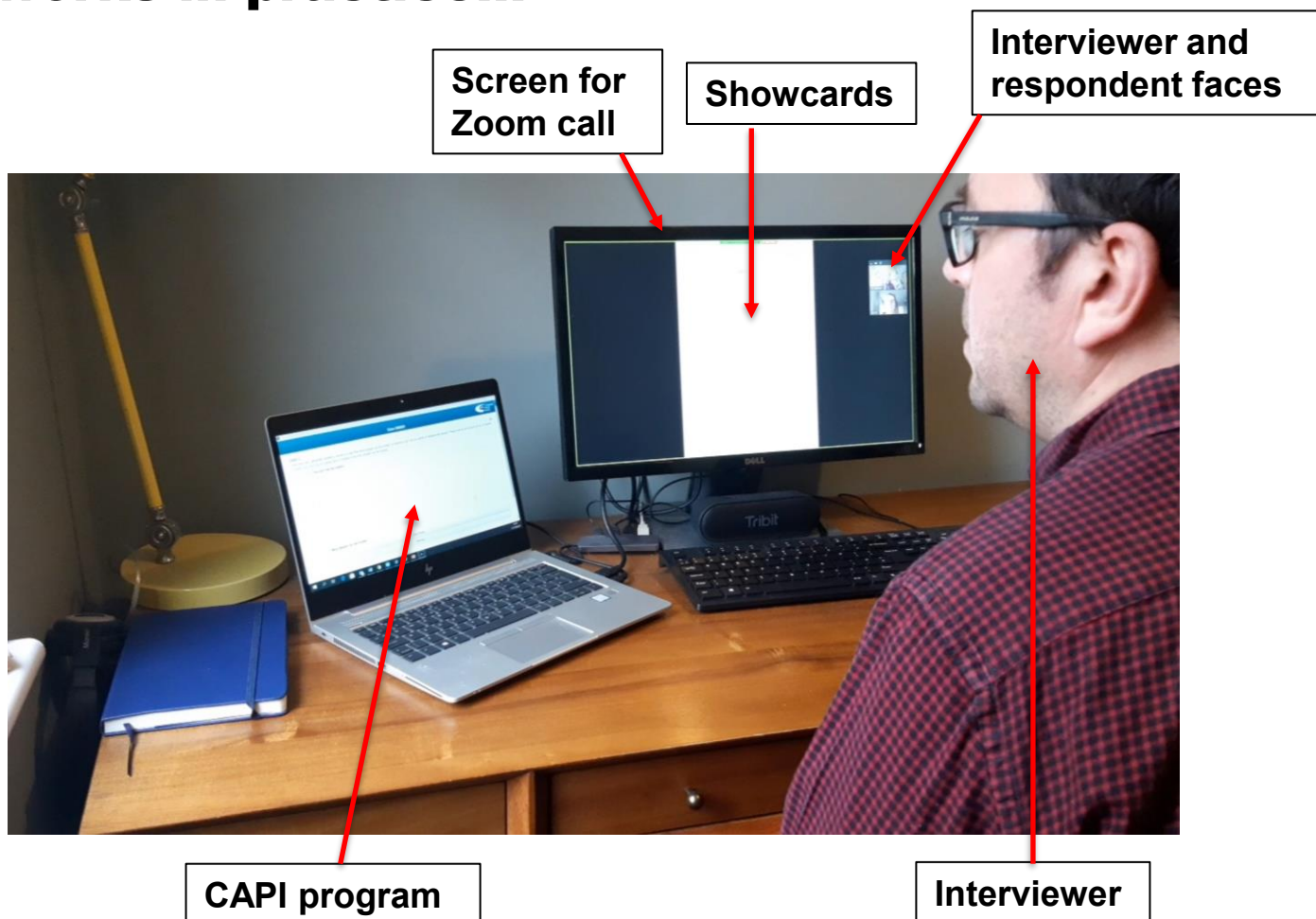
Approach to video interviewing (1)

- Use of video interviews would be optional for each country
- Initial contact with sample units and person selection (where required) done in the usual way – usually face-to-face (telephone for some countries)
- If target respondent reluctant to do an in-person interview, interviewer can offer a video interview (also mentioned in advance letter); in-person interviewing still prioritised where possible
- Appointment booked for video interview and invitation with link sent to respondent
- Two possible approaches: countries can decide whether to equip all interviewers to carry out video interviews or to establish a small specialised team for this
- Key focus on compliance with data protection and accessibility for respondents when planning approaches

Approach to video interviewing (2)

- Interviewer uses their CAPI device to ask questions and enter responses; separate device/screen used for video and to screen-share and move between showcards
- Respondents can use any device but larger screens recommended
- Questions added to survey to capture mode of interview and experiences/problems for respondents and interviewers
- National teams required to submit a short questionnaire describing their approach to video interviewing prior to fieldwork
- All countries required to pre-test video interviewing approach; all interviewers to be briefed on process
- Design is non-experimental – focus is on supporting effective delivery of ESS Round 10 fieldwork rather than learning for the future (though latter still important)

How it works in practice...



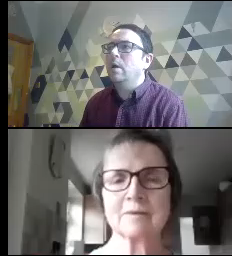
Question(s): A4

CARD 2

You
can't be
too
careful

Most
people
can be
trusted

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Case CTRL ESS ROUND 10 (10.0.13)

Case 999901



CARD 2

A4

Using this card, generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? Please tell me on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.

- ☐ 0. You can't be too careful
- ☐ 1. 1
- ☐ 2. 2
- ☐ 3. 3
- ☐ 4. 4
- ☐ 5. 5
- ☐ 6. 6
- ☐ 7. 7
- ☒ 8. 8
- ☐ 9. 9
- ☐ 10. Most people can be trusted

Don't know

Refusal

Progress so far

- Sadly not much to report!
- Slovenia have started fieldwork and conducted c. 600 interviews but no video interviews yet
- Some video interviews booked in Slovenia but not carried out – respondent drop-out (hidden refusal?) and technical issues experienced
- Norway, Croatia and Switzerland included video interviews as part of pre-testing (and will offer for main stage) – pre-testing generally went well
- Some changes based on initial experiences – e.g. guidance to have reminder phone calls and to provide short/simple guide for respondents on joining video calls
- Also switched to allow video option to be introduced before a firm refusal to the in-person interview
- Situation a little uncertain due to doubts over feasibility of face-to-face delivery – video seen as promising option where face-to-face fieldwork is possible

Questions we would like to answer

- Is video as a 'back-up' option a worthwhile approach?
 - Does it yield enough interviews to justify work needed to set it up?
 - Does it bring in people who cannot/would not take part in a face-to-face interview?
- To what extent do rates of video interviews vary between countries?
- What are the experiences of respondents and interviewers with video interviewing?
- Are there any (heightened) data quality concerns with video interviewing?
- Could video interviews be a good future option for ESS (or other surveys)?

Other innovations

Ongoing concerns about ESS Round 10 fieldwork

- Still major concerns about ability of all countries to conduct face-to-face fieldwork (including video) by end of 2021
- Fieldwork dates gradually being moved back by countries following earlier more optimistic plans
- Even after return to relative normality, likely to be a large backlog of face-to-face projects that cause fieldwork capacity issues (only one provider in some countries)

Alternative self-completion approach (1)

- As a result of concerns, we are developing an alternative self-completion (web and paper) approach in the event countries cannot deliver face-to-face
- Sequential design – all invited to complete survey online initially and paper self-completion questionnaires sent to non-responders
- Possibility of also including Electronic Questionnaire Device in some countries (see paper in session: *Novel Data Collection Solutions During a Novel Coronavirus Pandemic*)
- Two possible data collection approaches:
 - Postal recruitment only (expected for most countries)
 - Fieldworker-assisted – where sample frame or postal system don't allow letters to be sent (reliably) to addresses / dwellings

Alternative self-completion approach (2)

- Results from initial piloting of the postal approach have been positive (see paper in session: *Creative Adaptations for Data Collection During the Pandemic*)
- Further pilot/experiment in Austria in progress – will assess feasibility of adopting the full ESS questionnaire for self-completion
- Have also carried out user testing in the UK on the paper self-completion questionnaire
- Final protocol for self-completion to be released to countries in next few weeks, alongside central Qualtrics web program and source paper questionnaire
- Countries to decide whether a face-to-face approach will be feasible by end of 2021 or to switch to the self-completion approach



Thank you

Contact

✉ tim.hanson@city.ac.uk

🌐 europeansocialsurvey.org

🐦 @ESS_Survey

📘 EuropeanSocialSurvey
in European-Social-Survey

