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Impact of COVID-19 on the European Social Survey

Tim Hanson

Senior Research Fellow, ESS ERIC HQ

Lithuania Conference, 4 May 2021



europeansocialsurvey.org

ESS is a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC)



Topics covered in presentation

- Introduction to ESS
- ESS and COVID-19
 - Preparing for face-to-face fieldwork
 - Video interviewing
 - Self-completion approach
- Longer-term future of ESS

Introduction to ESS

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 (e.g. CRONOS panels)

Participating countries

9 ROUNDS 5 ROUNDS

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| 1. Belgium | 23. Bulgaria |
| 2. Finland | 24. Cyprus |
| 3. France | 25. Italy |
| 4. Germany | 26. Russia |
| 5. Hungary | 27. Ukraine |

4 ROUNDS

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| 6. Ireland | 28. Greece |
| 7. The Netherlands | 29. Iceland |
| 8. Norway | 30. Latvia |

3 ROUNDS

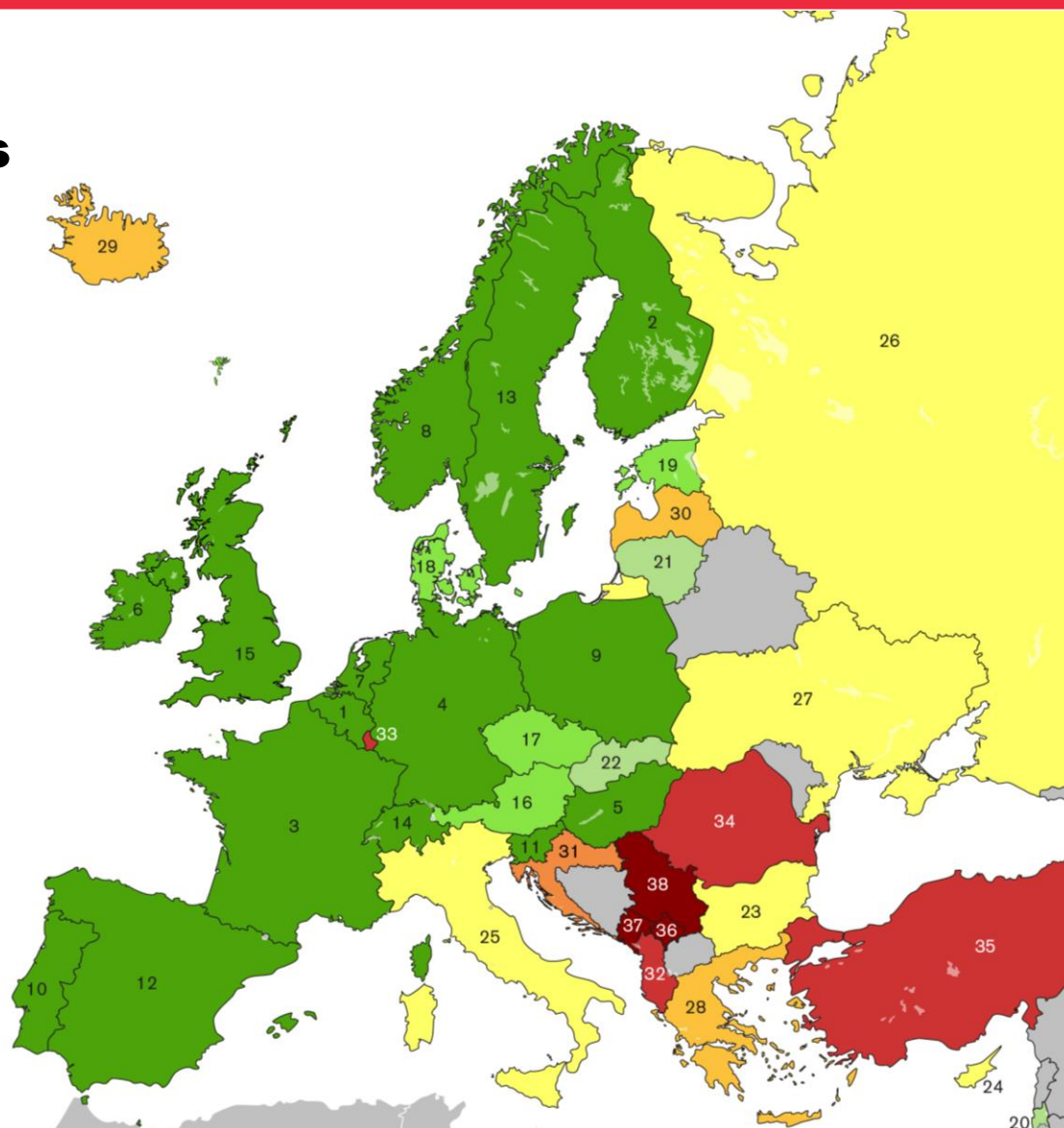
31. Croatia

8 ROUNDS 2 ROUNDS

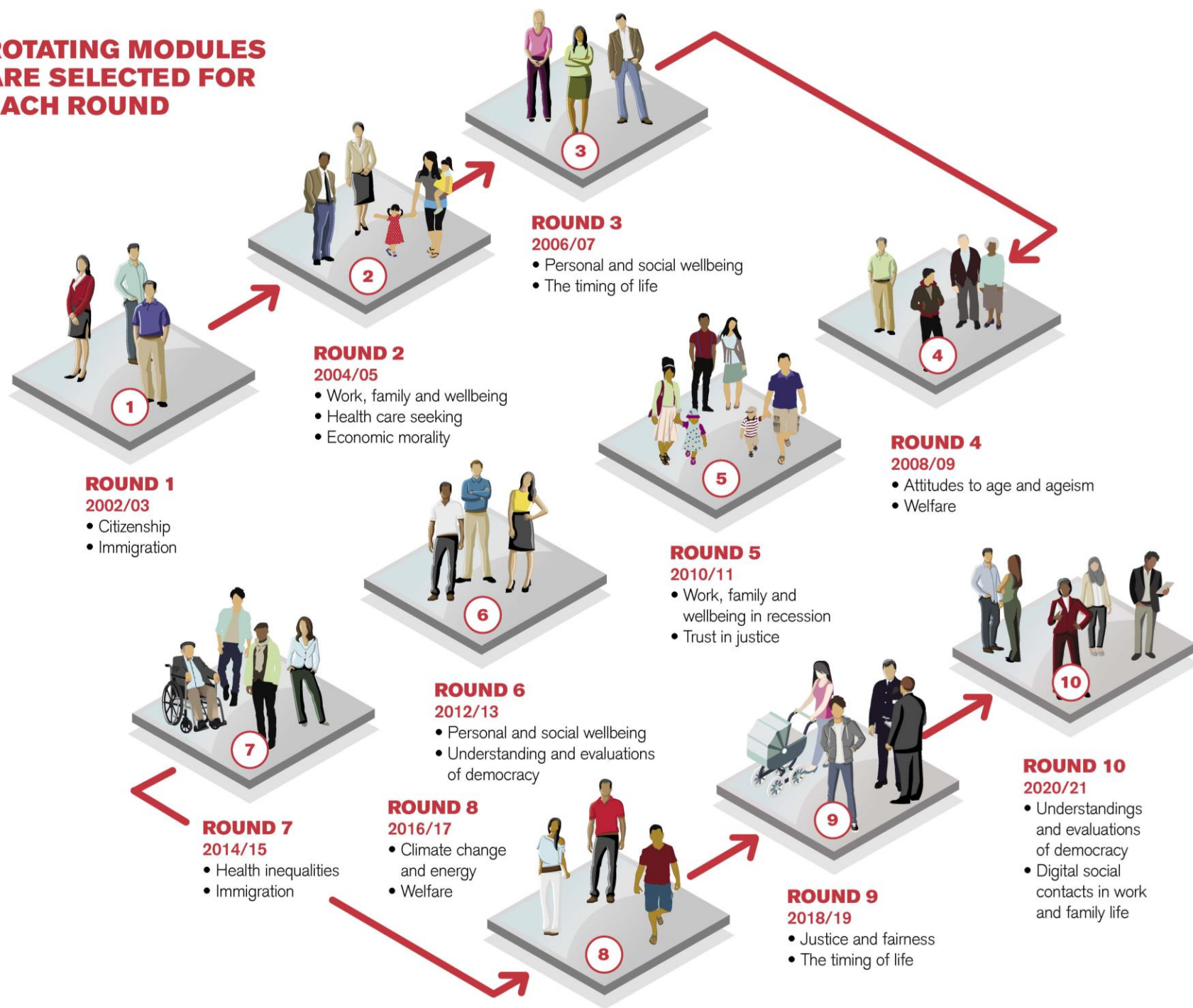
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|--------------------|----------------|
| 16. Austria | 32. Albania |
| 17. Czech Republic | 33. Luxembourg |
| 18. Denmark | 34. Romania |
| 19. Estonia | 35. Turkey |

6 ROUNDS 1 ROUND

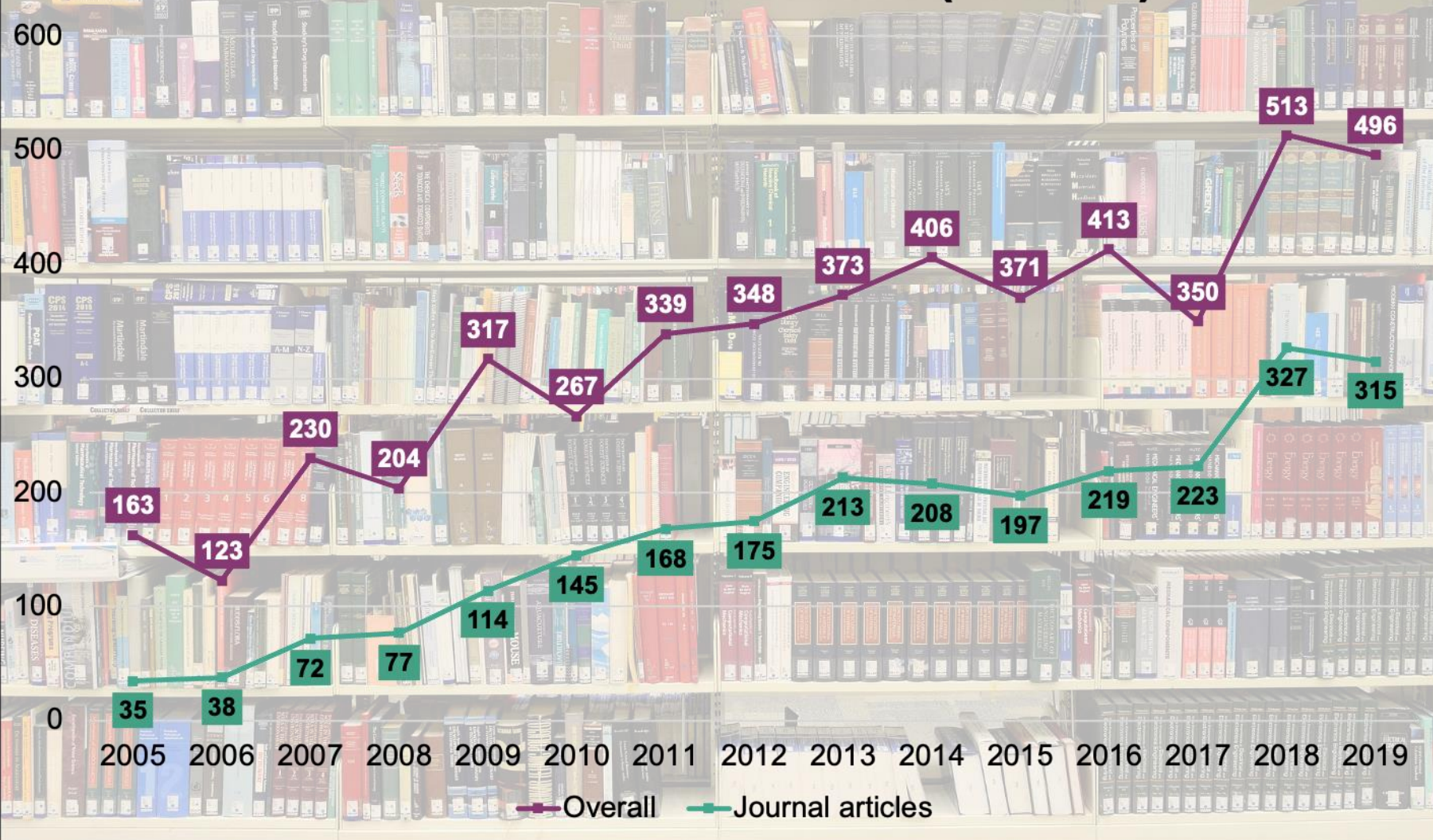
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|---------------|----------------|
| 20. Israel | 36. Kosovo |
| 21. Lithuania | 37. Montenegro |
| 22. Slovakia | 38. Serbia |



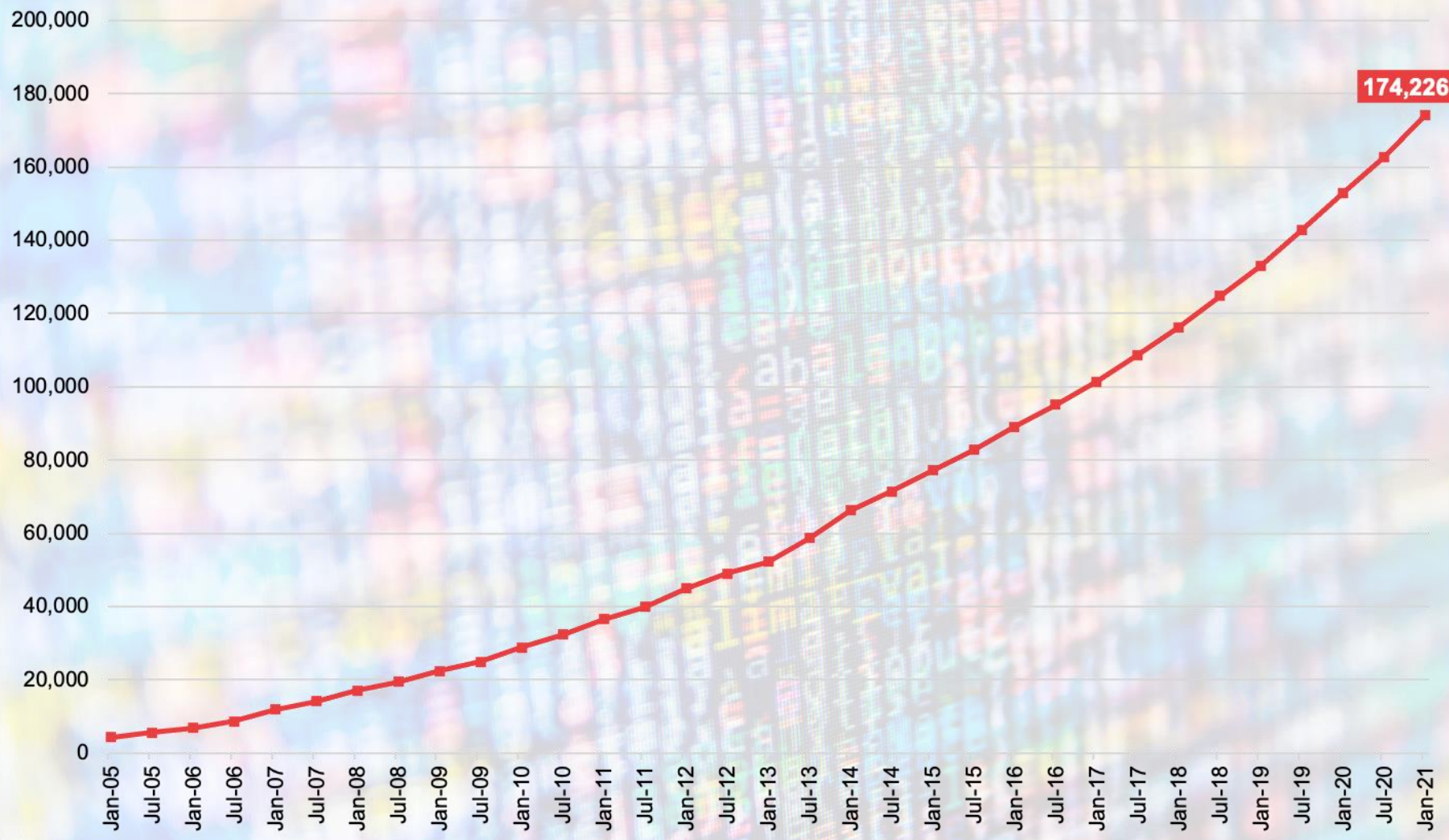
ROTATING MODULES ARE SELECTED FOR EACH ROUND



ESS Academic Publications (2005-19)



Registered users (2005-21)



ESS and COVID-19

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 one country has started face-to-face fieldwork (Slovenia) – a few others hoping to start soon but most delaying to summer/Autumn; some now planning to switch to self-completion

Preparing for face-to-face fieldwork

Delivering face-to-face fieldwork safely

- Most countries keen to retain face-to-face approach
- Close collaboration between ESS HQ, Core Scientific Team, and National Coordinating Teams on plans to start fieldwork
- No fieldwork can start while 'lockdowns' are in place or where between household mixing is not allowed; also regular review of infection rates
- Risk assessment process developed
- Pre-testing of face-to-face carried out in all countries (standard ESS requirement) – will inform feasibility of proceeding with main stage fieldwork

Risk assessment

- Guidelines for conducting fieldwork in a COVID-safe way shared with national teams; risk assessment questionnaires to be completed and approved before any fieldwork can start (including pre-testing)
 - Information on situation in country (infection rate, restrictions)
 - Any evidence from other surveys
 - Criteria that will be used to determine whether to start fieldwork
 - Regular health checks on interviewers
 - Outdoor interviewing where feasible
 - No re-use of showcards within 48-hour period
 - Adherence to social distancing; wearing of face masks
 - Interviewers to wash/sanitise hands before and after every interview
 - All interviewers to be briefed on procedures

Delivering ESS R10 fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic – risk assessment questionnaire for National Coordinators

The questionnaire below must be completed by all National Coordinators for participating countries at ESS Round 10. Please complete and return this to your Country Contact at least two weeks before the planned start of the pre-test. The risk assessment questionnaire needs to be updated timely to reflect any changing restrictions or requirements, even after the final sign-off.

Question	Response
1. Please enter your planned pre-test and main stage fieldwork dates here.	
2. Please summarise the current regulations and guidelines in your country regarding the pandemic (e.g. in relation to mixing and social distancing). Please note if there are any regional variations that would impact ESS fieldwork.	
3. Please state the main criteria to allow the fieldwork in terms of COVID-19 national restrictions (e.g., shops/restaurants need to be open, travel between districts allowed). Please note that no data collection should be allowed if a full lockdown is in place or household mixing is forbidden.	
4. Are you aware of other face-to-face surveys that have been carried out in your country in recent weeks/months? Please provide brief information on the experience of these surveys here.	
5. In addition to national regulations and guidelines, are there any other relevant standards for the safe delivery of fieldwork (e.g., set by professional bodies)? If so, please provide details here.	
6. Please list the measures that will be adopted for your ESS R10 fieldwork to minimise the risk of infection, noting how these meet the requirements noted at questions 2 and 4?	
7. Please confirm that showcards will not be reused within the same 48-hour period?	
8. What options will be offered in cases where target respondents are unable or unwilling to be interviewed in their home?	
9. Please confirm that information on fieldwork measures relating to COVID-19 will be shared with interviewers as part of briefings.	
10. How will compliance with fieldwork measures by interviews be assessed during the fieldwork period? What action will be taken in event that breaches are identified (e.g. not wearing masks where this is required, or reusing showcards within a 48-hour period)?	

11. Please confirm that you believe the fieldwork is being conducted in a manner that reduces the risk of COVID-19 infection between interviewers and respondents to a level considered acceptable in your national context?	
12. Please provide any further relevant information not covered by the above questions here.	

Video interviewing

Video interviewing as back-up method

- Expected that even if face-to-face fieldwork was broadly possible, some people would still be reluctant to do an in-home 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
- (Telephone interviewing not permitted)

* Including Fred Conrad and colleagues at University of Michigan Survey Research Center and their partners. See their paper covering design recommendations for video interviews:

Schober, Michael F., Frederick G. Conrad, Andrew L. Hupp, Kallan M. Larsen, Ai Rene Ong, and Brady T. West. 2020. "Design Considerations for Live Video Survey Interviews." *Survey Practice* 13 (1). <https://doi.org/10.29115/SP-2020-0014>

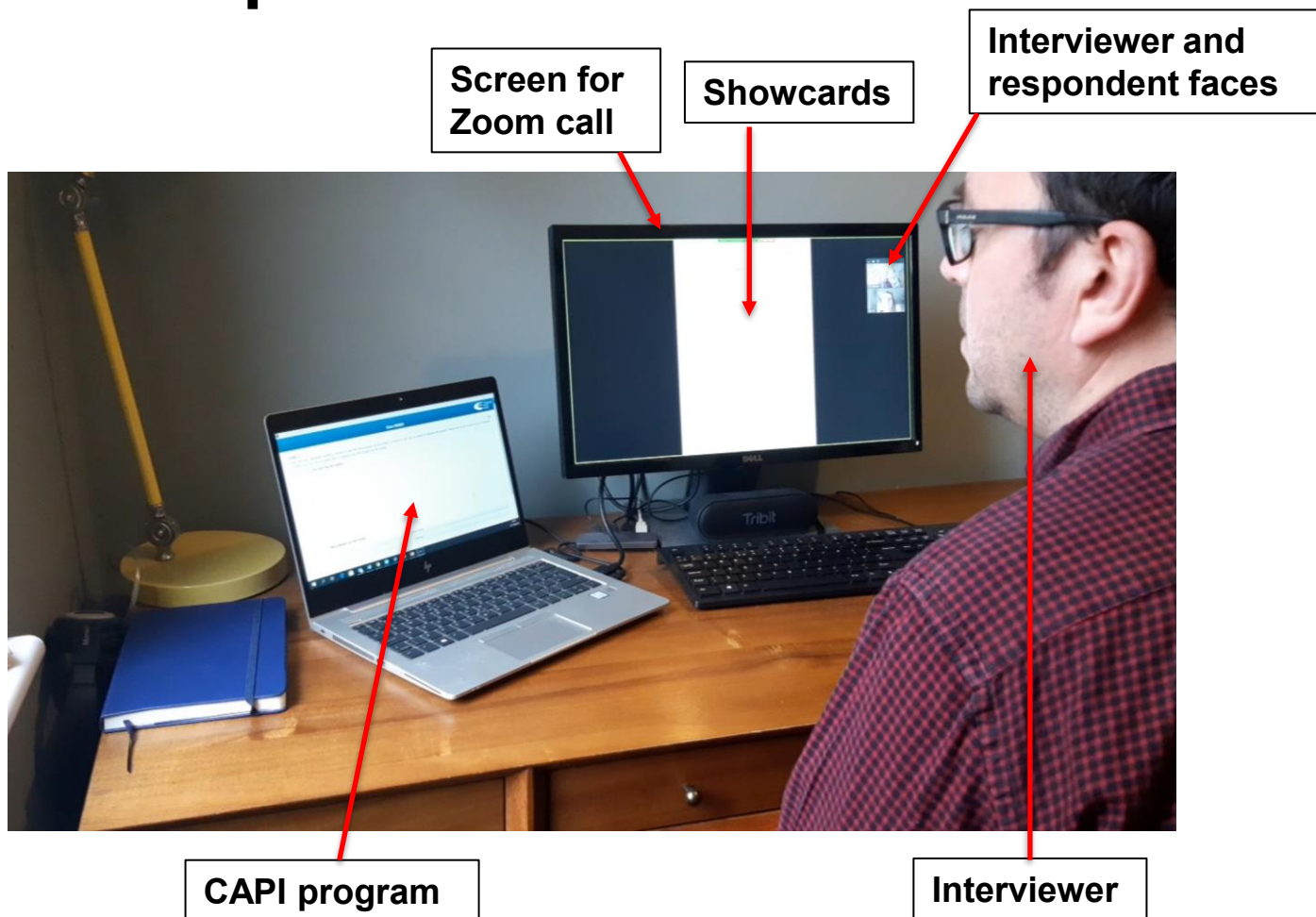
Basic approach to video interviewing (1)

- Use of video interviews would be optional for each country (judgment of suitability for target population)
- 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)
- Appointment booked for video interview and invitation with link sent to respondent
- Countries can decide whether to equip all interviewers to carry out video interviews or to establish a small specialised team for this
- Interviewer uses their CAPI device to ask questions and enter responses; separate device or screen used for video and to screen-share and move between showcards
- Respondents can use any device but larger screens recommended

Basic approach to video interviewing (2)

- Key focus on compliance with data protection and accessibility for respondents when planning approaches
- 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
- 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...



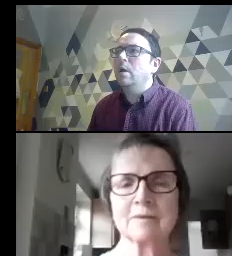
Question(s): A4

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; small-scale testing as part of pre-test generally successful
- 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 – 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
- Video still seen as promising complementary option if face-to-face fieldwork is possible

Questions we would like to answer

- Is video as a 'complementary' 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)?

For more: we are organising 2 sessions at the ESRA 2021 conference featuring 8 papers on video interviewing

Self-completion approach

Summary of self-completion approach

- National teams advised to decide by end of May whether to continue to plan for face-to-face approach or switch to self-completion
- Sequential design for self-completion (web ➡ paper)
- 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
- Mix of measures proposed for response maximisation: incentives, telephone follow-ups (where possible), face-to-face mop-up phase with non-responders
- Final protocol for self-completion and source materials to be shared with national teams in May/June (following Austria pilot)
- Data from self-completion to be released in separate file to face-to-face data

Experimental work to date

- Initial resistance from many national teams to self-completion approach – felt it was untested and would deliver extremely low response rates in their country (partly based on evidence – e.g. Ipsos MORI / Fundamental Rights Agency Survey)
- Test study in three countries where low response rates were expected – Austria, Hungary and Serbia
- Used around a 20 minute questionnaire – approx. a third of full ESS
- Very positive response rates (around 40%) with most responses online
- Mixed results on other indicators (sample composition, accuracy of person selection), though analysis ongoing
- Initial analysis suggests possibility of quite large mode effects versus face-to-face

Further testing and experimentation

- Have developed a paper self-completion version of the (near) full ESS with NatCen (36 pages); user testing carried out in the UK
- Full ESS questionnaire now programmed in English in Qualtrics
- Larger-scale pilot currently being carried out in Austria – repeating previous experiment but testing different questionnaire lengths (incl. full ESS) and conditional incentive combinations (€10 or €25)
- **Key question is whether we can achieve a sufficient response rate and sample composition with the full ESS questionnaire – will inform whether we use full version for Round 10**
- Electronic Questionnaire Device also being developed and tested – could be part of self-completion approach (at Round 10 or in future)
- Further experimentation may be conducted at R10 to examine mode differences

LIVING IN BRITAIN

We are asking for your help.

Each year a carefully selected sample of households is asked to complete a brief survey about life in Britain. This year we ask for your views on such topics as how the coronavirus may have affected you, how well the government is doing its job and about how you communicate with your family or at work. Most people will not need to answer all the questions in this booklet.



Any Questions?

If you have any questions about this questionnaire, or about the Living in Britain survey, please contact us using the details below.

tel: 0207 549 7198

e-mail: Natasha.Phillips@natcen.ac.uk

or visit www.europeansocialsurvey.org

NatCen

Social Research that works for society

We are very grateful that you are taking the time to complete our questionnaire.

Please complete the questionnaire using **BLACK** or **BLUE INK**.

If you do not know the answer to a question or would prefer not to give an answer, you may leave the question blank.

If you make a mistake or change your mind, please completely fill the box or circle to show the mistake and then tick the correct answer.

SECTION A - In this first section we will ask you about a variety of different topics starting with pandemics.

A1 Is it more important to prioritise public health or economic activity when fighting a pandemic? Please tick a circle from 0 to 10, where 0 means it is much more important to prioritise public health and 10 means it is much more important to prioritise economic activity.

Much more important to prioritise public health

Much more important to prioritise economic activity

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A2 Is it more important for governments to monitor and track the public or to maintain public privacy when fighting a pandemic?

Much more important to monitor and track the public

Much more important to maintain public privacy

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A3 Is it more important for you personally to follow government rules or to make your own decisions when fighting a pandemic?

Much more important to follow government rules

Much more important to make your own decisions

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A4 How important is it for the UK to close its borders when fighting a pandemic?

Not at all important

Extremely important

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A5 How important is it to restrict people's movement between different parts of the UK when fighting a pandemic?

Not at all important

Extremely important

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A6 On a typical day, about how much time do you spend watching, reading or listening to news about politics and current affairs? Please give your answer in hours and minutes.

HOURS	MINUTES

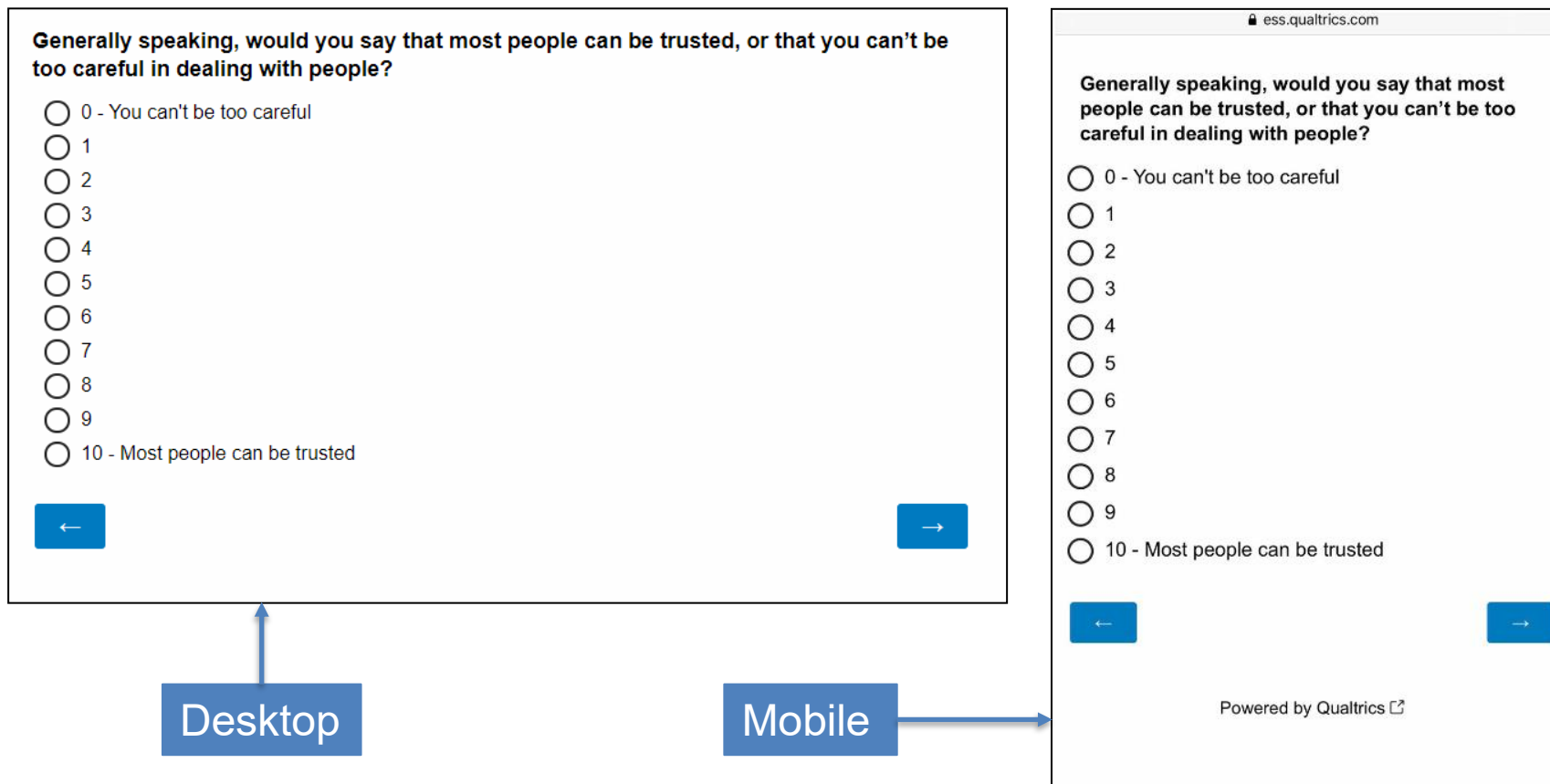
A7 People can use the Internet on different devices such as computers, tablets and smartphones. How often do you use the Internet on these or any other devices, whether for work or personal use? Please tick one box.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1 ☐ Never | } Skip to A9 on page 3 |
| 2 ☐ Only occasionally | |
| 3 ☐ A few times a week | } Continue to A8 below |
| 4 ☐ Most days | |
| 5 ☐ Every day | |

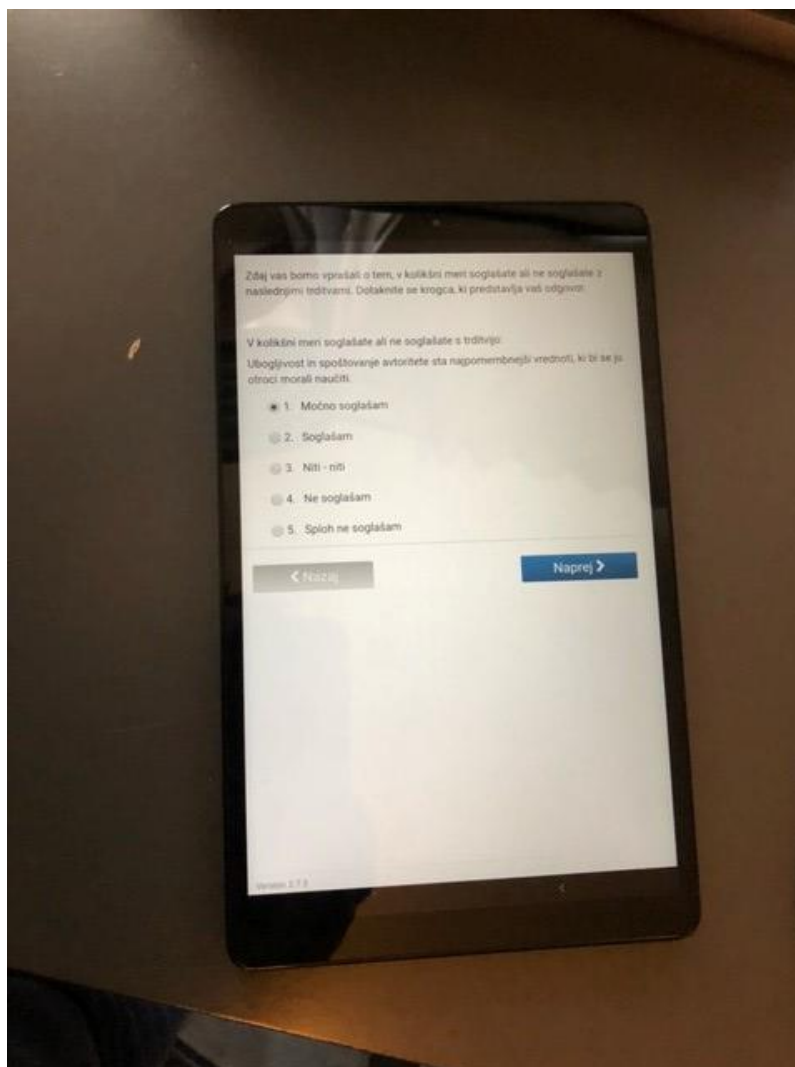
A8 On a typical day, about how much time do you spend using the Internet on a computer, tablet, smartphone or other device, whether for work or personal use?

HOURS	MINUTES

Example Qualtrics screenshots



ESS EQD



Longer-term future of ESS

Longer-term future of ESS

- Consideration of alternative modes not a 'new' thing for ESS – has been considered for some time and before pandemic expected future shift from a fully face-to-face approach (e.g. CRONOS panels)
- Pandemic may have accelerated this shift – longer-term negative impact on fieldwork capacity?
- But not straightforward! ESS includes an extremely diverse set of 30+ countries – experience, circumstances and future expectations differ hugely between them
- ESS has always relied on consistency of methodology between countries – but possible trade-off between specifying consistent approach for all countries (which may be sub-optimal for some) and adopting optimal approach for each country (allowing variation), which reduces cross-national comparability
- Upcoming meetings to consider future of ESS (mode, scale and frequency) – key issue to be considered over next few years



Thank you

Contact

✉ ess@city.ac.uk

🌐 europeansocialsurvey.org

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