

European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC)

Research Ethics Board (REB) Terms of Reference and Operational Guidelines

September 2024

Role:

The role of the ESS ERIC Research Ethics Board (REB) is to:

- Provide advice on the possible ethical implications of research carried out by or on behalf of ESS ERIC.
- Review and then approve or reject applications for research studies involving human participants and/or the processing of personal data, which are contracted directly by ESS ERIC. The decision of the committee is binding on all organs of the ESS ERIC, including the Director.

It is anticipated that around 10-15 applications/ amendments for ethical approval will be submitted to the REB during each two-year survey life cycle. This will include the ESS survey specification for each round, plans for questionnaire pre-testing in each survey round plus any new data collection projects contracted directly by ESS ERIC. New questions for each round will also be submitted to the REB prior to the finalisation of the source questionnaire. The CRONOS project (the cross-national online survey) will also submit an application for REB review prior to data collection, as well as all questions to be included in future CRONOS waves.

Outside of formal applications for ethical approval, the ESS ERIC Director may wish to consult the REB, for advice on ethical matters. This may include, but is not limited to, asking the REB to review the text outlining ethical requirements in the ESS Specification to countries or to provide informal advice on new projects prior to submission of a formal application for ethics approval.

The REB is a committee of the ESS ERIC General Assembly which will be in place at all times (Article 11.3).

Codes of Practice:

In accordance with the ESS ERIC Statutes (Article 23.3), the ESS ERIC subscribes to the [Declaration on Professional Ethics](#) of the International Statistical Institute.

Membership:

- Membership of the Board will consist of 8 members as follows:
 - One member of the ESS ERIC Methods Advisory Board;
 - One member of the ESS ERIC Scientific Advisory Board
 - Five external members with appropriate expertise in both research ethics and survey research;
 - One ESS ERIC National Coordinator;
 - The ESS ERIC Data Protection Officer (ex-officio).

- Members will be appointed by the ESS ERIC General Assembly chair on the advice of the Director. Appointments will be made on the basis of relevant experience whilst taking into account the need to maintain a balance in terms of gender and geographic representation.
 - The external members will be selected from applications to an open call advertised via the ESS website, ESS ERIC committee mailing lists and relevant professional mailing lists (e.g. ESRAnet);
 - The NC representative will be selected from applications to a separate call open to all National Coordinators of ESS member or observer countries in post at the time the call is issued;
 - Members of the Methods and Scientific Advisory Boards interested in serving will be invited to submit their application to the ESS ERIC Director.

- Members will serve for a four-year term (renewable).

- Members will be responsible for electing their own Chair from among the appointed members. The Chair will serve for four years (renewable). If the Chair is unavailable the Members may elect another to serve as Chair until the Chair is available for their duties.

- A member of research staff at ESS ERIC Headquarters will act as liaison between the REB and HQ staff members; they will be copied into communication between the REB chair and any ESS ERIC applicants.

Operational details:

The REB will meet in person once per year normally at ESS ERIC HQ at City University, London, UK. All other communication will be conducted by email or virtual meetings. In exceptional circumstances, if a research project is considered to pose significant ethical challenges

requiring additional scrutiny or discussion, the Chair may request a face-to-face meeting of the REB before reaching a decision.

- Applications for ethics approval of research projects directly contracted by ESS ERIC will be submitted to the REB in advance of the research commencing using a standard web form.
 - Applications will be submitted to the REB online. Both the Chair and the HQ liaison staff member responsible for the REB will be notified when new ethics form are submitted. The Chair is responsible for disseminating the application to the other REB members and for collating comments from them as well as agreeing on an official response to the application. The Chair will then communicate this response to the HQ liaison staff member and applicant. This response may take the form of:
 - Approval of the application
 - Approval of the application subject to further clarification/ amendment
 - Rejection of the application
 - Each application must be reviewed by at least two ordinary members of the REB, plus the Chair. Decisions are taken by simple majority. In the case of a tie, the Chair shall have a casting vote.
 - The REB should provide a response to applications within two weeks of receipt. Justification for the REB's decision should be provided.
 - Ethics applications will be accompanied (where relevant) by a detailed Data Handling Protocol. This protocol will be reviewed, agreed and monitored by the Data Protection Officer.
- Once an approved project is in progress, ESS ERIC will undertake to inform the REB if the implementation needs to change significantly from the approach outlined in the ethics application. The Chair, in consultation with other REB members, will review the proposed changes submitted as an amendment to the original application and notify ESS ERIC if, in their view, the revised approach raises any additional ethical considerations that have not been addressed.
- A record of all applications to and correspondence with the REB will be maintained by the REB Chair and HQ liaison staff member.
- Requests for informal advice will be circulated to the REB via email. Any member

willing and able to provide advice should respond directly to these requests.

Remuneration:

- Members will serve in a voluntary capacity though any travel and accommodation expenses incurred in pursuit of the role will be reimbursed by ESS ERIC in line with City, University of London procedures.
- ESS ERIC will purchase insurance to indemnify members of the REB in the conduct of their duties.

