

European Social Survey (ESS) – the impact of using fieldworkers to encourage response to the ESS

Introduction

This document is structured in two parts. The first reviews recent available evidence showing the impact on survey quality of using fieldworkers to boost response rates in self-completion surveys. The second presents design options and cost estimations of using this approach in three ESS countries.

1. Evidence review

Ultimately, this work is intended to assist the ESS team in its deliberations about the design of future ESS implementations. Ideally, reviewed studies would have been ones which shared all the key characteristics with the proposed future ESS design, these being:

- The survey should cover the general population
- The initial contact mode should not involve fieldworkers (i.e. should be postal contact)
- Data collection should be by means of self-completion (online and paper) questionnaires
- Fieldworkers should be used to encourage self-completion responses but not to administer CAPI (or CATI) interviews
- The studies should be ones that make extensive efforts to obtain good response rates: using multiple contacts, effective incentive regime, multiple data collection modes (e.g. paper as well as online)

However, because only two such studies were found, other relevant evidence has also been taken from three further studies that depart from the ideal in one of the following ways:

- fieldworkers were permitted to conduct CAPI/CATI interviews
- they used fieldworkers throughout data collection approach (delivering all invitations and reminders)
- they covered a special population

1.1. Directly relevant studies

Two reviewed studies, PAMCo (subset of 2021 data), undertaken by Ipsos in the UK, and ESS Poland Round 10, shared all key characteristics of the proposed ESS design.

PAMCo 2021

PAMCo is a long-running random probability address-based audience measurement survey undertaken in the UK.

As a result of legal restrictions on social contact during the Covid pandemic, the PAMCo data collection methodology was significantly revised. Four batches of fieldwork, undertaken between 25 March 2021 and 3 October 2021, shared exactly the characteristics proposed for future ESS rounds. For these fieldwork batches, the data collection methodology was as follows:

1. Postal stage
 - a. Postal invitation sent to random address sample inviting online completion from up to 2 household members and mentioning that paper questionnaires were available on request

- b. Reminder 1: postal reminder inviting online completion and mentioning that paper questionnaires available on request
- c. Reminder 2: postal reminder inviting online completion but also including paper questionnaire in the mailing
- 2. Fieldworker stage
 - a. Fieldworkers visited addresses not responding to the postal stage inviting online and postal questionnaire completion
 - b. As part of this interviewers were able to offer respondents tablets while they completed a CASI administered version of the online questionnaire

An incentive of £20 was offered for questionnaire completion.

Table 1 shows fieldwork outcomes for the two stages of fieldwork. The overall achieved response rate (on the base of addresses not deemed ineligible and not refusing by post) was 36%. 52% of these addresses responded during the postal stage, with 48% responding during the fieldworker stage.

Table 1: Fieldwork outcomes

Issued addresses	26,418
total in scope addresses (but excl. postal refusals)	24,746
Responding addresses during postal stage	4,665
Postal response rate on in-scope addresses (but excl. postal refusals)	18.9%
In-scope addresses (but excl. postal refusals) not responding to postal stage	20,081
Responding addresses during fieldworker stage	4,367
Increase to overall response rate from fieldworker stage	17.6%
Fieldworker stage response rate on base of in-scope addresses (but excl. postal refusals) not responding to postal stage	21.7%
All responses	9,032
Overall response rate	36.5%

Differences were consistently observed between estimates for postal stage and fieldworker stage respondents. Table 2 shows unweighted sample profiles for a range of variables broken down by stage of fieldwork. It also includes, as benchmarks, weighted pre-pandemic (July 2019 to March 2020) PAMCo estimates (considered by the PAMCo team to be closer to the underlying population values).

As can be seen, the fieldworker stage reduced bias for most of the examined variables. For example, stage 2 fieldwork increased the representation of C2DE sample members from 25.3% to 21.2%, decreased the proportion leaving education aged 21 or over from 44.8% to 38.9%, and the proportion of home owners from 71.1% to 65.1%. Other changes to sample profile were more modest, but generally decreased bias rather than increasing it.

We can safely conclude that including the fieldworker phase in PAMCo substantially increased response rates and had a generally beneficial impact on non-response bias.

Table 2: Sample profile by fieldwork stage and questionnaire type

	All	Stage 1 (postal contact)	Stage 2 (field- worker contact)	Benchmark figure (weighted PAMCo 19/20 estimate)
GENDER				
% Male	42.8%	41.9%	43.6%	49.0%
% Female	55.6%	56.6%	54.8%	51.0%
AGE				
% under 25 years	10.2%	9.3%	11.0%	14.1%
% 25-34 years	15.4%	14.8%	15.8%	16.4%
% 35-44 years	17.1%	16.1%	18.0%	15.4%
% 45-54 years	16.3%	16.4%	16.2%	16.4%
% 55-64 years	16.5%	17.5%	15.6%	15.0%
% 65-74 years	13.9%	15.7%	12.3%	12.2%
% 75+ years	10.7%	10.1%	11.1%	10.4%
SEG				
% A	4.3%	5.2%	3.5%	4.4%
% B	28.9%	34.4%	24.1%	22.1%
% C1	35.6%	35.2%	36.1%	29.7%
% C2	15.9%	13.6%	17.9%	20.1%
% D	7.9%	5.7%	9.8%	14.6%
% E	7.4%	6.0%	8.6%	9.1%
TERMINAL EDUCATION				
Still studying	6.3%	6.3%	6.2%	8.0%
16 or under	24.5%	20.2%	28.1%	37.6%

	All	Stage 1 (postal contact)	Stage 2 (field- worker contact)	Benchmark figure (weighted PAMCo 19/20 estimate)
17-20	26.1%	25.8%	26.3%	26.0%
21+	38.9%	44.8%	32.8%	28.2%
WORKING STATUS				
FT Work	41.8%	41.2%	42.4%	45.6%
PT Work (8- 29)	12.5%	13.6%	11.6%	10.8%
PT Work (under 8)	1.2%	1.3%	1.1%	0.4%
Unemployed	3.0%	2.9%	3.2%	2.8%
Retired	25.5%	27.8%	23.5%	24.1%
Not employed	5.4%	4.8%	5.9%	8.4%
FT education	5.6%	5.7%	5.6%	7.8%
HOUSEHOLD SIZE				
1	20.4%	19.8%	21.0%	15.8%
2	38.3%	41.9%	35.2%	37.3%
3	16.3%	15.3%	17.2%	17.9%
4	16.5%	15.9%	17.0%	18.1%
5+	8.5%	7.0%	9.6%	10.9%
HOME TENURE				
Owned	65.1%	71.1%	60.0%	62.0%
Rented	27.4%	23.9%	30.3%	31.7%

ESS Round 10: Poland

Like PAMCo, the ESS Round 10 implementation in Poland used self-completion questionnaires, and involved both postal and fieldworker contact stages.

Initially postal invitations were sent to 5,728 individuals named on population registers inviting them to complete online or postal questionnaires (offered concurrently). Most of the postal-stage non-respondents were then approached by fieldworkers and encouraged in-person to complete the questionnaire online or on paper.

Sample member contacts are summarised below.

1. Postal stage
 - a. Invitation letter with online link and a paper questionnaire
 - b. 7 days after a, first reminder letter with online link
 - c. 11 days after b, second reminder letter with online link
 - d. 14 days after c, third reminder letter with online link and a further paper questionnaire for half the sample
2. Fieldworker stage
 - a. Fieldworkers visited 81% of the addresses (relatively isolated addresses excluded from follow-up for cost reasons) not responding to the postal stage; fieldworkers invited online and postal (but not CAPI) questionnaire completion

Unconditional incentives of approximately 2.15 Euros were included in the initial mailing. Conditional incentives of approximately 13 Euros were offered for questionnaire completion.

Table 3 shows the percentage response figures we have found in the available documents.

Table 3: Response figures

Issued addresses	100%
Responding addresses during postal stage	31%
Addresses not responding to postal stage	69%
Responding addresses during fieldworker stage	6%
All responses	37%

The fieldworker stage (covering four fifths of addresses not responding to the postal stage) added 6 percentage points to the overall response rate.

As table 4 illustrates, the fieldworker stage reduced bias for a number of the variables examined, most substantially for size of settlement in which lived.

Table 4: Impact of fieldworker stage on selected estimates

	Postal stage estimate	Final estimate	Population benchmark
Aged 65+	24.6%	24.1%	22.2%
Years of education	14.2	13.9	12.7
In-work	54.3%	54.2%	51.1%
Living in a village	35.2%	39.9%	39.6%

1.2. Partly relevant studies

Here we briefly review four studies that share most, but not all, of the characteristics proposed for the future ESS design.

Recruitment for the AmeriSpeak Panel

AmeriSpeak is a large (approximately 26,000 households in 2017) probability-based panel, operated by NORC, designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. AmeriSpeak panellists participate in a range of studies often conducted on behalf of governmental agencies, academic institutions, the media, and commercial organizations. New panellists are recruited in two phases:

- (i) an initial recruitment phase from a probability sample of addresses selected from NORC's national sampling frame using USPS mailings, telephone phone contact, and incentives
- (ii) a more expensive non-response follow-up (NRFU) using FedEx mailings, enhanced respondent incentives, and in-person, face-to-face recruitment by field interviewers.

During the initial recruitment phase households are contacted by post and asked to complete a 10-15 minute recruitment questionnaire either online, or by calling a toll free phone-number for a CATI interview. The mailing sequence involves a prenotification mailing, a recruitment package and two reminder mailings. In addition, where possible, sampled addresses are linked to phone numbers and are called by phone.

The second phase of panel recruitment, termed NRFU (nonresponse follow-up), targets a stratified random sub-sample of the non-responders from the initial recruitment. The NRFU sample is stratified by initial recruitment stage stratification variables and consumer vendor data. Strata containing groups less likely to respond (young adults, non-Hispanic African Americans, and Hispanics) are sampled at a higher rate to increase the numbers of these groups recruited to the panel.

NRFU contact procedures involve a new recruitment invitation sent by Federal Express and including an enhanced incentive offer. Next, NRFU NORC field interviewers make face-to-face visits to the NRFU addresses to personalize recruitment and encourage panel enrolment. Where possible the interviewers administer the recruitment questionnaire in-person (CAPI) or encourage the sampled members to register online or via the toll-free telephone number.

During the 2014-2017 AmeriSpeak panel recruitment, weighted (i.e. accounting for NRFU sub-sampling), household response rates were 5.8% from initial recruitment and 27.9% from NRFU recruitment, 33.7% in all.

Comparisons with American Community Survey (ACS) benchmarks indicated that the NRFU stage improved the panel representation of the following groups even after base weighting to compensate for NRFU oversampling:

- younger panellists aged 18-34 (under-represented in initial recruitment)
- older panellists aged 55+ (over-represented in initial recruitment)
- Hispanic minorities (under-represented in initial recruitment)
- Those with no more than some high school education and those with high school graduate level education (both under-represented in initial recruitment)
- Those with at least some college education (over-represented in initial recruitment)

The NRFU stage made little or no difference to gender representation and to the representation of non-Hispanic black and Asian minorities.

Similarly, for four substantive panel surveys, a range of demographic estimates (gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, employment status, income, census region and household size) based on both initial and NRFU recruited panellists were less biased than were the corresponding estimates based on initial sample panellists only.

In summary, the NRFU exercise during panel recruitment reduced non-response bias across a range of variables. Although, AmeriSpeak recruitment differs in important ways from the proposed ESS design – sample members may react differently when asked to join a panel from when asked to take part in a lengthy one-off survey interview; and both CAPI and CATI interviews were allowed – we consider the evidence to be supportive. It is very likely that the change of contact mode brought into the sample types of respondent who would otherwise not have participated.

Ervaren Discriminatie 2018 (ED18)

Ervaren Discriminatie is a survey on experiences of discrimination conducted in the Netherlands. The 2018 survey covered the general population and was sampled by Statistics Netherlands, we assume from the population register. In common with the previous studies, ED18 used self-completion questionnaires, and involved sequential postal and fieldworker contact stages, the latter including both telephone and face to face contact but for separate samples. All responses were collected by self-completion, as per the proposed ESS method.

Sample member contacts are summarised below.

1. Postal stage
 - a. Invitation letter with online link
 - b. 14 days after a, first reminder letter with online link
 - c. 23 days after b, second reminder letter with online link and a paper questionnaire
2. Fieldworker stage
 - a. Phone contact to non-responding cases with a phone number (25-60% of samples depending on target group)
 - b. Fieldworker visits to non-responding cases at the same time as the phone contact phase. We understand this was a separate sample to the phone contact cases.
3. Subsequent postal stage: a final reminder letter was sent after the fieldworker stage

Conditional incentives of 5 Euros were offered for questionnaire completion.

Table 5 shows the response figures available in the documents provided. We understand that the face-to-face fieldworker stage was targeted towards the more difficult cases (non-responding, no-phone, ethnicity, areas, etc.), and yet it made a reasonable contribution to the achieved sample with a 6% response rate amongst these groups, on a relatively low response rate study. Its overall contribution to the response rate was modest (+0.9%) however it was offered to just 18% of the sample not responding to the initial postal stage. No figures were provided concerning its impact on survey estimates.

Table 5: Response figures

Issued cases (gross sample: individuals aged 15+, all 7 target groups)	35,727
Responding cases during initial postal stage	6,651
Initial postal response rate out of issued cases	18.6%

Total addresses not responding to initial postal stage	29,076
Issued cases to ftf fieldworker stage (18% of all non-responding cases)	5,330
Responding cases during ftf fieldworker stage	334
Increase to overall response rate from fieldworker stage	0.9%
Ftf fieldworker stage response rate out of issued cases	6.3%
All responses (including telephone fieldworker and final postal reminder)	8,582
Overall response rate out of gross issued sample	24%

ESS Round 10: Israel

As in Poland the Round 10 ESS in Israel also involved interviewers making contact with sample members and encouraging them to complete self-completion questionnaires. However, the approach differed substantially, because in Israel there was no initial postal contact phase (because of postal service unreliability) and interviewers were used to make contact from the outset.

The identification of sample addresses followed the same procedures as used in earlier face-to-face ESS rounds. Once contact was made, the sampled household was asked to select the respondent according to supplied instructions, and this person was then asked to complete an online questionnaire. After initial contact, there were three reminders for non-respondents: the first and third could be made either in person or by telephone, whereas the second reminder was always face to face and included the supply of a paper questionnaire.

Overall, a 30.3% response rate was achieved, which was comparable with those obtained in other Round 10 countries that used self-completion questionnaire data collection.

The Israeli experience, like the Polish one, demonstrates that using interviewers to administer ESS self-completion questionnaires is practicable, but, unlike the latter, it provides no evidence to show how much the inclusion of an interviewer contact phase in a mixed contact mode self-completion questionnaire survey might improve either response rates or survey estimates.

University of Michigan survey of student sexual misconduct

This survey used methods close to those proposed for the ESS (interviewer follow-up of web survey non-responders, without CAPI or CATI data-collection). Its relevance to ESS, however, is arguably diminished by the fact that the survey covered a very limited population (students).

A sample of 3,000 cases, selected from student registry records, were asked to take part in a web survey about sexual misconduct related attitudes and experiences. The contact procedures at phase 1 were as follows:

- Mailed a pre-notification letter
- Whole sample sent an invitation email
- Non-responders sent four reminder emails

Both prize draw and conditional cash incentives were offered.

For phase 2 a random selection of phase 1 non-responders were approached both by phone and in-person by interviewers in order to encourage online participation.

Weighted (to take account of sub-sampling for phase 2) response rates were 54% at phase 1, and 67% after phase 2.

Sample frame records indicated that phase 2 fieldwork reduced non-response bias for gender mix, black American representation and fraternity/sorority membership. However, it also increased bias in the undergraduate-graduate student mix. Phase 2 respondents were significantly less likely than phase 1 respondents to have experienced unwanted sexual harassment, but poststratification weighting almost completely removed the differences between phase 1 and phase 2 estimates for this variable.

This study generally supports the argument that including an interviewer follow-up phase can improve both response rates and survey estimates.

1.3. Does inclusion of a fieldworker phase improve survey quality in self-completion questionnaire surveys?

In conclusion, the reviewed studies cover a range of countries and in some cases population groups, and all provide evidence to support the inclusion of a fieldworker phase in the ESS.

To consider its potential impact on the ESS, table 6 summarises the five studies which provide information on the impact on response rates and survey estimates of a face-to-face fieldworker phase. All follow a similar design to the ESS, with a multi-contact postal (or email) phase preceding the fieldworker phase. The first three columns provide the study name, country and survey population. The fourth column provides the proportion of the responses that were received during the fieldworker phase. Given that only PAMCo followed up all non-responding cases to the postal phase, the response rates for the fieldworker phases of the other surveys are weighted to simulate the impact had all available cases been invited to this phase.

Table 6: Summary of fieldworker phase outcomes

Study	Country	Survey population	Postal stage response rate	% of responses from fieldworker stage (weighted)	Impact on survey estimates
PAMCo 2021	UK	General public	19%	48%	Improved particularly social grade & home ownership
ESS Round 10	Poland	General public	31%	19%	Improved particularly size of settlement
AmeriSpeak	USA	General public	6%	83%	Improved for a range of variables
ED18	Netherlands	Immigrant	19%	21%*	Information not provided
Sexual misconduct	USA	Student	54%	19%	Improved for most variables

* Based on responses to the initial postal and ftf fieldworker phases, excluding the additional postal contact initiated after the fieldworker phase.

As the table shows, the fieldworker phase contributed one fifth of the responses for three of the studies, rising to half for PAMCo and four fifths for the AmeriSpeak panel. What characterised

PAMCo, and particularly AmeriSpeak, was a fairly rigorous protocol at the fieldworker stage, and relatively low postal stage response rates, which likely increased the potential of the fieldworker phases on these studies. AmeriSpeak also encouraged interviewers to complete registration via CAPI, which would significantly boost the response rate but will not be permitted by the ESS. On the other hand, based on the available information, it appears that the ESS in Poland and ED18 may have required just one visit to sample members, suggesting a greater potential with additional visits. On balance, this limited evidence suggests that around 20-30% of the responses could be achieved via fieldworkers on the ESS.

2. Fieldworker follow-up designs

To further consider potential designs, costs were sought for fieldworker follow-up samples of a range of sizes from Ipsos agencies in three countries: Hungary, Italy and the United Kingdom (the cost specification is provided in the appendix). So that costs could be compared and extrapolated to other countries, each country was asked to provide costs for the same design.

The design specified was based on the expected self-completion ESS specifications. In this design, it is envisaged that the fieldworker phase takes place after a postal phase consisting of at least four postal contacts. The fieldworker phase then targets the non-responding cases. The following protocols were specified:

- a. Interviewers to attempt contact with each sample member (who did not respond to the postal stage) at their home address.
 - i. A minimum of two visits (in total) required if no contact on the first visit.
 - ii. The two visits could be on the same day¹, providing at least three hours apart, and at least one visit should be in the evening after 5pm
- b. On contact, interviewers tasked to:
 - i. Remind the contacted person (ideally the named contact in Hungary and Italy) about the letters they received, explain the purpose of the survey and answer any questions.
 - ii. For those who do not have the letters, provide a card with login details to complete the survey online and/or a paper questionnaire
 - iii. Record the outcome of each visit
 - iv. In the UK (which uses an address register), invitation letters would explain the selection process (last birthday), and interviewers would be able to explain these instructions but would not make the selection.
- c. If no contact with the household after two visits interviewers to post a reminder card/letter at the address.

The sample specifications aimed to be similar to the existing face-to-face designs of the three countries, and were specified as follows:

¹ It would also be possible to specify that visits take place on different days. However, this would mean that all PSUs would need to be worked over multiple days, increasing costs. Moreover, the assignment would be insufficient to provide a full day's work on each separate day, while interviewers would need to be compensated for taking this on over other, full day, work. For this reason, conducting visits on separate days may be a fairly inefficient option.

- a. A clustered sample consisting of 250 primary sampling units (PSUs), aiming to achieve 2,000 interviews in total if all PSUs are followed up².
- b. Average issued sample size per PSU at the fieldworker phase of 15 cases, ranging from 2³ to 21 depending on postal phase response rates⁴.
- c. Costs were sought for options to follow up 100%, 50%, 25% or 10% of the non-responding cases. For the reduced size options, it was assumed that a random selection of whole PSUs would be issued to the fieldworker phase, i.e. the clustering assumptions at point (b) above still would apply⁵.

The following table provides costs for the different options. The costs are based on 2023 Ipsos rates and cover all fieldworker direct costs and field management related to this data collection phase. They exclude costs for printing, incentive payments, a respondent helpline and researcher time for design and setup – items that will be required but could be factored into the overall project costs. The United Kingdom costs assume each PSU could be worked in one day on average; the other field teams assumed two days given their PSU sizes are more varied and likely to need more time for travelling.

Table 7: Estimated costs for fieldworker follow-up at different sample sizes

Option:	Hungary	Italy	United Kingdom
100% (3,750 cases across 250 PSUs)	€ 46,000	€ 107,000	€ 110,000
50% (1,875 cases across 125 PSUs)	€ 27,500	€ 57,000	€ 55,000
25% (945 cases across 63 PSUs)	€ 15,500	€ 28,900	€ 27,750
10% (375 cases across 25 PSUs)	€ 8,000	€ 12,000	€ 11,500

The following table provides a comparison of estimated fieldworker and postal phase costs in Hungary and the United Kingdom, for the 100% follow-up option and following the assumptions stated above (see footnote). The cost per interview of the fieldworker phase is expected to be around double the postal phase cost per interview in Hungary and 70% greater in the United Kingdom, although costs and data collection phase yield rates may be different in reality.

Table 8: Comparison of costs for postal and fieldworker phases

Option:	Hungary	United Kingdom
Postal phase estimated costs ⁶	€ 55,000	€ 165,000
Postal phase achieved interviews	1,445	1,445
Postal phase cost per interview	€ 38	€ 114

² In recent face-to-face rounds Italy and the UK have achieved slightly larger samples (around 2200) to meet ESS requirements of an effective sample size of 1500, with clustered samples, while the sample in Hungary has been partially unclustered and as a result was more efficient and could be smaller (around 1850).

³ In the expectation that PSUs with just 1 case remaining after the postal phase would not be followed up by fieldworkers. This would require a postal phase PSU yield rate of 95% which should be uncommon.

⁴ Based on issuing 21 cases per PSU at the postal phase, a 27.5% postal phase yield rate on average, 15 cases issued to the fieldworker phase and a 15% yield rate in this phase on average, giving a total of 8 interviews per PSU (6 at postal phase and 2 at fieldworker phase) and an overall yield rate of 38%. The final response rate would depend on the sample eligibility rate in each country.

⁵ The current ESS specifications envisage that proportional follow-up options will be based on a random selection of cases across all PSUs, i.e. with smaller cluster sizes. This option would reduce the clustering and assignment sizes, increasing costs and likely introducing feasibility issues for the smaller options. Commentary on options to reduce clustering is provided later in this document.

⁶ Source: Hungary, ESS national team; UK: Ipsos ballpark estimate

Option:	Hungary	United Kingdom
Fieldworker phase estimated costs	€ 46,000	€ 110,000
Fieldworker phase achieved interviews	570	570
Fieldworker phase cost per interview	€ 81	€ 193

An issue with this design, and fieldworker follow-up in general, is that for the fieldwork to be efficient the samples will usually need to be clustered. This means losing some of the benefits of the switch to self-completion, which would otherwise allow more statistically efficient unclustered designs to be introduced in most countries. Two aspects could potentially be varied to take advantage of this potential: partial follow-up designs (with clustered and unclustered sample components) and reducing the level of clustering.

2.1. Sampling a sub-set of cases for fieldworker follow-up

This approach involves sending fieldworkers to a random subset of non-responders (multi-phase approach). Weighted response rates and bias reduction will be equivalent to what would have been achieved had all non-responders been followed up. The penalty would be increased estimate standard errors, however, as it would only be necessary to cluster the sample that fieldworkers will follow up, some of the impact of weighting the sub-sample could be offset by improved efficiency from the unclustered part of the sample. For bias prone variables the overall impact of the approach on total survey error is likely to be positive.

The following table present estimates of the design effect due to clustering the fieldworker follow-up sample and for weighting the survey to account for sub-sampling where applicable⁷. The figures apply to the costed designs described above, assuming clustered samples for all fieldworker follow-up PSUs, with a mean cluster size (\bar{b}) of 8, and the intra-cluster correlation ($\bar{\rho}$) figures reported in the ESS round 9 quality report (figures shown in the table).

Table 9: Design effect estimates accounting for the impact of clustering and sub-sampling⁸

Option:	Hungary	Italy	United Kingdom
Follow-up all cases (100%)	1.25	1.48	1.33
Follow-up sub-sample 50%	1.25	1.36	1.29
Follow-up sub-sample 25%	1.56	1.62	1.58
Follow-up sub-sample 10%	2.72	2.76	2.73
Value of $\bar{\rho}$ used for calculations	0.036	0.068	0.047

All options have a cost in terms of design effect compared to an unclustered sample, with a design effect of 1 (with equivalent assumptions). In Italy and the United Kingdom, the 50% follow-up option is the most efficient follow-up design (lowest design effect) while in Hungary this option and following up all cases are equally efficient, due to the lower $\bar{\rho}$ value in Hungary. At ESS Round 9 only France, Germany and Iceland reported a $\bar{\rho}$ value below Hungary's, suggesting that the sub-sample 50% design would be more efficient than full follow-up in most countries, given a similar design with mean cluster size of 8. This option should also be more cost-effective than following up all cases given higher costs per interview than postal methods.

⁷ The impacts of calibration weighting and of weighting due to respondent selection in the UK would further increase sample design effects, but can be assumed to be more or less equal across the options.

⁸ Design effect from clustering calculated as $1 + (\bar{\rho} - 1) * \bar{b}$. Design effect from sub-sample weighting calculated as $N * \text{sum of squared weights} / \text{sum of weights squared}$

The 25% and 10% sub-sample options are less efficient due to the larger weights required to correct smaller sub-samples. However, if the costs of fieldworker data collection are much higher than postal data collection, taking a smaller sub-sample than 50% may prove to be a more cost-effective approach.

2.2. Reducing the level of clustering

A further option to improve sample efficiency is to reduce the level of clustering or eliminate it entirely. This is a feature of the current face-to-face ESS, with some countries adopting unclustered samples in larger urban centres and clustered samples in more dispersed localities, the round 9 approach in Hungary and to a smaller extent Italy, and others adopting designs which are entirely unclustered⁹.

The possibilities for adopting unclustered samples were discussed with each of the field teams in Hungary, Italy and the United Kingdom. These are all relatively large countries, with varied population densities, and potentially long travel distances between sample addresses. All teams are experienced at making resource assumptions for surveys using their standard PSU geographies, but would find it challenging to cost, let alone deliver, an unclustered sample. Doing so accurately would require a detailed analysis of a selected sample, work which was beyond the scope of this report.

The field team in the United Kingdom were able to provide information on the cost implications of different clustering levels, according to sample address density. Percentage changes are provided relative to the costs provided.

- 1 in 51-150: assumed clustering level for costs provided
- <= 1 in 50: 5% reduction in fieldwork days compared to costs provided
- 1 in 151-250: 15% increase in fieldwork days
- 1 in 251-350: 35% increase in fieldwork days
- 1 in 351-500: 75% increase in fieldwork days
- 1 in 501-750: 140% increase in fieldwork days

The UK field team also indicated that a clustering level above 1 sampled address per 750 addresses would ordinarily not be possible, believing it would be problematic to find interviewers willing to accept the work. An unclustered ESS design with fieldworker follow-up of all cases would have an average clustering level of 1 in 7,500 across the UK, ten times this limit.

2.3. Fieldworker considerations

As part of the cost gathering and evidence review, feedback was collected on how to recruit, train and motivate fieldworkers to follow up respondents. The Ipsos field teams in Italy, Hungary and the UK expected they would use their existing interviewer panels for the assignment. This is because interviewer recruitment costs are very high, and as a one-off assignment of modest scale fresh recruitment efforts for the ESS are unlikely to be cost-effective. That said, as most agencies pay their interviewers based on performance, a lot of interviewers will not like this type of work as they will feel less control over their earning potential. Although this can be reflected in pay structures, such as by paying per successful contact as well as successful interviews, high performing interviewers may still be able to earn more working on standard CAPI surveys.

This was the experience on Ipsos' PAMCo study, where initially many interviewers felt frustrated that they were not able to complete the survey with respondents. As there was no alternative during

⁹ At round 9 Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland all adopted fully unclustered designs.

the pandemic the team lost a lot of interviewers from the panel. However, as PAMCo is a long-running study they were able to recruit interviewers who were a better fit for the task. Important attributes included exchanging contact details to be able to chase respondents later, and it is also believed that some of the more successful interviewers went outside of the project scope such as by inventing fictitious deadlines or waiting for the respondent to complete the interview.

Some of these points were repeated by ESS national coordinators, based on their experiences of using fieldworkers at Round 10. The national coordinator for Israel noted that senior interviewers did not find the work motivating, as they did not feel their work had the same impact as on a CAPI survey. Moreover, it was difficult to recruit for Round 10 in Israel, contrary to expectations, given the abundant supply of labour during the COVID-19 pandemic. It appeared that the work was not sufficiently well paid, and potential recruits chose not to work rather than take it on.

The national coordinator for Poland noted that interviewers would have preferred to be able to complete interviews themselves, at least in some circumstances. Specifically, interviewers reported helping some (mainly older) respondents complete the interview on paper, as they could not understand the instructions and otherwise would not have taken part (these interviews were excluded, up to n=19). As part of the approach in Poland fieldworkers asked respondents a small number of questions about the survey, including their preferred mode of completion. Respondents expressed a preference for CAPI over other modes (see below).

Mode preferences in Poland, out of 1255 respondents who did not participate in the postal phase and were successfully contacted by fieldworkers:

- 41%: Not interested in taking part in such surveys
- 31%: I am visited by an interviewer who asks me questions and notes the answers
- 11%: I complete the paper questionnaire myself, which is collected from me by a fieldworker
- 10%: I complete the web questionnaire myself
- 6%: I complete the paper questionnaire myself, which I send back using a return envelope

We expect issues of interviewer motivation to be exacerbated for the fieldworker follow-up task with an unclustered sample, given fieldworkers will spend very little time speaking to respondents, compared with a standard survey involving CAPI interviews, and so the vast majority of the job would involve travelling. Moreover, it is likely that fieldworkers will need access to a car to be able to reach a dispersed sample efficiently. This is common for Ipsos fieldworkers in the UK but less common in Hungary, where many fieldworkers use public transport to reach their assigned PSUs and then move between addresses on foot. These issues may be less problematic in smaller countries.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, it is highly likely that a fieldworker phase would make a positive and significant contribution to response rates and also to bias reduction, at least for some variables. Given this, one of its potential benefits could be to smooth some of the differences between countries, which might arise if the self-completion approach is more successful in some countries than others. For instance, fieldworkers may prompt relatively more of the digitally excluded or elderly populations to complete the survey. This would mean that cross-country comparisons are put on a more solid footing.

The method may have greater potential if fieldworkers are able to provide more assistance than envisaged in the current procedures. It may be worth looking at whether interviewers could be allowed to complete interviews with respondents as a last resort. However, this would introduce a

combination of self-administered and interviewer-administered approaches, and subsequent measurement issues.

A disadvantage of a fieldworker phase is that in most countries the fieldworker sample will need to be clustered, eroding some of the sample precision that could be achieved with an unclustered, solely postal approach. A multi-phase approach with half the sample followed up by fieldworkers would appear to strike a good balance, in precision terms, between the impacts of clustering and sub-sample weighting. Nevertheless, based on the countries reviewed, this option will require a sample size around 25-35% larger to overcome the impact of clustering half the sample, increasing costs.

The additional costs of a fieldworker phase are likely to be significant, estimated at nearly double in Hungary and an additional two-thirds in the United Kingdom, compared to a solely postal approach. Its feasibility may ultimately depend on national budgets and practices, which may vary substantially to the countries considered in this review. If affordable, it appears a worthwhile investment as a bias reduction safety net, at least for the first self-completion round, whereafter its impact could be reviewed for future rounds.

APPENDIX – COST SPECIFICATION

This specification is to provide indicative costs for a face-to-face follow-up to a postal survey in your country. Please return the Excel cost sheet with your budget estimations **on/by Tuesday, May 2**. Kindly also **provide the additional information requested** in the cost sheet.

Background

The European Social Survey (ESS, <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>) is a high-quality cross-national survey that has been conducted across Europe since its establishment in 2001. It takes place every two years, to date using face-to-face interviews and probability sampling, and has covered more than 30 countries. The survey measures attitudes, beliefs and behaviour across a range of social research topics, in interviews lasting around 50-60 minutes.

The ESS plans to move to a **fully self-completion data collection approach** in future years, with online interviews as the primary mode and paper questionnaires offered as an alternative.

Ipsos is advising the ESS HQ team on aspects of this transition, the purpose of this RFQ is to inform this advice. Your input will play an important role in shaping the future design of the ESS and so it is important the costs are as accurate as possible. We are requesting costs from Hungary, Italy and the UK to provide a range of costs relevant to other countries.

Survey design

The survey targets adults 16+ with nationally representative samples and full country coverage. In Hungary and Italy a named sample will be drawn from population/municipal registers, in the UK an address sample will be drawn from PAF. A clustered sample design will be used for sample with fieldworker follow-up.

The data collection approach will be as follows:

- 1. Postal stage (not part of this costing, information provided for context):**
 - a. Postal invitation sent to sample inviting online completion, likely including a small unconditional incentive ideally cash
 - b. Reminder 1: postal reminder inviting online completion
 - c. Reminder 2: postal reminder inviting online completion but also including paper questionnaire in the mailing
 - d. Reminder 3: postal reminder inviting online completion and mentioning the paper questionnaire

We expect around a 25-30% response rate to the postal phase, with non-responding cases issued to the fieldworker phase.

2. Face-to-face reminder stage

- a. Interviewers will attempt contact with each sample member (who did not respond to the postal stage) at their home address.
 - i. A minimum of 2 visits (in total) will be required if no contact on the first visit.
 - ii. The 2 visits can be on the same day, providing they are at least three hours apart, and at least 1x visit should be in the evening after 5pm
- b. Interviewers will be instructed to (c.2-3 minutes conversation per household on average):

- i. Remind the person about the letters they received, explain the purpose of the survey and answer any questions.
 - ii. For those who do not have the letters, provide a card with login details to complete online or a paper questionnaire (as preferred by the respondent)
 - iii. Record the outcome at each address (iField/electronic contact sheet)
 - iv. In the UK, invitation letters will explain the selection process (last birthday). Interviewers will be able to explain the instructions but will not be responsible for making a selection.
- c. If no contact is made with the household after 2 visits the interviewer will post a reminder card at the address.

Conditional incentives of around EUR 10-20 will also be offered for survey completion in both postal and face-to-face stages.

Interviewers may not complete interviews with respondents. However, they should be encouraged to use their initiative to obtain completes, for example through reminder phone calls or offering to collect paper questionnaires.

Sample and clustering:

- The sample for face-to-face follow-up will be clustered into primary sampling units (PSUs). You should assume:
 - o An average of 15 cases (individuals/addresses) per PSU will be issued to interviewers at the face-to-face stage
 - o The number of cases will vary across PSUs, ranging from 21 (the maximum, meaning a zero postal-stage response) to as low as 2 cases (PSUs with just 1 case will be dropped). However, most PSUs will be closer to the average and within c.10-18 cases.
- The total sample will consist of 250 PSUs. To enable us to consider different designs cost options are requested for working different numbers of PSUs:
 - o all PSUs: 250 PSUs * 15 cases on average = total 3,750 cases to contact
 - o 50% of the PSUs: 125 PSUs * 15 cases on average = total 1,875 cases to contact
 - o 25% of the PSUs: 63 PSUs * 15 cases on average = total 945 cases to contact
 - o 10% of the PSUs: 25 PSUs * 15 cases on average = total 375 cases to contact

Other costs and assumptions

- Monitoring and interviewer pay: no sample size target commitment is required, although the task should be carefully monitored to ensure interviewers adhere to the full protocols. However, interviewer pay should reflect/motivate successful placement. For instance, this could be structured by offering a base fee for placement in person, with bonus if online/paper complete achieved. Dropping the invitation through the mailbox (no contact cases) could attract a lower rate of pay.
- Training/instructions: interviewers to be issued with instructions covering the task. Training (e.g. webinar) should be provided according to usual practices.
- Sampling frames: assume access is already arranged/budgeted – no need to include any time/costs for this
- Other costs: Costs for printing materials, hosting a helpline, payment of incentives should not be included, we will budget this centrally

