



Social Sciences

European Social Survey (ESS) - Developmental Projects

Subsidy Round 2009

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Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research

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1 Introduction

The European Social Survey [ESS] is an international database¹, which has become a prime instrument for innovative comparative research on social and political attitudes. The data are gathered in 34 European countries through surveys held once every two years. Until now the ESS has collected three rounds of survey data (2002-2004-2006). The fourth round (2008) is in the field. The data will become available on 1 September 2009.

In each round, interviews are held with approximately 50,000 people in Europe (about 1,800 in each country) on a broad range of social and political attitudes and social backgrounds. The interview format is strictly replicated, creating ample opportunities for international comparative research with a longitudinal perspective. The objective of the ESS is to design, develop and run a conceptually well-anchored and methodologically bullet-proof study of changing social attitudes and values. Achieving these aims in a cross-national context requires optimal comparability in the implementation of the study in all participating countries. This 'principle of equality or equivalence' applies to sample selection, translation of the questionnaire as well as to all methods and processes. Moreover, all procedures and outcomes are comprehensively documented in a standard manner.

Due to their high quality, broad scope and easy accessibility, the ESS data have become an outstanding source for comparative research in the social and political sciences and the ESS is increasingly setting new standards for survey research in these and other disciplines (such as demography, geography, social psychology, epidemiology and social medicine) at both national and international level. Currently available download statistics show that there are over 17,000 users of ESS data in more than 170 countries. Users in the Netherlands rank in the top ten. Research based on ESS data has yielded more than 400 scientific publications in the first four years of the data's availability (2003-2007)².

Researchers from the Netherlands have been at the forefront of developments in the ESS from the very beginning. The ESS research community in the Netherlands is comparatively very active, with over 900 data downloads in four years. User statistics³ for the Netherlands show a broad origin of researchers, from both inside and outside academic institutions.

¹ See: <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>. The information in this section has been abstracted from the ESS website.

² See: <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>. > ESS Bibliography.

³ These user download statistics for the Netherlands have been made available to DANS by NSD, the ESS's Norwegian data archive.

2 Aim

The aim of this subsidy round is to fund three developmental projects designed to help the ESS to further refine its methodology and enlarge its scope, as well as to improve the quality of the Dutch ESS data and to support researchers in the Netherlands in keeping their leading role in the further advancement of the ESS.

Researchers who are interested in implementing one of the three developmental projects are requested to send in an application for the projects described below.

Developmental project (DEVO #1): **Experimenting with mixed modes of data collection.** Despite its successes in increasing response to previously unreachable levels, response rates in ESS fieldwork in the Netherlands are still unsatisfactory in some hard-to-reach subgroups. The most prominent among these groups are (a) young adolescents (18-25), either living with their parents or independently, (b) ethnic minorities and (c) couples in which both spouses are employed full-time. The face-to-face strategy that the ESS applies with respect to the initial approach of respondents has not been very successful in reaching these groups. The developmental project will experiment with a multi-mode design in which respondents are approached and can choose between different response modes, such as by e-mail or online. This project is a follow-up to the ESS-prep experiments⁴ currently conducted using mixed-mode approaches for the general sample. Mixed-mode data collection gives rise to a multitude of complications: we have to meet the challenges of selective response and measurement bias using carefully calibrated control groups. The aim of the project is not so much to reduce the costs of data collection (although that could be a by-product), but to achieve better representativeness in these hard-to-reach groups. The project's budget will allow for a (PhD) research project that will probe alternative ways of data collection among hard-to-reach groups.

Developmental project (DEVO #2): **Implementing a panel component.** At present, the ESS is designed as a strictly replicated cross-sectional dataset. Historical developments are inferred by comparing results from different respondents interviewed in separate rounds. While comparing cross-sections is a perfectly acceptable – in fact, even the best – strategy to assess historical trends in social and political attitudes (Firebaugh, 2008), much would be gained from re-interviewing (some of) the respondents in a subsequent wave. Such panel data would give access to individual-level estimates of social change, in which individual change and measurement unreliability become completely separable. The importance of such data would be that they would allow for a simplex design to estimate validity and reliability of measures (Alwin, 2007). This would be a welcome complement to the MTMM design currently in place. Comparison of the simplex design with MTMM would offer the opportunity of investigating the short-term stability and variability of the main characteristics of the ESS and to gain a better insight into the different sources of fluctuation and 'unreliability'. Ideally, this panel setup would be extended in time, at least partially, to be able to identify the true underlying trends. An obvious way to conduct these panel rounds are postal follow-ups to the main interview, which have

⁴ For more information about the ESS preparatory infrastructure phase, please check the ESS website www.europeansocialsurvey.org: http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=239:essprep&catid=113:funding&Itemid=338

been shown to have satisfactory response rates as respondents have already committed to participate. While we do not forecast that the ESS as a whole will move towards using a panel format (as this would considerably complicate the use of data for end users), we see room for a developmental project that might lead to replication in some other countries. As the ESS questionnaire is rather long for a postal write-in questionnaire, a split ballot design will be used.

Developmental project (DEVO #3): **Improving the measurement of social background variables.** The ESS uses a combination of indicators of social and political attitudes and social background variables. While social and political attitudes are usually analysed in parts, depending on the specific interests of the researchers, social background variables occur in many, if not all analyses of ESS data. The comparative measurement of these variables is a challenge for cross-national research, in particular as these variables are strongly connected to institutions that are specific to countries, such as the education system, the family, migration policies, and the labour market, and whose underlying structure is constantly subject to change. While the ESS is an improvement over comparable and competing projects (such as Eurobarometer, EVS, IALS, ISSP, PISA, and SHARE) as it provides richer and better quality social background measures, much remains to be desired. The standardised education measure has been shown to contain major biases in some countries (Schneider 2008), occupational mobility (in particular relative to parental occupation) is insufficiently measured (Ganzeboom 2007), migration status is only crudely covered (Güveli, 2007; Fleischman & Dronkers, 2008) and personal income is simply lacking in the present ESS design. The aim of the developmental project is to take initiatives to improve the core ESS design, first by expanding the Dutch database (some of the improvements have already been implemented) and second by generating convincing evidence that such improvements are needed for the ESS project at large. The requested budget covers a (Postdoc) research project that will analyse existing social background information in the ESS and develop recommendations on adding new and improved questions to the survey after being tried first in the Dutch questionnaire. A similar strategy has been successfully applied in the past and has led to the implementation of changes in questions on parental occupations in the ESS.

3 Guidelines for application

3.1 Who can apply

Applications can be submitted by post-PhD researchers from Dutch universities and institutes recognised by the NWO (for more information, please see the General Terms and Conditions for NWO Grants on the [NWO website](#)).

3.2 What can be applied for

NWO supplies a maximum grant for each of the three developmental projects. The budget is earmarked for personnel and additional data collection. Please note that should the total budget required for the proposed research activities exceed the maximum grant, the applicant should find additional funding sources. Additional funding could be provided by the host institution or institutions involved in related research programmes. Guarantees for additional funding should be provided.

Funding for development project # 1:

Two years Postdoc fulltime (to be spread over a maximum of three years)	€ 135,000
Additional data collection	€ 200,000

Total funding DEVO # 1:	€ 335,000

Funding for developmental project #2:

One and a half years Postdoc fulltime (to be spread over a maximum of six years)	€ 110,000
Additional data collection	€ 300,000

Total funding DEVO # 2:	€ 410,000

Funding for developmental project #3:

Two years two Postdocs fulltime (to be spread over a maximum of three years)	€ 265,000
No additional data collection	

Total funding DEVO # 3:	€ 265,000

No additional funding is available.

Reimbursable costs

This subsidy can be used to pay the costs of the project, which includes:

- Postdoctoral positions. For the personnel costs per project, please see above;
- The purchase of special equipment and non-durable items required for the research, with the exception of computers;
- Conducting additional data collection interviews, surveys and experiments.

Non-reimbursable costs

Non-reimbursable costs are:

- The costs of computer use at university computing centres and the costs of laboratory time;
- Housing, overhead and depreciation costs;
- The costs of equipment, non-durable items or administrative or technical assistance, which should be part of the usual facilities at a university or research

institute, unless the funded research requires the use of facilities that clearly exceeds normal use.

3.3 When can applications be submitted

Closing date for submission of applications is 3 November 2009, 12 noon.

3.4 Drawing up an application

The application consists of two parts. Part one describes the scientific standing, background and experience of the applicant, part two describes the proposal for the implementation of the developmental project. Only applications that use the application form provided on the website will be accepted. All applications are evaluated on the basis of a fixed set of criteria: Scientific Quality, Track Record and Relevance. For a detailed overview of the criteria used to evaluate the proposals, please see Section 4.2.

3.5 Specific conditions

The General Terms and Conditions of NWO Grants are applicable. See http://www.nwo.nl/nwohome.nsf/pages/SPES_5VEDDR_Eng

3.6 Submitting an application

Applications can only be submitted using the Iris electronic application system. To use the Iris system, you need to request an access code on the NWO website: <http://www.iris.nwo.nl>. More information on Iris is available from the NWO website. If you have questions of a technical nature, please contact the Iris service desk. They can be reached by telephone on weekdays between 11 am and 5 pm on +31 (0)900 - 696 47 47 or by email: iris@nwo.nl.

The application should be made on the correct and fully completed application form and must meet all criteria in terms of format, length of text, etc. The application form and guidelines can be downloaded from the NWO website (www.nwo.nl/ESS).

4 Assessment procedure

4.1 Procedure

Proposals are reviewed by international peers (anonymous). Applicants will then have the opportunity to respond to the issues raised in the review reports. The ESSNeth Committee evaluates and ranks the proposals on the basis of the proposal, peer review reports, the applicants' responses to these reports and the criteria mentioned below. Based on the ranking, the Social Sciences Division Board takes a final decision on funding. Only one application may be awarded for each developmental project. All applicants will be informed in writing about the outcome of the final selection procedure.

Timetable

The indicative timeline for the round of subsidy applications is as follows. You will be asked to reply to the referees' comments in February. The final award decision has been provisionally set for April/May 2010.

It is possible, should there be unforeseen circumstances, that the application and assessment procedure could be changed. Applicants will be notified of any changes immediately.

4.2 Criteria

The programme secretarial office will screen all applications for compliance with the formal requirements as mentioned on the application form. The General Terms and Conditions for NWO Grants apply (for more information, please see the [NWO-website](#)). Applicants will receive written confirmation of receipt within two weeks of the deadline, stating whether the application has been accepted or refused.

An application will not be processed if one or more of the following applies:

- The application form is inaccurate, incomplete or not completed according to the instructions;
- The application was not submitted via the Iris system;
- The application was not submitted on time.

All applications are evaluated on the basis of a fixed set of criteria:

Track Record

- The quality and competence of the principal investigator;
- First-hand familiarity with survey methodology and procedures;
- Knowledge about past national or sub-national studies of a similar nature and, ideally, with experience of cross-national research;
- Scientific standing (publications, international visibility) and academic leadership (PhD supervision; international network).

Scientific Quality

- Quality of the proposed approach;
- Originality and innovative character of the approach;
- Adequacy and effectiveness of the approach;
- Feasibility, including the presence of a sound management plan.

Relevance

- Close fit to the objectives of the ESS.

4.3 Composition of committee

The ESSNeth Committee is responsible for the implementation of the ESS fieldwork and the developmental projects. It will take decisions and bear responsibility for coordinating and monitoring the survey and projects. In addition, it will stimulate knowledge exchange between science, policy and society.

5 Other information

5.1 Contact

For more information and the application guidelines, please visit the ESS website (www.nwo.nl/ess).

The programme office is managed by:

- Anne Westendorp MA
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Please contact the NWO office if you have any queries.