

# Exploring public attitudes, informing public policy

Selected findings from the first three rounds



**“ The European Social Survey has developed a unique scientific methodology for mapping changes in social attitudes... providing an authoritative source of EU data for academics and policy makers ”**

Janez Potočnik, EU Commissioner  
for Science and Research

Janez Potočnik reflects on the award of the Descartes Prize for 'excellence in scientific collaborative research' to the ESS, during his opening speech at the Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities in Europe, European Parliament, 2005

# Attitude shifts in a changing Europe

## It was in the 1990s that the European Science Foundation first identified the need for a new regular and rigorous Europe-wide survey to chart changes in social values throughout Europe

This booklet contains summaries of a number of findings from the European Social Survey (ESS), which started in 2001 and is now in its fourth biennial round. Seed-funded in the 1990s by the European Science Foundation, it has since been funded by the European Commission and up to 34 national Research Councils throughout Europe (26 EU countries and 8 others). None has ever withdrawn from the study.

The ESS has three linked aims:

- 1** To measure changes in public attitudes and behaviour patterns both over time and across nations
- 2** To improve the quality of comparative quantitative measurement in Europe and beyond
- 3** To establish robust attitudinal indicators to stand alongside existing behavioural and factual indicators of national well-being

In 2005, the ESS became the first social science project to win the Descartes Prize for 'excellence in scientific collaborative research'. It has subsequently been selected as one of a small number of projects which form part of the European Roadmap for Research Infrastructures. In 2008 a top-level review commissioned by its 35 funders concluded that the ESS:

*'...has generated new insights and knowledge on key issues, problems, and topics within the social sciences' ... and... 'improved standards of methodological rigour and transparency, raising international standards of fieldwork, questionnaire design and sampling for other European social surveys and market research, especially in countries which lack accumulated expertise in survey research'.*

So the ESS has swiftly become an authoritative source of reliable data about Europe's evolving social fabric and a key vehicle for knowledge transfer. This booklet focuses on a selection of published findings from the accumulated ESS data sets which are widely quarried by academics, researchers, politicians, policy-makers and journalists. ◀

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# Addressing key issues


## The ESS questionnaires cover a wide range of topics that tap into key issues facing contemporary Europe

Some questions are asked in every round of the survey. Others are asked on a rotating basis by leading academic specialists in the field in association with questionnaire design specialists within the ESS team. The subjects and authors of rotating modules are selected following a Europe-wide competition at each round.

ESS questionnaire topics include:

- Citizen involvement and democracy
- Moral and social values
- Trust in institutions
- Social capital and social trust
- Immigration and asylum
- Family and working life
- National, ethnic and religious identities
- Economic morality
- Political values and engagement
- Health and social care
- Personal and social well-being
- Perceptions of the life course
- Crime and personal security
- Household circumstances
- Attitudes to welfare
- Financial circumstances
- Attitudes to and experience of ageism
- Education and occupation
- Social exclusion
- Socio-demographic characteristics

Investigating public attitudes in up to 30 European countries every two years and disseminating the results without delay enables governments, policy analysts and scholars to keep up to date on social trends that affect how democracy is working and how European citizens perceive their lives, their nations and the world.

In an era of falling political participation and low electoral turnout, the ESS is becoming an ever more important aid to good government at both a national and European level. Supplementing other reliable sources of official data which chart changes in people's social and economic circumstances or behaviour, the ESS also provides rigorous cross-national data about shifts in people's long-term perceptions, preferences, preoccupations and concerns. 

### ESS FACT

The EC Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizen has derived a set of unique indicators of 'active citizenship' based on ESS data

# The European social model

**Does Europe's model of welfare provision reduce individual acts of social support?**

One of Europe's most enduring contributions has been its model of welfare provision in which everyone's taxes contribute to the health and financial security of all. But from time to time the system has come under fire from those who argue that societies actually function better when citizens spontaneously interact with and care for one another. Such activity supposedly withers in welfare states where formal government provision 'crowds out' individual acts of social support because people step aside and leave things to the state. The more this happens, they suggest, the less frequent will be even the most basic acts of solidarity such as doing a sick neighbour's shopping.

Tom van der Meer and colleagues from Radboud University in the Netherlands have investigated these claims by drawing on data from the first round of the ESS\*. They analysed data on individual help given to fellow citizens and linked it to aggregate national data on social security expenditure and average income.

Their key findings are that:

- Higher social security spending does not diminish individual acts of social support
- There is no evidence for the notion that the welfare state 'crowds out' social solidarity
- The higher the average income in a country, so the more inclined are its citizens to provide for one another
- Economic security strengthens rather than weakens social ties, perhaps because individuals more readily turn their attention to others only once their own basic needs are met

These conclusions were made possible by the scale of the ESS's large cross-national dataset which enabled common patterns to be identified. The unusually detailed background data in the ESS enabled the effects of certain national differences – such as the likelihood of living in a large family – to be taken into account in the analysis, making it possible to identify the 'independent' impact of increases in social security spending and differences in average income between countries. ◀

## ESS FACT

A large programme of methodological research is carried out by the ESS team to investigate and improve questionnaire design, fieldwork protocols and response rates, and to achieve cost savings without resulting losses in data quality

\*Van der Meer, T., Scheepers, P. and te Grotenhuis, M. (2008), 'Does the state affect the informal connections between its citizens? New institutionalist explanations of social participation in everyday life', in: H. Meulemann (ed), *Social capital in Europe: similarity of countries and diversity of people? Multi-level analyses of the European Social Survey 2002*, Leiden & Boston: Brill.

# Ageing and financial security

**Many people, especially women, are concerned about the adequacy of their pension provision. But these worries are much more widespread in some countries than in others**

With an ageing population in Europe, how well-prepared are people for their retirement, especially at a time when occupational and state pensions are under acute pressure?

What is clear from ESS data is that many Europeans are worried about whether they will have an adequate income to cover their retirement years. As always, variations between countries are large, with over half of those in some countries and only one-tenth of people in others expressing concern. People who are most worried are also more inclined to see it as 'the government's responsibility' to provide an adequate standard of living for old people.

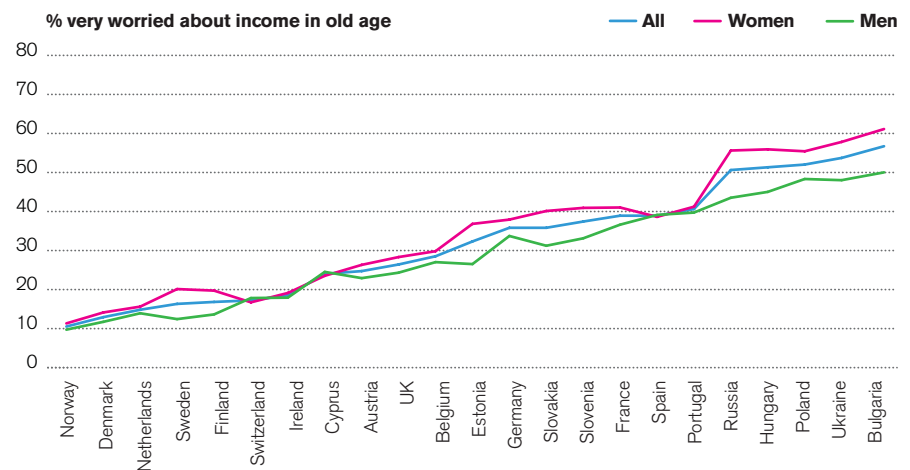
The graph reveals that women in almost all countries are especially concerned that their income in retirement will be too small to see them through their later years, and that these concerns are most marked in many Eastern European countries – where there is already more overall concern.

Long-term trend data via the ESS will enable these issues to be tracked and be related to actual changes in pension provision in each country. ☞

**“ People who are most worried are also more inclined to see it as ‘the government’s responsibility’ to provide an adequate standard of living for old people ”**

## ESS FACT

The twin objectives of the ESS are to provide rigorous data that contribute to European governance and to improve methods of comparative social measurement



ESS 2006/7 % very worried is derived from those answering between 8 and 10 on a scale where 0 is not worried at all and 10 is extremely worried.

# A digital divide?

**Large disparities exist across Europe in online access and daily internet usage**

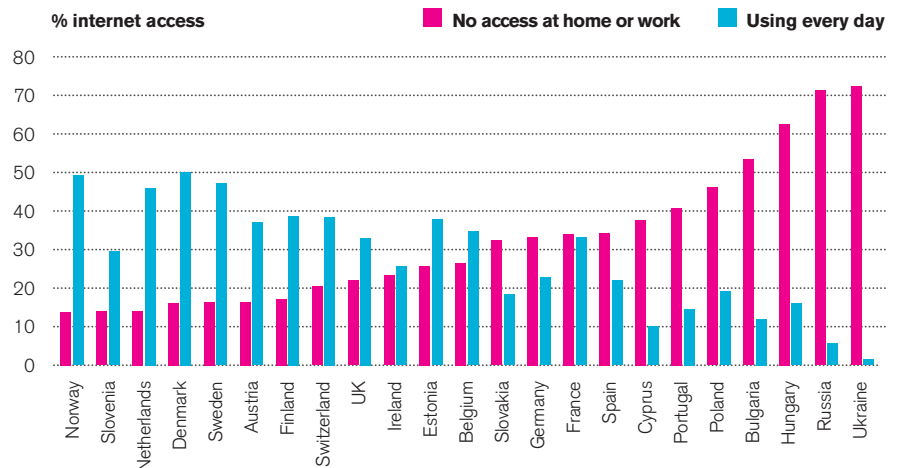
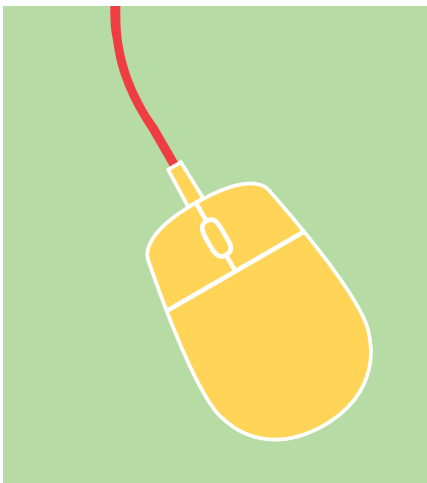
It is well-known that internet access throughout the world made remarkable gains between 2002 and 2006. But ESS data reveal that this is by no means the whole story.

Although the *rate* of growth in internet access has been almost as high in, say, Russia and Ukraine as in the Nordic countries, the discrepancies between nations remain very large because of their different starting-points. So, by the time of the most recent reading in 2006, fewer than 2 in 10 people in Nordic countries had no internet access, compared to over 7 in 10 Russians or Ukrainians who did not. The chart provides the evidence that, despite massive recent growth, a digital divide in Europe is still clearly in evidence.

The disparity in the height of the pink bars – representing each country's level of internet penetration – tells its own story. But the height of the blue bars – representing

each country's daily use of the internet – highlight the existence of four reasonably distinct groups of countries. In the highest group are Denmark, Norway, Sweden and The Netherlands, where daily internet use exceeds 45%. In the second group is a larger cluster including Finland, Switzerland, Austria, Estonia, Belgium, France and the UK, where it exceeds 30%. In the third group are Slovenia, Ireland, Germany and Spain, where daily use exceeds 20%. And in the lowest group are Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Portugal, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Russia and Ukraine.

Further analysis reveals, however, that four particular countries – France, Spain, Germany and the UK – are especially polarized by an *internal* digital divide. Large proportions of the public in those countries (in France up to a third of respondents) are at one or other pole of the usage scale – that is, closer to an 'all or nothing' pattern. ◀



ESS 2006/7

## A question of trust

**A connection between trust in fellow citizens and confidence in political and social institutions has been established**

If evidence were needed of the importance to democratic societies of a large measure of public trust and confidence in their political and economic institutions, then events in 2008 surely provided it.

The widespread loss of confidence in the banking system among investors, depositors and the banks themselves created serious instability. But public confidence in political and national institutions is only part of the story. It is also important for citizens broadly to trust one another. Although political and social trust have long been thought to be linked, political scientists have until now found it difficult to measure whether and to what extent this was true in different societies.

**“ Individuals with the greatest trust in their fellow citizens also tend to have the highest levels of confidence in public institutions such as the police, the legal system, parliament and politicians ”**

Now, according to a forthcoming article in a leading academic journal, the problem seems to have diminished. The authors describe the ESS as the first international study to provide reliable evidence on this elusive link, not just because of 'the high quality of the ESS data', but also because it uses 'more sensitive measurement scales'\*.

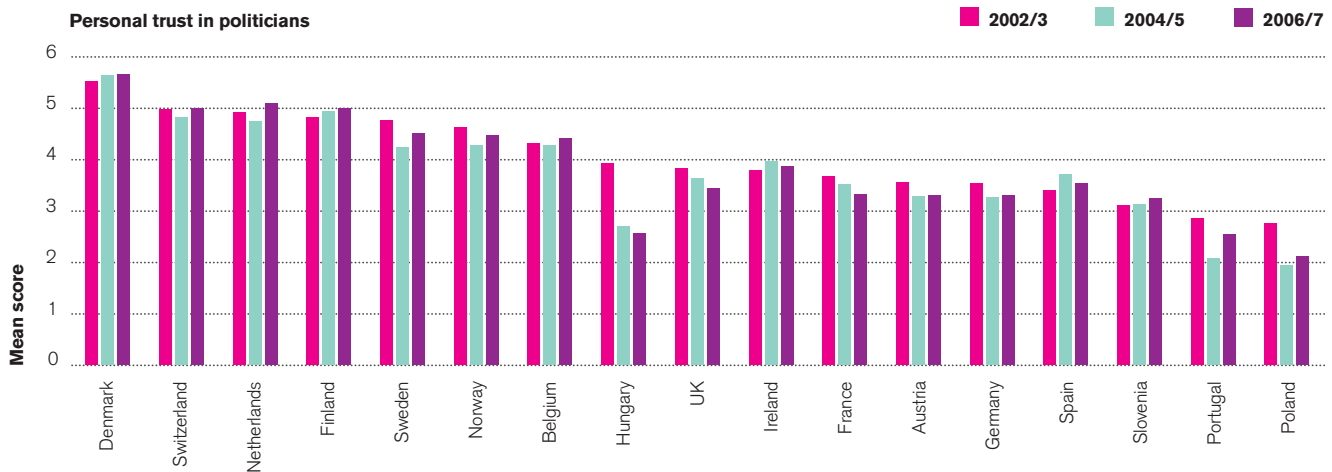
### ESS FACT

The ESS data website has over 20,000 registered users so far from academic and policy communities, over 12,000 of whom have downloaded all or part of the data sets



\*Zmerli, S and Newton, K (forthcoming 2009), 'Social trust and attitudes towards democracy', *Public Opinion Quarterly*





**Note:** Numbers are national average scores from a scale ranging from 0–10, with 10 indicating a high level of trust in politicians. ESS 2002/3, 2004/5 and 2006/7.

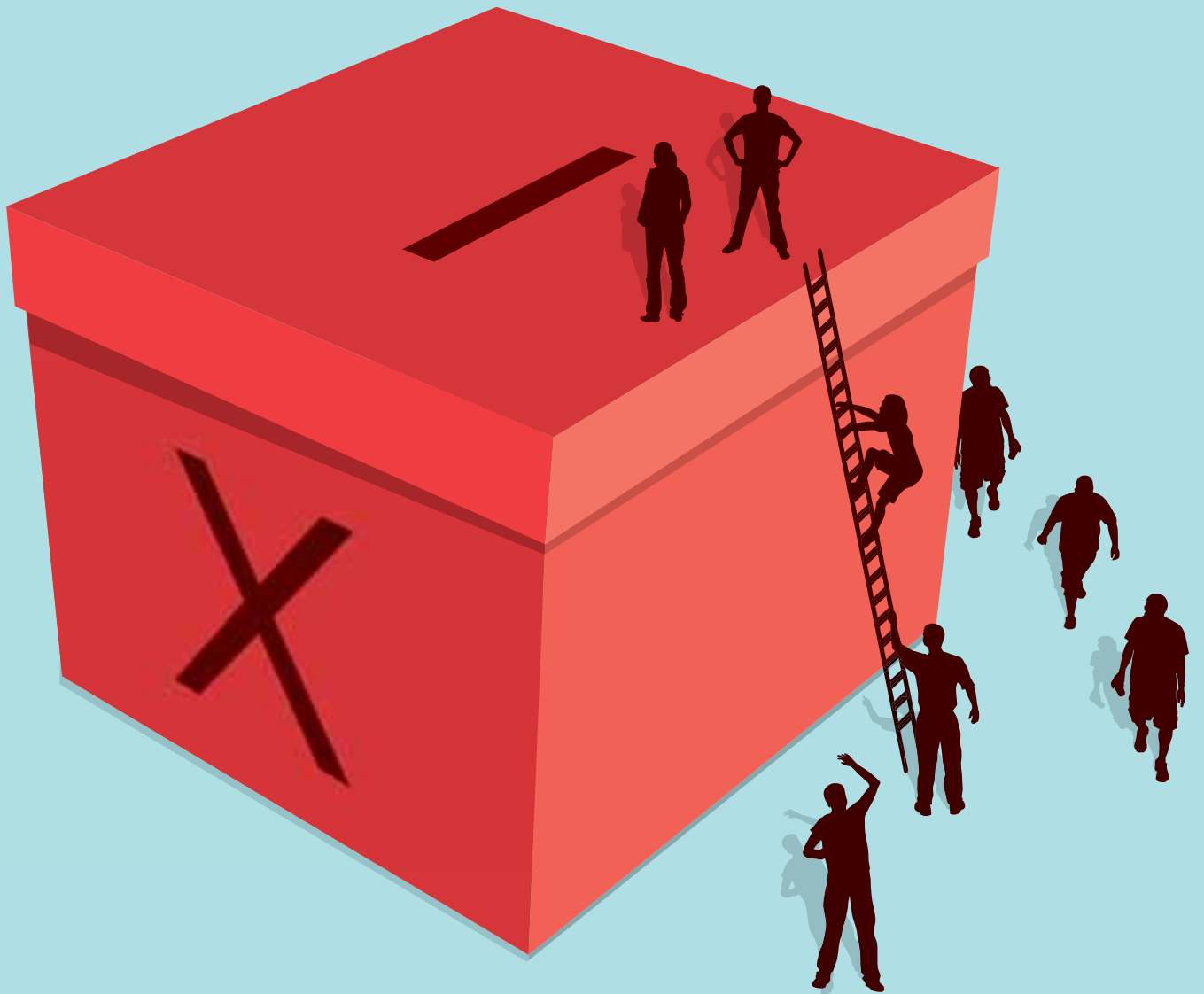
**“ Despite the widely-held view that public trust in politicians is in long-term (possibly irreversible) decline, ESS data show that such a decline has either greatly reduced or ceased altogether ”**

Their analysis has revealed a close link between social and political trust. Whether in people's everyday transactions – as consumers, in workplaces and in social interactions – or in their activities as citizens and voters, they conclude that trust helps 'to sustain a co-operative social climate, to facilitate collective behaviour and to encourage a regard for the public interest'. Trust between citizens 'makes it easier, less risky and more rewarding to participate in community and civic affairs and helps to build the social institutions of civil society upon which peaceful and stable democracy rests.'

The paper goes on to illustrate the extent to which people's social and institutional trust go together at both an individual and a societal level. Individuals with the greatest trust in their fellow citizens also tend to have the highest levels of confidence in public institutions such as the police, the legal system, parliament and politicians. And this relationship holds true not only within but also across European nations.

Further analysis also provides qualified good news for politicians. Despite the widely-held view that public trust in politicians is in long-term (possibly irreversible) decline,

ESS data show that such a decline has either greatly reduced or ceased altogether. In only 2 out of the 17 European countries represented in the figure above was there a marked decline in public trust of politicians between 2002 and 2006. The remainder of countries have experienced either no appreciable shift or a modest revival. ◀



# Education and politics

**The connection between education and political interest proves to be strong and consistent**


In a celebrated book, John Kenneth Galbraith suggested that there was in the USA a 'culture of contentment', which meant that richer and better-educated people were more likely to vote in elections and participate in politics. Thus, contrary to the spirit of democracy, the very people who might most be expected to want political change were perversely also the least likely to vote or lobby for it\*

The 2008 US election may have changed all that. In any case, it has always been difficult to establish conclusively that extra years of education do actually lead to greater electoral and political participation. Now a sophisticated analysis of ESS data by Francesca Borgonovi at the OECD seems to have confirmed this elusive causal link.\*\*

The table below shows a remarkably strong and consistent relationship between education and political interest, though a much less consistent relationship between education and voting.

But in an attempt to establish whether or not this was a causal relationship, Borgonovi introduced aggregate data on national compulsory school leaving age alongside ESS data so as to isolate the independent effect of longer education. Her dramatic conclusions are that every additional year of education raises the likelihood of voting in national elections by a remarkable three percentage points – a finding that may give pause to countries considering lowering their voting age.

This is because, regardless of its democratic advantages or disadvantages, its short-term effect would be likely to reduce aggregate percentage electoral turnout.

According to the author, her modelling work for this analysis was made possible only by the wide range of indicators of political participation in the ESS and by its large number of participating countries, which together provided the necessary variation to generate robust conclusions. 

## Education, interest in politics and voting in 22 European Countries

Years of education completed	6 or fewer years	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17 or more years
% very or fairly interested in politics	25	31	31	35	39	42	43	49	50	56	61	70
% who voted in last national election	81	74	75	74	73	71	75	80	78	81	84	87

**Note:** The 22 countries in this analysis were: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK. Pooled data ESS 2002/3, 2004/5 and 2006/7.

\*Galbraith, J. (1992), *The Culture of Contentment*, Houghton Mifflin Company: Wilmington.

\*\*Borgonovi, F. (2008), 'The relationship between education and civic and social engagement'. Paper presented at the *Social Outcomes of Learning Project Experts Group Meeting*, Paris, 19 June.


# Families and work

**The long-term increase in the proportion of women who go out to work does not on its own explain the long-term fall in birth rates in Europe**

An unresolved debate among policy makers and analysts is whether the large growth in women's employment rates in recent decades is or is not a disincentive to family formation. Now the sharply declining birth rate in some countries has given this debate fresh impetus. Is the fact that women are increasingly working outside the home a barrier to childbirth or does it rather provide the resources needed to support family life?

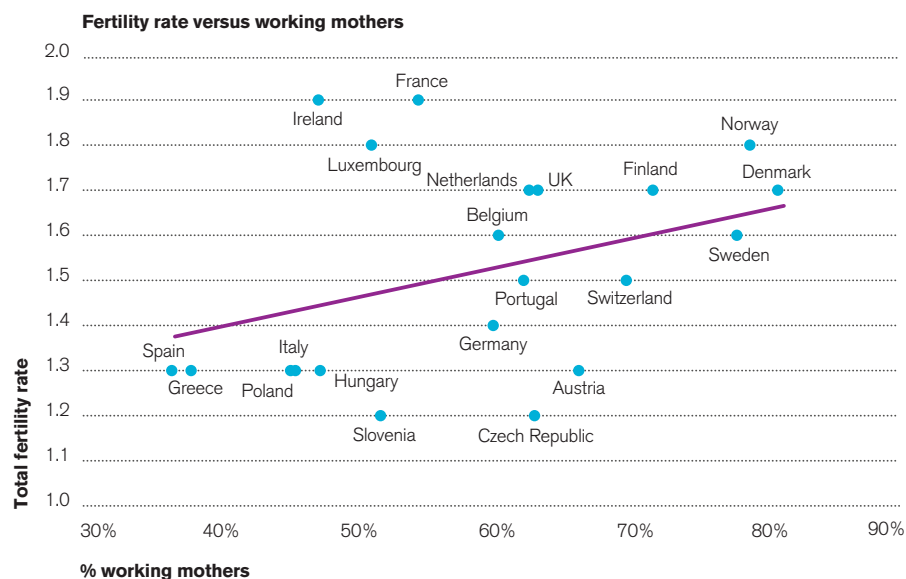
With the help of data from the first round of the ESS, Analia Torres and her colleagues set out to investigate the issue and find no simple answer.\* Instead they reveal major unexplained variations between nations. As the figure below shows, countries range along a continuum. At one end are nations with low female employment rates and low

birth rates (Spain, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Poland), and at the opposite end are nations with high female employment and high birth rates (the Nordic countries).

A seemingly obvious explanation is that this difference might be due to different levels or quality of child care. Thus, in countries where work and child-rearing are especially difficult to combine, women may be more likely to delay or forego motherhood, and where there is more affordable childcare the conflict would lessen. But this cannot then explain why there turns out to be a third cluster of countries (Ireland, France and Luxembourg) where low employment rates for women are accompanied by high birth rates. 

## ESS FACT

All ESS documents and methodological protocols are swiftly made available on its websites, including questionnaires and field documents in all languages



**Note:** The total fertility rate is the mean number of children that would be born alive to a woman during her lifetime if she were to pass through her childbearing years conforming to the fertility rates by age of a given year.

\*Torres, A., Mendes, R. and Lapa, T. (2008), 'Families in Europe', *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, Volume 7 (1), pp. 49–84.

## Keeping the faith

**Most Europeans see themselves as belonging to a religion, but many are non-active believers**

**“ Europe’s nations are a diverse blend of religiosity and secularism. Fairly recent entrants to the EU include the most religious country (Poland) and the least religious (Estonia) ”**

While religion retains its prominence in the USA, and Islam is said to be the fastest growing world religion, Europe is remarkably secular. But because religiosity is linked to other human values, accurate cross-national data on trends in religious engagement provide a context for understanding changes in the fabric of European societies.

Europe’s nations are a diverse blend of religiosity and secularism. Fairly recent entrants to the EU include what is now the most religious country in the Community (Poland) and the least religious (Estonia). And in the wings is the candidate country, Turkey, with Islam as its dominant religion.

The ESS provides a nuanced picture of religious engagement, enabling analysts to classify people into three broad groups: active believers (who ‘belong’ to a religion and attend services at least on holy days), inactive believers (who ‘belong’ to a religion but never attend services), and non-believers. An analysis of ESS 2004/5 data by researchers at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium reveals the contrasting patterns in different European countries:\*

- The six most religious countries in Europe, each with more than 80% of people who are active or non-active believers, are, in descending order: Turkey, Poland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Slovenia
- Just 2% of Turks are non-believers, while 88% of Poles are active believers
- The five most secular countries in Europe, each with more than 50% of non-believers, are Estonia, Czech Republic, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands
- Almost three-quarters of Estonians are non-believers, while only 15% of Swedes attend religious services
- In countries where religious engagement is high, it is linked to people’s demographic characteristics. Where it is low, this link is weaker, suggesting that individualism and secularism may themselves be related. As a long-running time series, the ESS is able to monitor trends in religious affiliation and engagement and investigate their links with other values. ◀

### ESS FACT

Each biennial round of the ESS consists of at least 40,000 hour-long face-to-face interviews in almost all parts of Europe, carried out in 30 different languages

\*Billiet, J. and Meuleman, B. (2007), ‘Religious diversity in Europe and its relation to social attitude and value orientations’, ESSHRA Conference Proceedings *Citizenship and cultural identities in the EU: old questions, new answers*, Istanbul, October, pp. 83–104.



# Public responses to migration

**Rises in concern over immigration are greater in times of economic gloom, and among citizens who do not have the skills or qualifications to adapt**

Several European governments periodically increase inward migration as a means of filling gaps in their national labour force, often in the face of strong public opposition. In other countries, immigration has increased spontaneously, also accompanied on occasions by public disquiet. So it is no surprise that the salience of immigration as a political issue rises and falls. Just prior to the French Presidency of the EU (2008), the French Prime Minister warned that '...Europe is being subjected to increasingly large waves of immigration... and the general public in some countries is extremely worried about it!'

What determines the extent and the timing of these episodic upturns in public concern?

Since 2001, ESS data provide in-depth updates on the issue across Europe. Two analyses in particular (from Harvard\* and Catholic University of Leuven\*\*) use data from the ESS to tackle this question.

The Leuven analysis concludes that surges in opposition to immigration between 2002 and 2006 were closely associated with economic fluctuations. Good economic conditions make people more accepting of immigration, and vice versa. More worryingly, a widespread economic downturn is likely to be accompanied by a sharp rise in opposition to immigrants.

**“...the 2003 ESS provides a rich, detailed set of questions about the immigration issue...”**

Hainmueller & Hiscox, Harvard University

But the Harvard study discovers another factor at work at the individual level:

- Public attitudes to immigration are closely linked to educational background; people with less formal education are more likely to oppose all immigration, even of higher level workers who do not seem to pose any direct threat to their own jobs
- More highly educated people show greater acceptance of all forms of immigration, even of workers who might well provide competition for their own jobs
- The link between education and greater tolerance of immigration arises from the impact of education on people's overall values. Thus more educated people tend to express less xenophobia; feel more sympathy for cultural diversity and are more likely to discern the economic benefits of immigration. They are also less likely to believe that immigrants 'make crime worse' and more likely to believe that they 'enrich cultural life!' ☞

## ESS FACT

In 2008, a high-level international review team commissioned by ESS funders, concluded unanimously that 'the importance of ESS... and its clear signals of impact justify fully continuous funding at levels necessary to achieve its vision and maintain its quality'

\*Hainmueller, J. and Hiscox, M. (2007), 'Educated Preferences: Explaining Attitudes Toward Immigration in Europe', *International Organization* 61, Spring 2007, pp. 399–442.

\*\*Meuleman, B. et al (2008), *Changing attitudes toward immigration in Europe, 2002–2007: a dynamic conflict theory approach* [Manuscript].

# What makes a good citizen?

**Do European countries share common conceptions of citizenship with one another and with other democracies?**

To what extent do European countries share common conceptions of citizenship and civic responsibility? Do, for instance, Eastern Europeans with their fairly recent experience of a different system of government share notions of good citizenship with Western Europeans? And do people from the former East Germany share the views of those in former West Germany, having not only entered the European Union earlier than other former Warsaw Pact countries, but also having done so by merging with an established member state rather than by a prolonged process of accession? Moreover, how closely do European expectations of good citizenship correspond with or differ from, say, US expectations?\*

In a chapter in a book devoted to ESS findings, Sigrid Roßteutscher reveals a set of common European expectations as to the desired qualities of a good citizen, uniting east and west, north and south.\*\* These qualities include above all a sense of duty to vote in national elections (participation), a willingness to help people who are worse off (solidarity), adherence to the law, and forming one's own opinions (autonomy). Most of these priorities are shared by most Americans too, but – as the figure opposite shows – Europeans are less inclined than their US counterparts to give priority to active participation in voluntary or political organisations.

As far as former East and West Germany are concerned, Roßteutscher concludes that: 'Fifteen years after reunification, Germany is not a "republic of two cultures", but rather a normal, ordinary European society' – a development that nobody would have dared anticipate in the 1980s? Despite the perceived civic virtue of voting, however, many European countries in recent years have – like the US – been experiencing falling voter turnout and declining membership of political parties, and this decline appears fastest among young people. Is this a sign of things to come?

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**“(There is now) a set of common European expectations as to the desired qualities of a good citizen”**

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Studies in the US paint a more optimistic picture, suggesting that it is simply the nature of politics that is changing. Young Americans were disillusioned with traditional politics and parties and chose instead to be active on specific social and political issues, such as climate change. Rather than opting out, young US citizens – especially more educated ones – are switching to 'issue politics' in which they can be at least as attentive and active as those in their age group have ever been. This more optimistic interpretation of recent trends had not yet been tested in Europe.

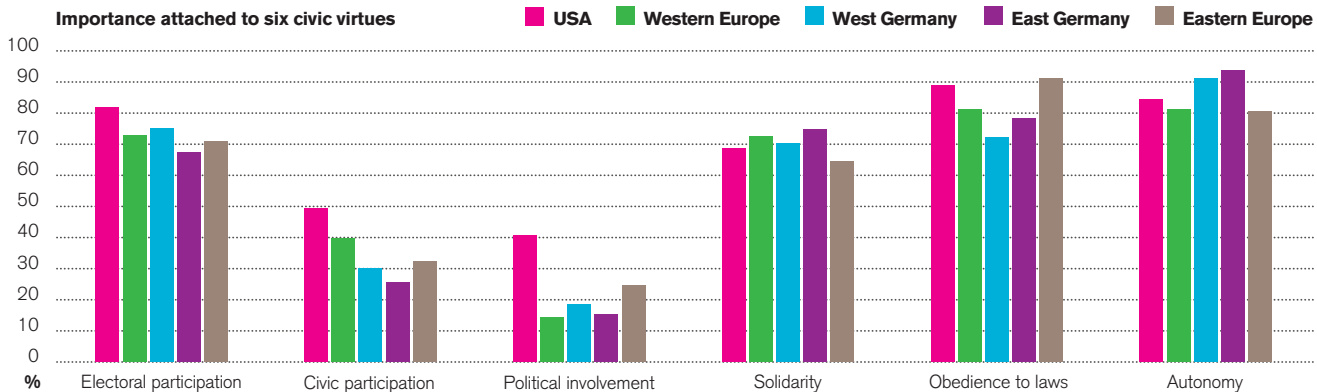
## ESS FACT

The ESS is one of only three social science projects selected for consideration as a potential European Research Infrastructure from 2012

\*A special US-funded survey 'The U.S. "Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy" Survey', replicated questions from ESS 2002/3 to generate inter-continental comparisons of values.

\*\*Roßteutscher, Sigrid (2004), "Die Rückkehr der Tugend?" ['The return of virtue?']. In: Jan W. van Deth (ed) *Deutschland in Europa. Ergebnisse des European Social Survey 2002–2003* [Germany in Europe. Results from the European Social Survey 2002–2003]. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften: pp.197.





Data from ESS 2002/3 and US Citizen Involvement and Democracy Study 2005 for those aged 18+. The data show percentages giving an importance score of at least 7 out of 10 to each civic virtue. 'Western Europe' in this analysis includes: Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, Denmark, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Sweden. Eastern Europe includes: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovenia. Chart based on analysis by S Roßteutscher.

## “Now, using data from the second round of the ESS, scholars from the Catholic University of Leuven have investigated the existence of traditional versus issue politics in Europe”

Now, using data from the second round of the ESS, scholars from the Catholic University of Leuven have investigated the existence of 'traditional' versus 'issue' politics in Europe\*\*\*.

They find that those actively engaged in 'traditional' politics outnumber those involved in 'issue' politics alone by around two to one, and that – unlike the US – neither group is particularly disillusioned with the political system as a whole. Nor are those involved in issue politics either particularly

young or particularly highly-educated. The authors conclude instead that rather than lamenting the alleged lack of political interest among young people, it would be more productive to investigate what sorts of changes in the political and party systems could help to make political parties more attractive to an ever expanding group of young, highly educated Europeans. ◀

\*\*\*Hooghe, M. and Dejaeghere, Y. (2007), 'Does the "Monitorial Citizen" exist? An empirical investigation into the occurrence of postmodern forms of citizenship in the Nordic countries', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30 (2): pp. 249–271. Their analysis was confined to five Nordic countries – Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland – but their findings have since been shown to apply to the rest of Europe as well.

## Sex and sexuality

**Permissive attitudes towards both the age of first sex and the acceptability of homosexuality vary considerably according to one's country and one's age**

Attitudes to sexual morality have always varied by nation, religion and generation. What is acceptable to some is unacceptable to others, and a society's sexual norms tend to reflect how permissive or 'traditional' that society is in its overall moral outlook. Data from the European Social Survey show that opinions about the permissible age of first sex on the one hand and homosexuality on the other differ greatly across countries and generations, but not as consistently between religious groups as might have been anticipated.

Two questions from the survey were:

- Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish (ESS core question – agree/disagree scale)

**“ Regardless of nationality, there is a tendency for younger people to hold more permissive views about homosexuality than their elders ”**

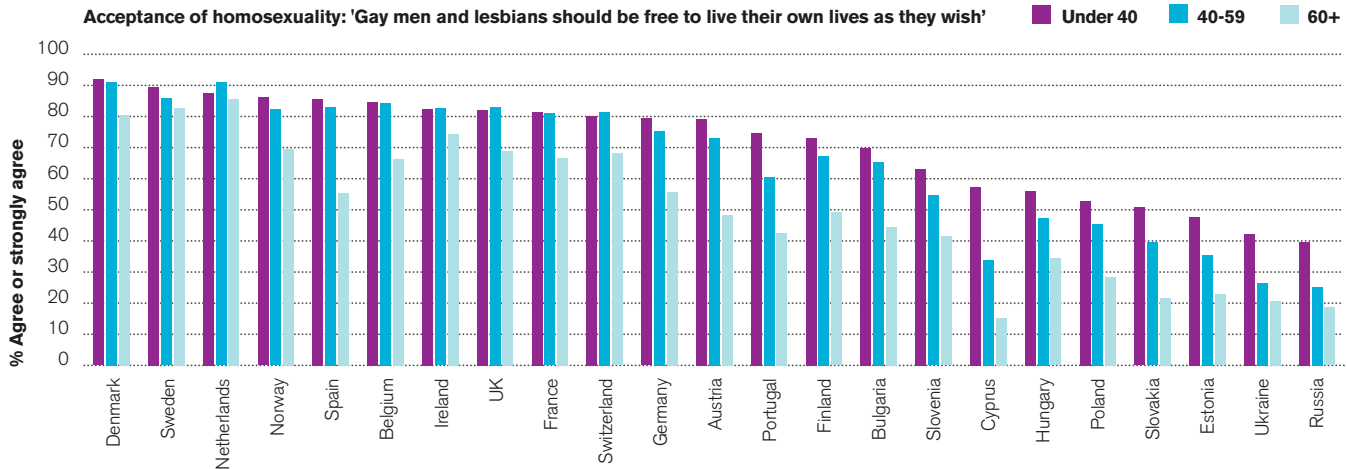
- Below what age would you say a man/ woman is generally too young to have sexual intercourse? (ESS question 2006/7)

The figure opposite illustrates the sharp contrasts between countries and age groups in the proportions of respondents who are accepting of homosexuality – with the Danes the most permissive and the Russians the least.

### ESS FACT

The work of the ESS is guided by an eminent group of expert advisers from across Europe and beyond





ESS 2006/7

With a few notable exceptions – notably Ireland, Spain and France – countries with mainly Catholic or Orthodox populations tend to be less permissive, but eight of the nine least permissive countries are from the former Eastern bloc.

Regardless of nationality, there is a tendency for younger people to hold more permissive views about homosexuality than their elders. Even so, there are still clear variations across countries. In general people over and under 40 tended to differ substantially on this issue, but there was no distinct single pattern. For instance, in Western and Northern Europe there was generally little difference between the under-40s and those between 40 and 59. So the likely increase in tolerance in these countries seems to have taken place only once the over-60s were already set in their values. In Central and Eastern European countries, however, the same gradient in attitudes to homosexuality appears to be more gradual.

Permissiveness in relation to the age of first sex forms a similar pattern, with 9 of the 10 most permissive countries in respect of homosexuality coinciding with the most permissive countries in respect of the age of first sex (the exception being Ireland). In order to test whether people's views on the permissible age of first sex varied for young men and young women, the question was asked about males to one half of the sample in each country and about females to the other half. Although men and women held equally permissive views about the minimum age of first sex overall, men turned out to be more likely than women to operate a double standard, accepting a lower age for males than for females. ◀

# The training gap

**Provision of training and skills development in the workplace varies across Europe**

As Europe enters troubled economic times, it will become increasingly important for workers at all levels to be able and willing to improve their skills and develop new ones. Data from Round 3 of the ESS – mostly collected at the end of 2006 – suggest that provision for training is already widely available in certain countries, but that national variation is considerable – principally along geographical lines.

As the first figure below shows, in each of the Nordic countries around half of all working adults reported having upgraded their skills or knowledge in the previous year. Although this proportion was nearly matched in Switzerland and Austria, lagging further behind with between 30 and 40% of recently 'upskilled' workers was a cluster of mainly western European countries (but also including Slovenia, Estonia and Slovakia). At the back of the field was a group of countries in Eastern and Southern Europe where fewer than

**“ In every case professional workers were much more likely to have benefited from training than were those in lower status occupations ”**

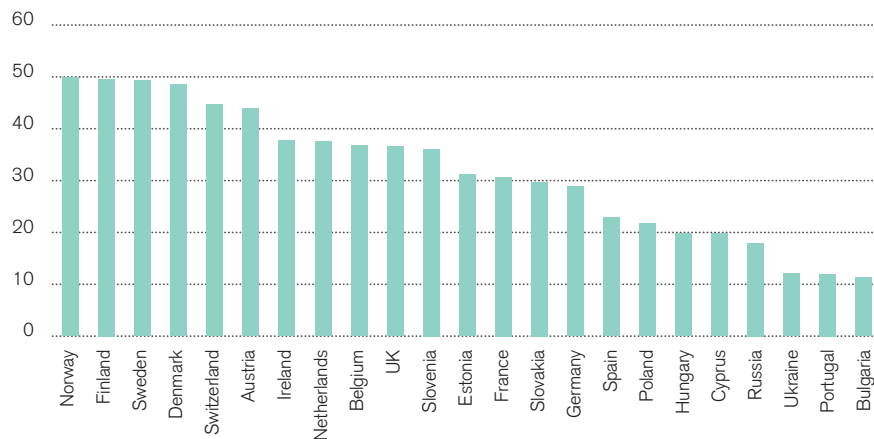
a quarter of employed adults had received any training in the last 12 months.

But there are also consistent within-country differences. As the second figure shows, training opportunities seem to be disproportionately available to workers according to their place in the occupational hierarchy. The bars represent the odds of non-professional workers acquiring employment skills or knowledge in the last 12 months relative to their managerial and professional counterparts. In every case professional workers were much more likely to have benefited from training than were those in lower status occupations.

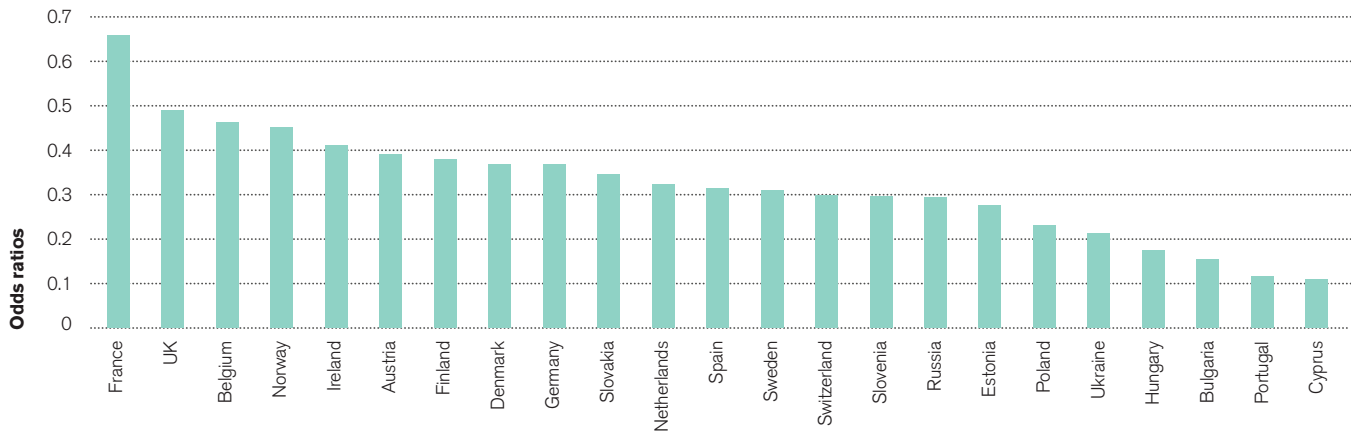
## ESS FACT

The ESS is a key provider of research training to future generations of researchers, whether in the form of face-to-face teaching, on-line courses or practitioner seminars and conferences

**% Respondents upgrading skills/knowledge in last 12 months**



Relative odds of non-professionals receiving skills training in last 12 months (compared with professional and managerial occupations)



“ At the back of the field was a group of countries in Eastern and Southern Europe where fewer than a quarter of employed adults had received any training in the last 12 months ”

France emerges as by far the most egalitarian country in this respect, with Cyprus and Portugal the least so.

So, across the labour markets of Europe, it appears for the moment that managers and professionals not only derive higher status and rewards from their present work, but also possess more immediate opportunities to adapt to an adverse economic climate. ☞





# Education matters

**Time spent in education has a major impact on people's lives beyond greater earning capacity**

## ESS FACT

Archived alongside the ESS data sets are 'events data', which chart national and international events just before and during each fieldwork round which may have an effect on responses in a particular year or a particular country

Education changes people's lives in many ways above and beyond improving their ability to find better-paid jobs. ESS data demonstrate the impact of extra years in full-time education on people's lifelong values, their health, their likelihood of voting, their level of tolerance and their overall life satisfaction.

As reported earlier in this booklet:

- According to an OECD analysis of ESS data, each extra year of education tends to increase people's likelihood of voting in national elections
- People with less education are more likely to oppose immigration at all levels, regardless of whether it poses any conceivable threat to their own employment opportunities
- In contrast, people with more education are more likely to consider that immigrants enrich rather than threaten their country
- There is a strong and consistent positive relationship between years of education and interest in politics

But ESS data also show other links between education and aspects of people's lives. Even if comparisons between those with more and less formal education are confined to people under 40 (so as not to risk confounding the impact of education with the effects of being raised in different time periods), ESS 2006/7 data show that people under 40 whose formal education lasted 14 years or more:

**“ People under 40 whose formal education lasted 14 years or more... are more likely to describe themselves as 'happy' ”**

- are more likely than their counterparts who have spent less time in education to regard themselves as being in good health; and
- are also more likely to describe themselves as 'happy'.

Add these impacts to the likely financial benefits from extra years in education, and people's lifetime returns from their investment in education are impressive. ◀

# More than a survey

## The ESS has become a Research Infrastructure serving many thousands of users

Four biennial ESS surveys have been undertaken covering more than 30 countries throughout Europe and embracing well over 150,000 individual interviews. Further rounds are planned to paint an accurate picture of changes in European attitudes, values and behaviour patterns both across nations and over time.

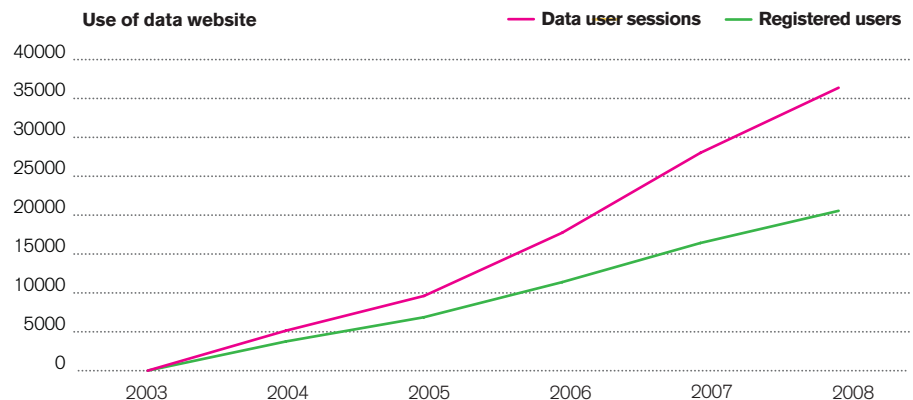
Funded by the European Commission, over 30 national Research Councils and ministries, and the European Science Foundation, the ESS has become a major European research facility and an authoritative monitor of societal change. It employs and disseminates cutting-edge methodology and engages considerable knowledge transfer, helping to place Europe at the forefront of quantitative social measurement.

Academically driven, the ESS's aim is to inform social policy at a national and European level via a series of rigorous surveys of change and continuity conducted every two years throughout Europe. Some of the main additional features of the ESS Research Infrastructure are:

- Websites, which allow unrestricted access to the project's protocols, methods, procedures and data
- A searchable online bibliography allowing access to the already wide range of publications arising from the project

- ESSTrain – a programme of state-of-the-art training courses for researchers across Europe in approaches to comparative measurement
- EduNet – an online training resource using ESS data to guide students through the analysis of large scale cross-national data

**“...the ESS has become a major European research facility and an authoritative monitor of societal change”**



Source: Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD).





### ESS FACT

Over 400 separate scientific or policy papers, reports, articles, chapters or books based on ESS data or methods are already available and the output is increasing rapidly

- Regular meetings of survey institutes and experts convened to promote pan-European dialogue about improved standards and harmonisation
- A continuing programme of studies to tackle issues such as minimising response bias in surveys, increasing the representativeness and equivalence of cross-national data, and maximising cost-effectiveness
- The ESS data website has over 20,000 registered users who have equal and immediate access to the data; no 'privileged' or early access is permitted
- A variety of data users including governments, politicians, private enterprise, think tanks, academics and students
- A major dissemination programme including books in several languages, peer-reviewed journal articles and papers, conference presentations, reports and working documents €

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**“ The ESS’s aim is to inform social policy at a national and European level via a series of rigorous surveys of change and continuity conducted every two years ”**

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# ESS institutions and framework

## The people, institutions and structure that make ESS work


The ESS has been led from the start by a Central Coordinating Team (CCT), which includes researchers and managers from seven European institutions:

- City University London, UK (Coordinator)
- GESIS, Germany
- Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), Norway
- ESADE, Ramon Llull University, Spain
- Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), Belgium
- Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP), Netherlands
- University of Ljubljana (UL), Slovenia

More recently, in preparation for the planned transformation of the ESS into an official European Research Infrastructure, the managing Consortium of the ESS is being expanded to include Research Councils. So far, the following Research Councils have joined the consortium and more are anticipated:

- European Science Foundation (ESF)
- German Research Foundation (DFG), Germany
- Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (Sciences Po), France
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), UK
- Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IFiS PAN), Poland
- Netherlands Organisation for Social Research (NWO), Netherlands
- Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS), Sweden
- Research Council of Norway (RCN), Norway
- Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), Switzerland
- Agency for Social Analyses (ASA), Bulgaria
- Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT), Portugal

The ESS derives its strength from several important organisational features including:

- National funding for fieldwork and coordination
- EC funding for central coordination and pan European infrastructure activities
- European Scientific Foundation support for scientific liaison
- Central design and coordination to ensure cross-national equivalence and rigour
- Various representative advisory bodies to ensure accountability and transparency 



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# Find out more about the ESS

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## **A number of websites contain information about the ESS:**

### **Home website**

[www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)

### **Immediate data access and download**

<http://ess.nsd.uib.no/>

### **ESS Review panel report**

<http://www.esf.org/research-areas/social-sciences/activities/research-infrastructures/the-european-social-survey-ess.html>

### **ESS Training courses**

[www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)

### **ESS on-line training courses**

<http://essedunet.nsd.uib.no/>

### **European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures**

<http://cordis.europa.eu/esfri/>

### **Descartes prize award**

<http://ec.europa.eu/research/press/2005/pr0212en.cfm>

Contact the ESS Central Coordinating  
Team by e-mail: [ess@city.ac.uk](mailto:ess@city.ac.uk)

This booklet was produced with support from  
the European Commission's Framework  
Programme 7 (Research Infrastructures Priority).

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