

## European Social Survey (ESS) – Monitoring Social Change in Europe

*The European social survey is a pan-european survey, carried out every two years, which charts Europeans' social attitudes. Since 2001, it has generated a unique source of information on social attitudes to an extensive range of topics, from trust in institutions to attitudes and experiences of ageism. This information is stored in an easily accessible data bank which is used by academics, policy makers and others. The information gathered by the ESS contributes to knowing Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its potential to inform a range of public policy fields is increasingly recognised. The ESS is one of three social sciences initiatives on the ESFRI roadmap (2008) and it hopes to be amongst the first of the ESFRI Roadmap Projects to be awarded the status of 'European Research Infrastructure Consortium' (ERIC).*

EU Commissioner Janez Potočnik, reflecting on the award of the Descartes Prize for 'excellence in scientific collaborative research' to the ESS, noted that: "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 (opening speech at the Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities in Europe, European Parliament, 2005)".



### The Story of the ESS

European societies are changing, some dramatically, others less so. Charting the changing attitudes of European citizens enables policy to be developed which takes account of the heterogeneous, as well as the similar, challenges facing European societies. The ESS aims to inform the policy making process, and to contribute to better governance.

The ESS came into being at the initiative of the European Science Foundation in the late 1990s. It intended, from the outset, to overcome existing problems of comparative survey research and to be a time series which would allow comparison of the changing nature of European values and social attitudes. Led from City University, London, the ESS has from the outset been a multinational infrastructure, with key functions spread across seven key institutions in Europe. Started in 2001, it has acquired support, funding and participation from 34 national research councils/ministries in all parts of Europe, plus consistent central support for its design, coordination and dissemination from the EC and the European Science Foundation. It had also, by 2005, been recognized as a critical resource in building research excellence in the European Research Area. It was the first and, to date, the only European social science project to be awarded the Descartes Prize for excellence in collaborative scientific research.

## The ESS as a Research Infrastructure

The ESS is one of three social science initiatives on the ESFRI Roadmaps of 2006 and 2008. It is a distributed research infrastructure which will be operational in the following countries: UK; Germany; The Netherlands; Spain; Belgium; Norway; Slovenia. Its headquarters will continue to be at City University, London as the UK will be the host nation. To date, nineteen countries, plus the ESF, have signed a Statement of Commitment, pledging support to the future operation of the ESS ERIC. It is hoped that all 34 participating countries and others will join the ESS ERIC in the longer-term.



ESS is building a major database which is used to chart change in European societies. Responsive to key social concerns and in every survey round, the core questionnaire is accompanied by two modules of specific topic questions designed by teams selected from a Europe-wide competition.

Its importance for the European Research Area and its policy, scientific and public communities is not only that it provides an academically robust way of 'knowing Europe' but also that it contributes to the scientific community's endeavor to develop, test and implement methods of reliable social measurement.

### Additional information

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