Developing a self-completion version of the European Social Survey: results from an experiment in Austria

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ESS is a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC)

Introduction to ESS and Round 10

Introduction to the European Social Survey (ESS)

- Academically-driven cross-national survey measuring attitudes and behaviour across Europe

- Conducted every two years since 2002; Round 10 nearing completion

- 38 countries have participated in total; 32 at Round 10

- For Rounds 1-9: Fully face-to-face approach across all participating countries; consistency of methodology important

- Central fieldwork specification and central planning/oversight – but decentralised fieldwork contracting and delivery

- Random probability sampling; mix of sample frames across countries

- 1,500 target effective sample in most countries (800 in small countries)
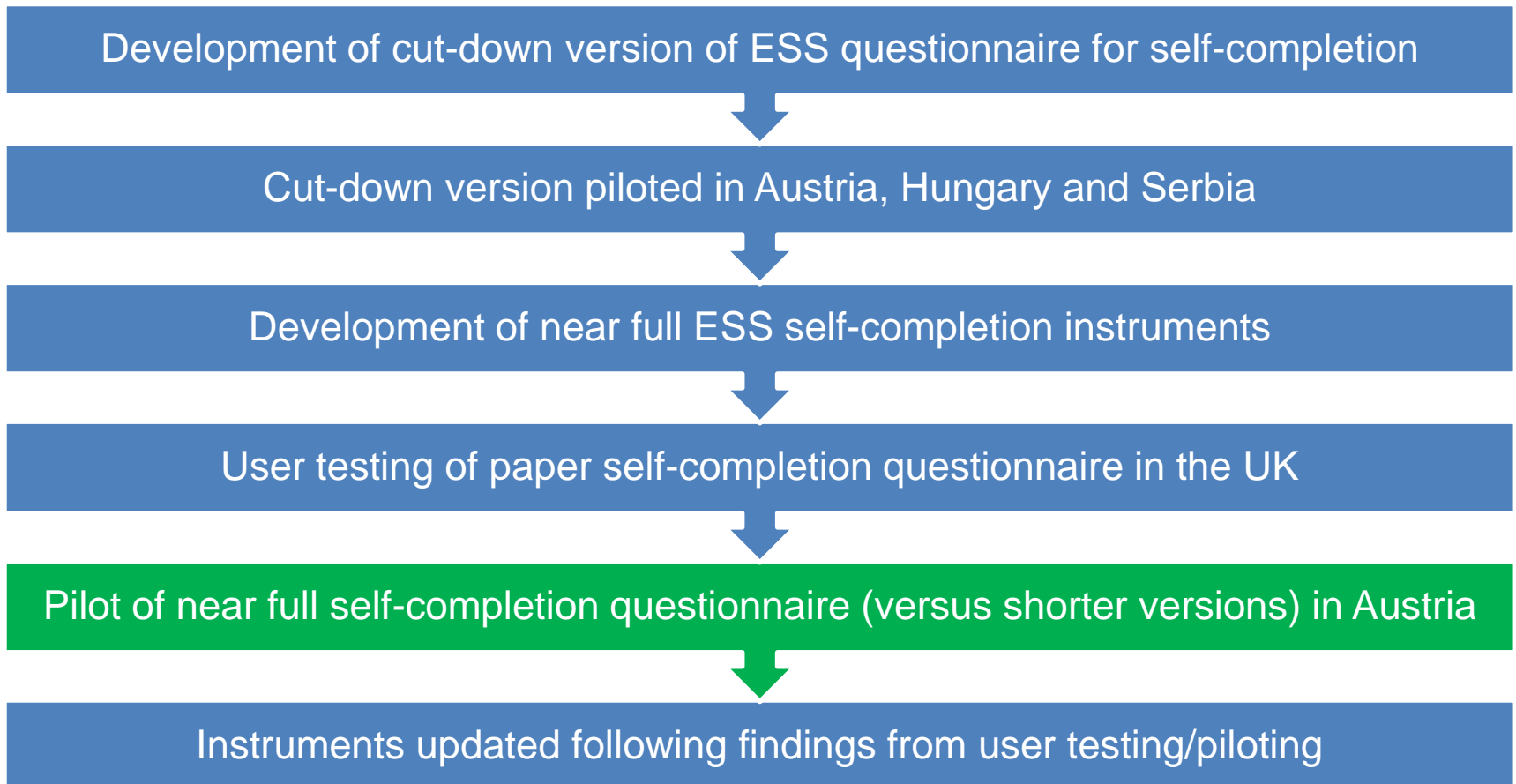
- Interview length c. 1 hour

ESS Round 10 and COVID-19

- Fieldwork for Round 10 of ESS was due to run from September 2020 to January 2021 using the usual face-to-face approach in all countries

- COVID-19 pandemic presented major challenges to deliver usual face-to-face approach

- Contingency measures introduced:

  - Continuing to prioritise a face-to-face approach where possible – but with greater flexibility on timings and other adaptations to specification

  - Preparing a self-completion approach to be implemented by any countries that could not deliver face-to-face fieldwork (no mixing of modes permitted)

- Developmental and experimental work to inform/prepare self-completion approach: **focus of today's presentation**

Developing a self-completion approach for ESS

Can we develop a self-completion version of ESS that includes the majority of content from the face-to-face survey (with limited adaptation) while delivering 'acceptable' response rates, sample composition and data quality?

Development stages for self-completion approach

Development of cut-down version of ESS questionnaire for self-completion

Cut-down version piloted in Austria, Hungary and Serbia

Development of near full ESS self-completion instruments

User testing of paper self-completion questionnaire in the UK

Pilot of near full self-completion questionnaire (versus shorter versions) in Austria

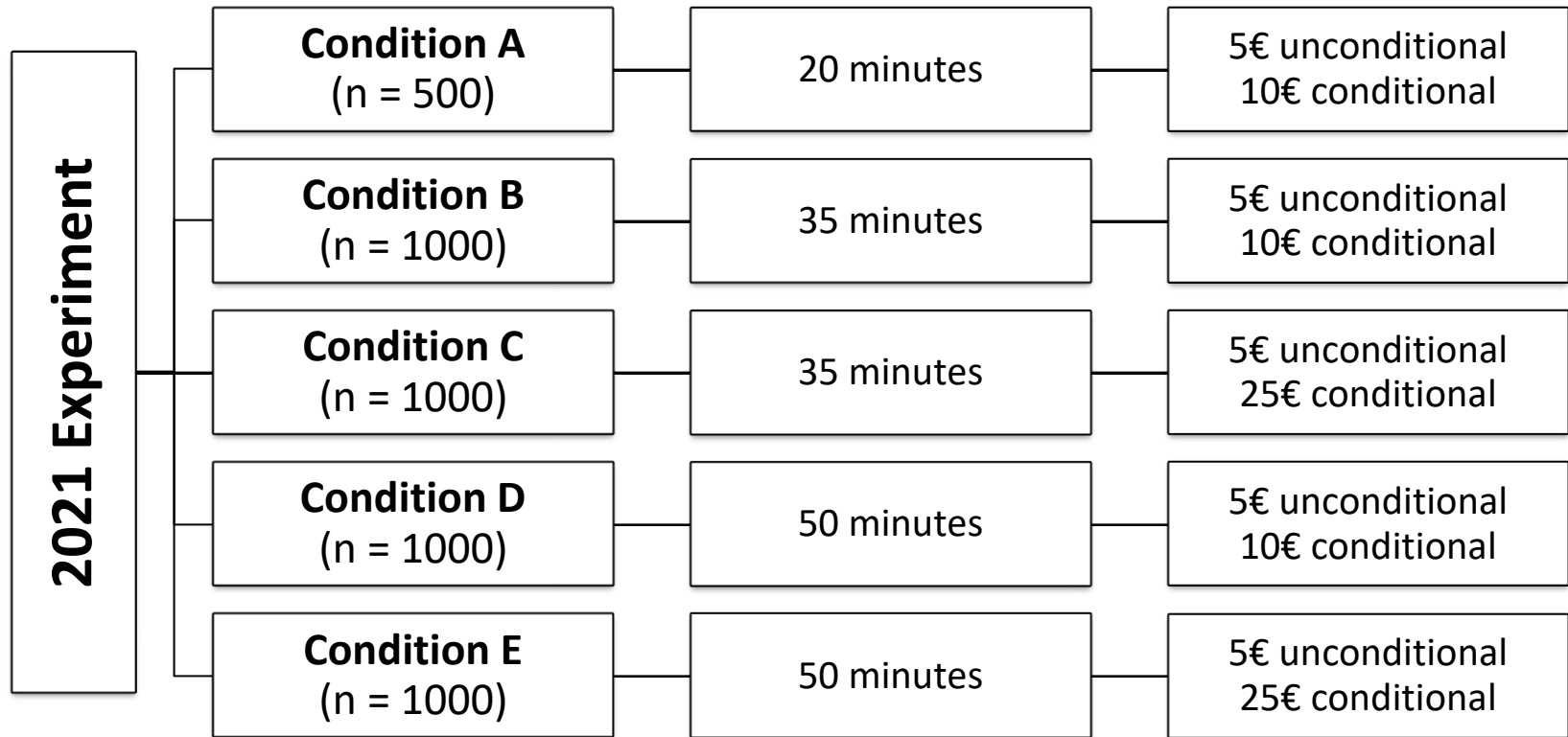Instruments updated following findings from user testing/piloting

ESS self-completion experiment in Austria

Research questions

1. Is it feasible to field a (near) full-length version of the ESS questionnaire? *comparison of c. 50 minute questionnaire vs. 35 minutes and 20 minutes*

2. What is the impact of different conditional incentive amounts on participation and data quality?
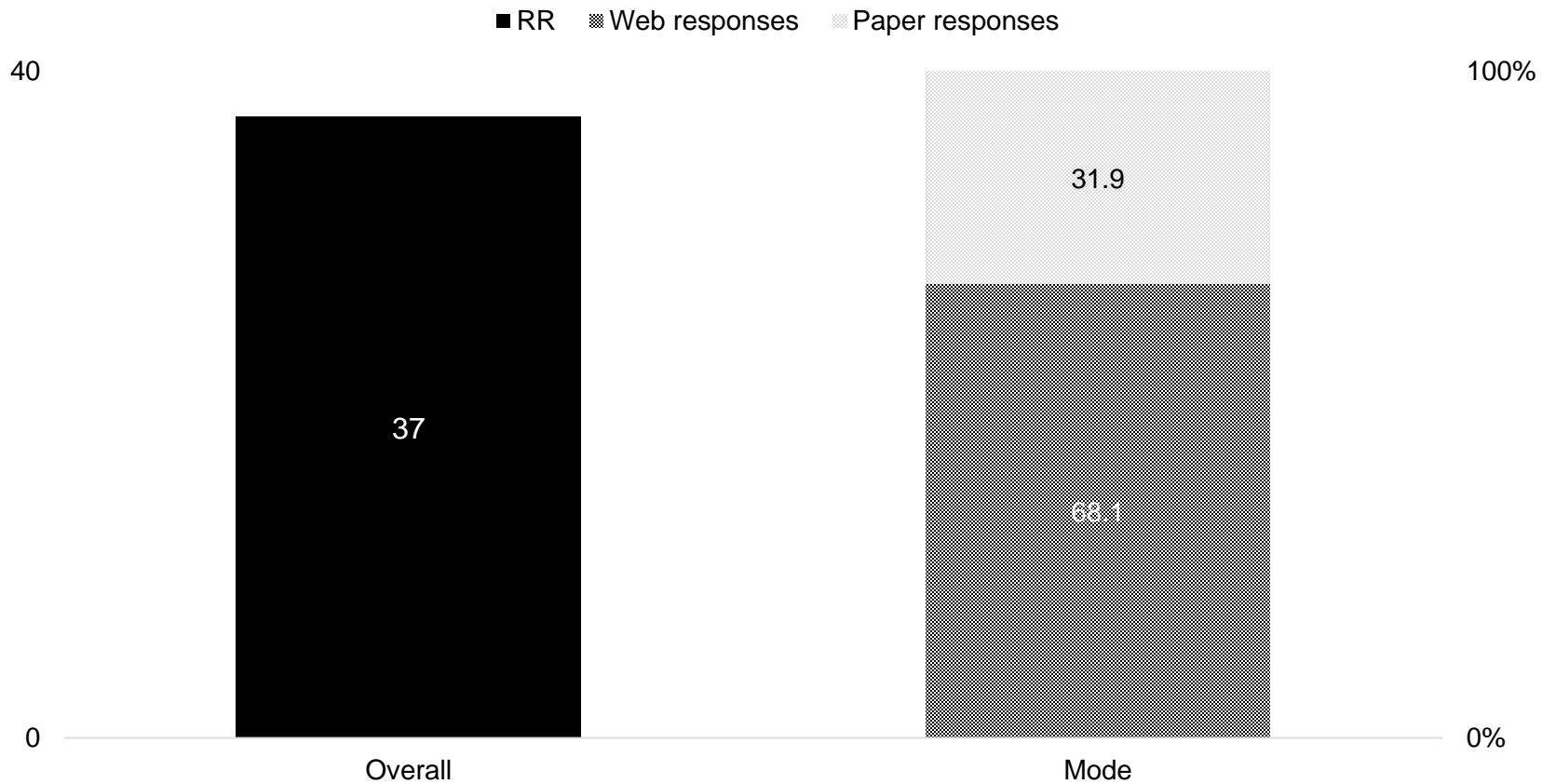
Research design

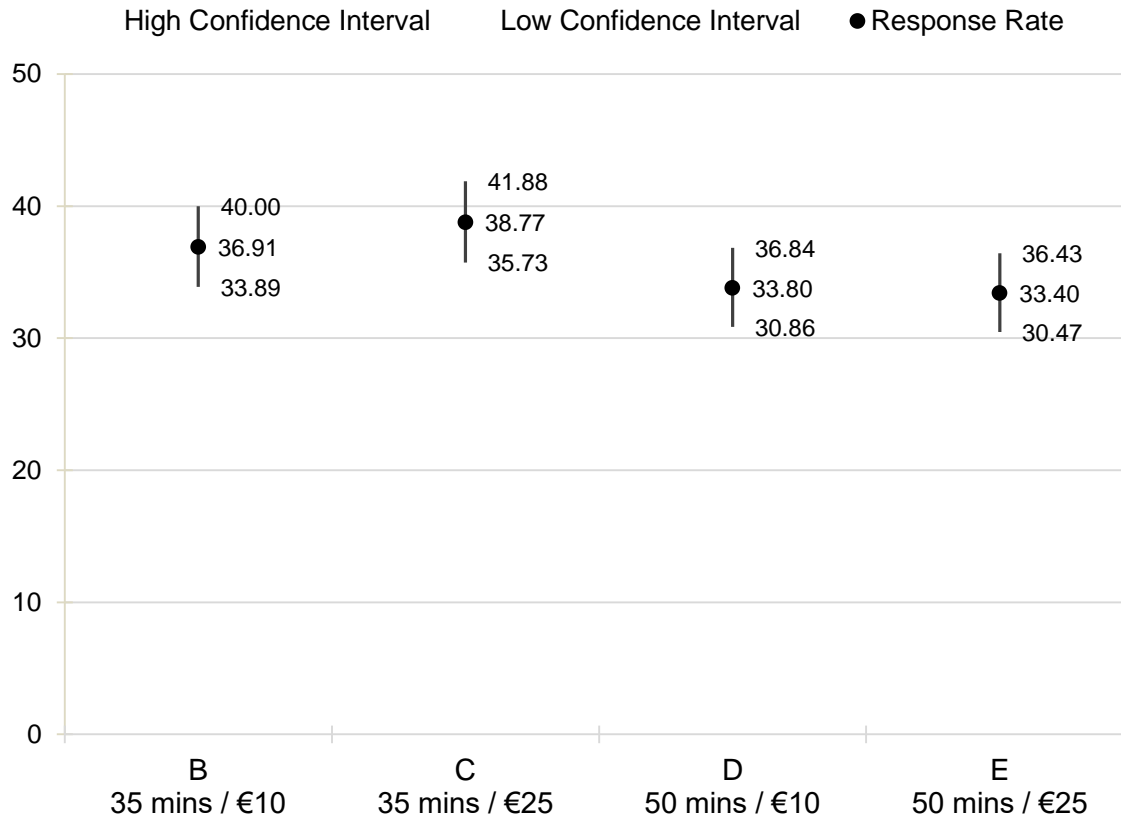|		
Condition A (n = 500)	20 minutes	5€ unconditional 10€ conditional
Condition B (n = 1000)	35 minutes	5€ unconditional 10€ conditional
Condition C (n = 1000)	35 minutes	5€ unconditional 25€ conditional
Condition D (n = 1000)	50 minutes	5€ unconditional 10€ conditional
Condition E (n = 1000)	50 minutes	5€ unconditional 25€ conditional

2021 Experiment

Summary of approach

- Push-to-web design with postal recruitment

- Address-based sample; person with next birthday in household instructed to complete the survey

- Sequential approach: web first and paper questionnaire sent to non-responders with second reminder (three reminders sent in total)

- Source instruments developed centrally – web survey in Qualtrics, paper questionnaire in InDesign (50 minute version equated to 36 pages)

- Fairly limited adaptation to questionnaire from face-to-face survey

- Data collection between April and June 2021

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Response rates: Condition A

■ RR   Web responses   Paper responses

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Response rates: Conditions B-E

High Confidence Interval   Low Confidence Interval   ● Response Rate

- No significant differences in response rates across conditions

- Rates ranged from 33.4% (long questionnaire/ high incentive) to 38.8% (short questionnaire/ high incentive)

- Approx. 70-75% of responses by web across all conditions

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Sample composition – sex – conditions B-E

Sex	Condition				ESS R9 unweighted	Population statistics
	B (35 mins / €10)	C (35 mins / €25)	D (50 mins / €10)	E (50 mins / €25)		
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	45.1	47.0	45.5	48.2	45.9	48.7
Female	54.9	53.0	54.5	51.8	54.1	51.3

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Sample composition – age – conditions B-E

Age group	Condition				ESS R9 unweighted	Population statistics
	B (35 mins / €10)	C (35 mins / €25)	D (50 mins / €10)	E (50 mins / €25)		
	%	%	%	%	%	%
18-29	12.8	12.3	13.2	11.0	13.3	17.7
30-49	31.5	33.2	33.5	31.5	30.7	32.7
50-64	28.6	32.9	31.9	33.1	28.2	26.6
65+	27.1	21.6	21.3	24.3	27.8	23.0

Sample composition – years of education – conditions B-E

	Condition				ESS R9 unweighted	ESS R9 weighted
	B (35 mins / €10)	C (35 mins / €25)	D (50 mins / €10)	E (50 mins / €25)		
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Average years of education	13.5	13.8	13.7	13.7	12.6	13.3

Sample composition – citizenship – conditions B-E

Citizen-ship	Condition				ESS R9 unweighted	Population statistics
	B (35 mins / €10)	C (35 mins / €25)	D (50 mins / €10)	E (50 mins / €25)		
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Austrian	96.4	91.4	96.7	92.1	93.9	83.4
Non-Austrian	3.9	8.6	3.3	7.9	6.1	16.6

No concerns with most data quality indicators but clear issues with item non-response for certain questions on paper

- Low levels of straightlining and 'contradictory' responses (no difference between conditions)

- Very few unfeasibly short completion times for web survey

- For most items, levels of item non-response not consistently / notably higher than in the face-to-face survey (no difference between conditions)

- **But – for all conditions – high levels of item non-response for some questions (especially on paper)**

- Item non-response highest for questions with 'write-in' response formats, (complex) routing instructions, and where knowledge may be lower

Conclusions and next steps

Reflecting back on our research questions

1. Is it feasible to field a (near) full-length version of the ESS questionnaire?

   – **Yes – reasonable response rates achieved, few differences in sample composition and most data quality indicators positive**

2. What is the impact of different conditional incentive amounts on participation and data quality?

   – **Very few differences – though some evidence that higher incentives may bring in more responses from non-Austrian citizens**

Next steps

- Based on this experiment and other experimental / development work decided to develop self-completion approach for ESS Round 10 fieldwork

- Slightly reduced version of questionnaire used (one section removed)

- Approach largely reflects that used for the Austria experiment (sequential, four mailings)

- Required €5 (or equivalent) unconditional incentive (ideally cash); recommended €10 conditional incentive; felt additional costs of larger conditional incentives could not be justified

- Self-completion approach being used for 9 countries to deliver their ESS R10 data collection; response rates so far between c. 20% and c. 40%

- Expect ESS will fully transition to self-completion (next 5+ years) – lots to learn from work so far; extensive further development/experimental work to be carried out

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Thank you

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