

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAMME (ISSP)

WORKING PRINCIPLES

(Amended May 2019)

A. MEMBERSHIP, MEETINGS AND DECISION-MAKING

1. *Membership*

- 1.1 Membership of the ISSP is by invitation, following a majority vote at a General Meeting or by electronic vote.
- 1.2 The Group chooses new members following a formal application for membership with answers to standard questions about methodology and survey procedures.
- 1.3 No new member shall be admitted until the Group is satisfied of its intention and ability to participate in ISSP activities according to these Principles.
- 1.4 New members will acquire the right to vote after having attended their first General Meeting, and after the successful deposit of their first ISSP module with the Data Archive. New members are expected to attend a General Meeting within two years of their election and to have successfully archived their first data set within three years. If they fail to do either, their membership automatically lapses.
- 1.5 Membership may be terminated by a two-thirds majority of the Group; membership will automatically lapse if the member fails to conduct two successive ISSP surveys (according to these Principles) within the appropriate calendar years. Members are expected to attend each annual General Meeting. If a member does not attend two consecutive General Meetings, the Secretariat will ask the Standing Committee to review their membership status and make a recommendation which will then be voted on at the General Assembly.
- 1.6 When a former ISSP member wishes to regain membership, it will be treated as a new member and will submit a new report to the Methodological Committee. It will then acquire the right to vote after attending one meeting and successfully depositing an ISSP module.
- 1.7 The Data Archive will keep the issue of membership size under review, and will inform the Group well in advance if it feels that the number of datasets of the enlarging group can no longer be handled within the budget, or timetable.

2. *General Meetings*

- 2.1 General Meetings of the Group will be held each year at venues to be decided. The plenary meeting considers administrative issues and the design of the annual ISSP module. It meets for three days, running from a Monday to a Wednesday. The plenary sessions generally stop at 13:00 on Wednesday afternoon.
- 2.2 The Sunday morning before the plenary is reserved for meetings of Drafting Groups and committees, and the Sunday afternoon for discussions of research findings emerging from ISSP data, or methodological issues. The agenda for these discussions is organised by the Secretariat. The schedule for the meeting on research findings is circulated in advance, together with research papers being presented.
- 2.3 Each participating nation is entitled to be represented at the General Meetings by not more than three people (but each country has only one vote). Two of these delegates may be speaking delegates, and the third has only observer status. In general, the two speaking delegates have to be *the same two* people throughout any one meeting. A change of one speaking delegate is possible for the duration of the discussion of the proposed proximate module. The host nation for each meeting may have more non-speaking delegates present if extra administrative assistance is required. The Secretariat may also bring more than three delegates to assist in the running of the General Meeting. With the exception of the country serving as Secretariat, all countries will normally have only one delegate seating around the table at any point in time. Additional seats around the table will also be allocated to

delegates serving on the Methodology Committee and other ISSP committees during relevant points on the agenda.

- 2.4 The Data Archive of the Group is also entitled to be present at these meetings on the same basis and, in any case, to be consulted on all matters in its domain.
- 2.5 All countries are encouraged to send delegates to all General Meetings.
- 2.6 Under special circumstances a country may appoint a delegate who is not a member of the institution to represent it at the General Meeting. The designated delegate should not represent another country during the meeting. In order to be recognized as a delegate the Secretariat would need to be informed in advance of the General Meeting.
- 2.7 Should unforeseen disruptions seriously interfere with attendance at the General Meeting, the Standing Committee is authorized to take the necessary steps to ensure the timely fielding of planned modules.

3. *Voting*

- 3.1 Half of all eligible voting members shall constitute a quorum.
- 3.2 If there is no consensus upon a matter, a vote may be taken in which each country has one vote. Decisions are by simple majority of the countries present and eligible to vote at a specific General Meeting, except for amendments to this document, which are by two-thirds majority of those voting.
- 3.3 Those members who are not to conduct a particular round of the survey will have no vote on the questionnaire for that year.
- 3.4 The Secretariat may ask for votes on specific matters by mail, email, fax, or other appropriate means of communication, addressed to the national coordinators for each member institute.

B. GROUP COORDINATION

1. Each member institution will designate one national coordinator.
2. The Group's Data Archive is *GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences*.

3. *Secretariat*

- 3.1 The Group shall appoint one of its member institutions as its Secretariat, renewable on a three-yearly basis. The maximum period of office for a Secretary/Secretariat in succession is 6 years (2 terms).
- 3.2 The Secretariat shall be elected at the General Meeting. The successful candidate must receive more than 50 percent of eligible votes. If no country receives a majority of the eligible votes in the first vote, a second vote will be taken between the two countries receiving the highest votes in the first vote.
- 3.3 Decisions of the Group, plans for meetings, and correspondence with potential new members will be coordinated by the Secretariat.

4. *Standing Committee*

- 4.1 A Standing Committee on organisational matters is elected to assist the Group in making decisions on membership, venues for future meetings, funding of joint activities, etc. This committee shall correspond between meetings, and meet in advance of the annual session if necessary. The Standing Committee consists of the Secretariat and four other members elected for four-year terms with one seat coming up for election each year.
- 4.2 Members of the Standing Committee shall be elected at the General Meeting. The successful candidate for the available seat must receive more than 50 percent of the eligible votes. If no country receives a majority

of the eligible votes in the first vote, a second vote will be taken between the two countries receiving the highest votes in the first vote.

5. Methodology Committee

- 5.1 A Methodology Committee is elected to assist the Group in assessing and enforcing the technical standards of the ISSP as indicated in these Working Principles. The Methodology Committee shall have seven members, elected by the General Meeting. The Methodology Committee elects one member as chair. Each member will be elected for a four-year term with one seat coming up for election every fourth year and two seats the other years.
- 5.2 Members of the Methodology Committee shall be elected at the General Meeting. When more than one seat is up for election voting will be conducted in succession and the successful candidate for each available seat must receive more than 50 percent of the eligible votes. If no country receives a majority of the eligible votes in the first vote, a second vote will be taken between the two countries receiving the highest votes in the first vote.
- 5.3 The Methodology Committee may create sub-committees to carry out the various tasks assigned to it by the Working Principles. The Methodology Committee may appoint other ISSP members to assist in its tasks and serve on the sub-committees and should consult with experts outside the ISSP as needed. The Methodology sub-committees report to the Methodology Committee which handles contact with the Data Archive, Secretariat, and other ISSP bodies.
- 5.4 Methodological matters are initially referred to the Methodology Committee. In consultation with the Data Archive and others as needed, the Methodology Committee then formulates recommendations on standards, actions, etc. and presents them to the Secretariat. The Secretariat then consults with the Standing Committee and ratifies, modifies, or rejects the recommendations of the Methodology Committee. Decisions of the Standing Committee stand unless modified or rejected by the General Meeting.

C. MODULES AND DRAFTING GROUPS

1. Each General Meeting will select a theme for the module that is to be discussed in detail at the following General Meeting, and give guidance on the content and approach of the proposed questionnaire. The General Meeting will also select a Drafting Group of no fewer than three and no more than six member nations (one of whom will be appointed as convener) whose task it will be to prepare a draft questionnaire on behalf of the Group.
2. Members of the Drafting Group shall be elected at the General Meeting. Voting will take place simultaneously for all seats on the Drafting Group. Each voting member may vote for up to 5 candidates and the countries with the highest number of votes will have a seat on the Drafting Group.
3. In order to ensure continuity between replicate modules, the previous convener of the Drafting Group shall be automatically nominated for the new Drafting Group.
4. The convener of a Drafting Group may invite up to three topic specialists who are not standard delegates to attend the General meeting. The convener will inform the Secretariat well in advance.
5. The Drafting Group will decide how best to transact its business - whether by email, post, telephone, interim meetings, or a combination - but in any event will circulate a draft questionnaire to all national coordinators by an agreed date in the autumn of that year.
6. The module topics are to be repeated at agreed intervals. For a module to qualify as a replication, two-thirds of the items must be taken from one or more of the previous questionnaires of that topic module.
7. In a replication of a module, the Drafting Group is required to indicate, if the topic module has been fielded more than once before, in which of the previous questionnaires of that topic module the replicated items have been asked. The Drafting Group is also required to present its rationale for selecting the replicated items in a written report.

8. The members will then reply to the Drafting Group, who will collate responses and circulate another draft no less than two months before the annual meeting.
9. Responses and proposed amendments to this second draft should be sent to the Secretariat who will forward them to all ISSP members, two weeks before the General Meeting. This allows all members to get a sense of the range of views, and to ascertain consensus on various matters.
10. The Drafting Group will meet on the Sunday morning before the annual General Meeting. At this meeting, the Drafting Group will consider the suggestions they have received, and decide on their collective response. They will produce a short draft note which must be circulated at the Monday morning session, giving the Group time to read it before the consideration of the questionnaire starts on Monday afternoon.
11. General Meeting in plenary session will then consider the draft in detail (informed by the results of any pretests that have by then been completed), with a view to producing a final draft at the end of its deliberations.
12. If members of the ISSP want the General Meeting to discuss and decide about the inclusion of any (optional) item(s) proposed for the module, they should notify the Drafting Group and the Secretariat at least four weeks in advance of the General Meeting in which the questionnaire is finalized and specify the item(s) and provide a rationale. The Drafting Group should consider and respond to these proposals. The final decision which items to include in the draft questionnaire lies with the Drafting Group. The number of optional items should be limited. Whether optional items are voted on individually or en bloc is left to the discretion of the Secretariat.
13. The Drafting Group will then be charged with completing the design of the module and fine-tuning as necessary, in consultation with other nations and the Secretariat. The final questionnaire and supporting material will be circulated by the Secretariat by September 1st in that year.
14. The General Meeting will appoint a member or members whose task it is to generate written material on ISSP findings.
15. If a Drafting-Group convener fails to get a response from a Drafting-Group member after two attempted contacts, the convener may, in consultation with the Secretariat, drop the non-responding member from the Drafting Group and ask another member to fill the vacancy.
16. Members of a Drafting Group may, as necessary, remove the convener by majority vote. The Secretariat must be immediately informed of any change in convener. If the Drafting Group removes a convener, but is unable to agree upon a replacement, its members should contact the Secretariat for assistance.
17. The Secretariat will monitor the operation of the Drafting Groups and their compliance with ISSP rules. If the Secretariat finds that a Drafting Group is not fulfilling its obligations, it will contact the members of the Drafting Group and attempt to resolve the problem. If the Secretariat is unable to resolve the problem with the members of the Drafting Group, the Standing Committee may dissolve the Drafting Group and appoint a new committee in its place.

D. FINANCE

1. Each country is responsible for its own expenses.
2. The budgets for international coordination and for the Data Archive are provided - for the time being - by the Secretariat or the Data Archive respectively.
3. The host for meetings provides the budget for the organisation of and facilities for that meeting, but not for the participants' expenses.

E. DATA COLLECTION AND ARCHIVING

1. Every member agrees to field a 15-minute long questionnaire once a year. A 15-minute long questionnaire is generally understood to consist of 60 questions (not including the compulsory demographics). The

questionnaire should be suitable for self-administration, but can be administered in a face-to-face interview as well. Telephone interviews are generally not acceptable. The questions are to be asked in a single block in identical order in each country, but individual questions may, when necessary, be omitted by any nation after informing the Group. The intention to omit items must be either announced at the General Meeting or presented to the Secretariat in due time before fielding the module.

2. The agreed annual background variables are not counted as part of the fifteen-minute block, nor do they need to be administered in a single block. Other background variables agreed for specific years need not be part of a single block, but they should be suitable for self-completion format and do count as part of the fifteen minutes available for the ISSP modules.
3. The sample is a national representative probability sample of the adult population without substitution, designed to achieve a norm of 1,400 cases, and, in any event, a minimum of 1,000 cases. ISSP does not accept the use of quota samples. When there is a shortfall in the achieved sample size, the Data Archive will inform the Secretariat. The Secretariat in consultation with the Standing and Methodology Committees will decide if the shortfall is notable enough that the study will not be counted as successfully archived and will be excluded from the integrated data set.
4. Each national questionnaire is to be a translation from a standard questionnaire upon which the Group has agreed. The language of the standard questionnaire is "British" English. As for the method of translation, it is recommended to use a two-step approach as it is described in the Appendix A, section 3.1. As a minimum rule, the translation shall be conducted in collaboration of at least two individuals. The translation team should combine the expertise from the areas of translation and survey methodology/questionnaire design. If a cultural adaptation rather than a translation becomes necessary, this is to be notified to the Group and indicated in the documentation.
5. Documented data files of each country, together with technical details of the survey methods, are to be sent to the Data Archive without delay (and certainly not later than nine months after fieldwork). For a list of required documents see ISSP data deposit portal. The Data Archive will offer an integrated dataset to the scientific community. In any event, the Data Archive will include in the integrated data file all national data received by September 1 in the year after the calendar year to which it relates. (Data received after this date may be too late for inclusion in the first release of the module.) Country data sets which are not completely deposited before April 15th of the second year after the module's year can definitely not be included into the final integrated file. The integrated ISSP dataset will be made publicly available as soon as possible after this date. If a country is unable to archive by that date, it should contact the Data Archive and Secretariat and inform them when the data will be deposited. (Appendix A gives further details of agreements about archiving.)
By September 15th of each year the Data Archive will report to the Secretariat the status regarding the depositing of data and required supplementary materials for each country. The Secretariat will announce by October 15th the status of all studies.
6. In order for the data to be considered successfully archived the Technical Report must be completed in a timely and satisfactory manner. The Technical Report is due when each module is deposited and like the data themselves are due by September 1st in the year following the scheduled data collection year of the module. If the Technical Report is not completed or if the information supplied raises concerns, the Methodology Committee should report this to the Secretariat.
7. If the Technical Report or other information indicates that a study does not conform to ISSP standards, the Methodology Committee should inform the country involved and work with it to bring its practices into compliance with ISSP rules. The Methodology Committee should also inform the Secretariat of any actions.
8. Any country considering changes to its study design from what was proposed when it first joined the ISSP or otherwise from its past practice should send a description of the proposed changes to the Methodology Committee and the Secretariat well before any changes are adopted. The Methodology Committee will advise the country proposing the changes and the Secretariat whether the revised study design meets ISSP standards. If the Methodology Committee finds that the revised design is not compliant with ISSP rules, it will work with the country proposing changes to come up with a design that does meet ISSP standards.
9. The Secretariat and Methodology Committee will review responses to the Technical Report and identify cases in which the practices of countries deviate from the ISSP norms and work with countries to raise standards and reduce undesirable variance in ISSP practices.

APPENDIX A. Recommendations about translation, weighting, archiving, sampling, response data and background variables

1. Translation procedure

- 1.1 It is recommended that the translation of the questionnaire into the (main) national languages is conducted in at least two steps:
- First step: At least two independent translations of the source questionnaire are conducted.
 - Second step: Review and Adjudication. The two draft translations are compared and reviewed by a third person. The final draft translation is checked for internal consistency.

2. Weighting

- 2.1 The Data Archive should be supplied with unweighted data.
- 2.2 The Data Archive Variable Report will contain the unweighted frequencies for each variable.
- 2.3 The Variable Report will contain a prominent warning to this effect in the lead text.
- 2.4 In cases where countries do not weight data, the Data Archive will recode the weight variable so that all weights equal 1 (not 0) so the weighting variable can be applied globally rather than selectively.
- 2.5 Each country needs to supply the Data Archive with a clear description of the weighting procedure, what justification there is for weighting the data, and what the weight variable is designed to accomplish. This description should be in English, and must give enough detail so that non-members can understand the conditions under which weighting should be applied.
- 2.6 The weighting variables supplied to the Data Archive will be included as a variable in the integrated dataset so that analysts can apply it as necessary.

3. Sampling and non-response

- 3.1 Each member should make sure that the Technical Report deposited with the Archive gives clear details of the sampling procedure, and any known biases. This is particularly important where the sample is known not to be nationally representative, due either to differential non-response or to deficiencies in the sampling frame.
- 3.2 The Technical Report deposited with the Data Archive should contain clear information about response rates, which should include not only non-response to the particular survey but, where relevant, wave non-response (i.e., if the design is a panel design). At a minimum, response data should include information that can be displayed in the following format

Details about issued sample:

Please follow the standards laid down in AAPOR/WAPOR, Standard Definitions: The numbers in the parentheses are those used in Table 2 ff. of the Standard Definitions. The most up-to-date version is [edition 9 from 2016](#)

1. Total number of starting or issued names/addresses (gross sample size) *	
2. Interviews (1.0)	
3. Eligible, Non-Interview A. Refusal/Break-off (2.10) B. Non-Contact (2.20) C. Other i. Language Problems (2.33) ii. Miscellaneous Other (2.31, 2.32, 2.35)	
3. Unknown Eligibility, Non-Interview (3.0)	
4. Not Eligible A. Not a Residence (4.50) B. Vacant Residence (4.60) C. No Eligible Respondent (4.70) D. Other (4.10,4.90)	

* When new sample units are added during the field period via a new dwelling units list or other standard updating procedure, these additional issued units are added to the starting number of units to make up the total gross sample size. See AAPOR/WAPOR Standard Definitions, pp 12-13 for further clarification.

- 3.3 Each member is asked to include the following information about known characteristics of its national population, from a census or the best available estimates from government surveys or other high-quality data sources:

sex distribution of the population;
age distribution of the population;
education (years of schooling) of the population;
employment rate of the population.

These data will allow analysts to make independent judgments about sample representativeness of each national dataset.

- 3.4 The Data Archive will collect technical reports or papers on methods of sampling, data collection and weighting for each member nation. Each member should send any such reports to the Data Archive, and the Data Archive will announce the availability of such reports.

4. *Standard background variables*

- 4.1 The Secretariat has circulated guidelines on the required standard background variables. The latest version of these guidelines and further information on the standard background variables are available from the Data Archive via the Data Deposit Portal. All countries are asked to check these variables and to conform to them.