

Quality assurance for the 4th European Company Survey

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Introduction

Eurofound has been running comparative cross-national EU-wide surveys since 1995.¹ The surveys reflect Eurofound's commitment to answer to the needs of its tripartite² stakeholders with a remit to conduct European policy-oriented research in the fields of living and working conditions.

The [European Company Survey \(ECS\)](#)³ is a questionnaire-based survey among a stratified, random sample of establishments in Europe. Traditionally, an overview report is produced, as well as secondary analyses focussing on themes of research and policy interest. The results of the ECS are published and disseminated widely.

The ECS has been carried out every four years since 2004 by the [European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions \(Eurofound\)](#)⁴ which is based in Dublin. The next edition is being organised jointly, for the first time, with Eurofound's sister agency in Thessaloniki, the [European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training \(Cedefop\)](#)⁵, and will go to the field in early 2019

Both Eurofound and Cedefop were established in 1975 as tripartite European agencies set up to produce comparative socio-economic research. While Eurofound focuses on living and working conditions and industrial relations, Cedefop focuses on vocational education and lifelong learning. Both agencies have between 90 and 100 staff and they each have a small representative office in Brussels.

4th European Company Survey

The objectives of the [ECS 2019](#)⁶ are to provide evidence relevant to the agencies' stakeholders and support policies for EU competitiveness and EU initiatives, e.g. the New Skills Agenda for Europe, the EU Industrial policy, the Digital Single Market Strategy, the social dialogue relaunch initiatives.

¹ [European Working Conditions Survey \(EWCS\)](#) – started 1995, seventh edition 2020; [European Quality of Life Survey \(EQLS\)](#), started 2003, 4th edition 2016; [European Company Survey \(ECS\)](#) – started 2004, 4th edition 2019

² Where the Board is composed of representatives from national governments, employers and trade unions. It also includes representatives of the European Commission

³ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-company-surveys>

⁴ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/>

⁵ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/>

⁶ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-company-surveys/ecs2019>

It will build on the work done in the [ECS 2013](#)⁷ and will look at workplace practices in terms of work organisation, human resources management, skills strategies, digitalisation, employee participation and social dialogue. This should allow for the identification of those bundles of workplace practices that work particularly well in creating win-win outcomes, linking these issues to business strategy and performance: situations where workers are facilitated and motivated to use their skills to the full, share their knowledge and insights with colleagues and management, and identify opportunities to improve both themselves and the work process as a whole, allowing establishments to thrive.

The target population are establishments with 10 or more employees in all economic sectors (except NACE Rev. 2 categories A, O, P, Q, T and U) in all the EU Member States and 4 Candidate countries (Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey). Within the establishment the survey targets the most senior manager in charge of personnel and, where present, an official employee representative.

In a change from previous editions, which were administered by telephone, the ECS 2019 will use a push-to-web approach and will be the first large-scale, cross-national survey to apply such a method. Nearly 28 000 establishments across 32 European countries will be contacted via telephone to identify a management respondent, and, where possible, an employee representative respondent after which respondents will be asked to fill out the survey questionnaire online. This approach reduces the burden on respondents and is expected to improve the quality of responses. It is intended that moving the questionnaire administration fully online shall make the ECS well and truly future-proof.

Key challenges for the ECS 2019

- Coverage error
- Quality of sampling frames
- Screening of companies to get to the establishment level
- Screening within establishments to identify employee representative
- Response rates and response bias
- Measurement error
- Quality of the respondent
- Quality of the survey infrastructure
- Respondent burden

Timeline

January-February 2018	Cognitive testing in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Poland
January-July 2018	Sampling strategy and sampling plans for all countries
March-July 2018	Translation
February 2018	Introductory seminar with national fieldwork partners
September-October 2018	Pilot testing in all countries
December 2018	Pre-fieldwork seminar with national fieldwork partners
February-May 2019	Fieldwork (telephone recruitment and on-line completion)
August 2019	Delivery of final datasets, syntaxes and reports
September 2020	Publication of results

⁷ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-company-surveys/european-company-survey-2013>

Quality assurance, transparency and quality control

Considering its impact at EU, international and national levels, Eurofound has a strong commitment to quality assurance and improvement. It is important that data collected are sound, robust and of the highest quality and that information on data quality is made available to stakeholders and the research community.

For the preparation and implementation of the ECS 2019, information will be gathered to assess it against a **quality assurance framework** devised by Eurofound and based on the quality concept of the European Statistical System as developed by Eurostat,⁸ as well as other quality frameworks such as the Cross-Cultural Survey Guidelines⁹ and the Total Survey Error Approach.¹⁰ This information will be published in a report along with an external quality assessment report which will document the quality of the ECS 2019. Detailed methodological information will also be made to the public.

Eurofound's quality framework has three elements:

- Quality assurance: procedures and activities to ensure that the survey meets quality requirements
- Quality control: all the things that we actually do to make sure that that a quality job is being carried out
- Quality indicators: list of indicators through which we can monitor the survey and assess the quality

With preparations for the ECS 2019 well advanced, the presentation will provide an overview of the current quality standards and quality assurance measures that Eurofound and Cedefop are applying to ensure their commitment to quality improvement. It will look at the different phases and tasks required to carry out such a large survey and cover such tasks as questionnaire development, translation, sampling, fieldwork monitoring and reporting.

Sophia MacGoris will present the ECS 2019 with a focus on the approach to quality assurance and quality control. Feedback from participants on the presentation is encouraged.

⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/64157/4392716/ESS-QAF-V1-2final.pdf/bbf5970c-1adf-46c8-afc3-58ce177a0646>

⁹ <http://ccsg.isr.umich.edu/index.php/chapters/survey-quality-chapter>

¹⁰ Cf. Herbert F. Weisberg (2005). *The Total Error Approach. A Guide to the New Science of Survey Research*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.