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SERISS (Synergies for Europe's Research Infrastructures in the Social Sciences) aims to exploit synergies, foster collaboration and develop shared standards between Europe's social science infrastructures in order to better equip these infrastructures to play a major role in addressing Europe's grand societal challenges and ensure that European policymaking is built on a solid base of the highest-quality socio-economic evidence.

The four-year project (2015-19) is a collaboration between the three leading European Research Infrastructures in the social sciences – the European Social Survey (ESS ERIC), the Survey for Health Aging and Retirement in Europe (SHARE ERIC) and the Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA AS) – and organisations representing the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP), European Values Study (EVS) and the WageIndicator Survey.

Work focuses on three key areas: Addressing key challenges for cross-national data collection, breaking down barriers between social science infrastructures and embracing the future of the social sciences.

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Introduction

This deliverable describes detailed plans for the work to be carried out under Work Package 7 (WP7) – ‘A survey future online’ of the project ‘Synergies for Europe’s Research Infrastructures in the Social Sciences (SERISS)’, funded by the European Commission under Horizon 2020 grant agreement 654221. This document outlines the recruitment design for the CROss-National Online Survey (CRONOS) panel.

Online surveys have become increasingly common in the social sciences, and representative probability-based online panels have been successfully implemented in several European countries as well as in the USA. However, with no cross-national probability-based online panels, the empirical evidence to date has been gained from one-country projects.

The CRONOS panel is the first attempt to set up an academic cross-national probability-based web panel under an input-harmonisation framework, where panel recruitment, setup and maintenance are guided by the same methodological principles in all participating countries. To make this effort efficient, we have designed the panel to be built on the back of an established probability-based cross-national face-to-face survey: the European Social Survey (ESS). Between 2016 and 2018, a pilot study will be conducted in three of the countries participating in Round 8 of the ESS: Estonia, Slovenia and the UK.

One of the main goals of this pilot study is to explore the challenges associated with cross-national recruitment and implementation. This deliverable summarises the recruitment plans and decision process related to setting up CRONOS; these plans were informed by a literature review, practical and empirical evidence from similar projects, and cooperation with the numerous survey experts and organisations involved in the project. Further details of how the panel performed, and the implementation of these plans, will be provided in SERISS Deliverables 7.5 “Best strategies to recruit and maintain web panels” and 7.7 “A blueprint for a comparative web panel”.

The recruitment strategies presented in this document are the result of the collaborative work of a large team of social scientists, from those who coordinate SERISS WP7 to the researchers who will supervise panellist recruitment in each country and teams who will design questions for the multilingual panel. CRONOS is centrally organised and led by ESS ERIC Headquarters (ESS HQ) at City, University of London, in collaboration with SERISS WP7 partners in Norway (NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data), Slovenia (University of Ljubljana), the Netherlands (Tilburg University and CenERdata), Germany (Munich Centre for the Economics of Ageing) and Spain (Universitat Pompeu Fabra), as well as with National Coordinator (NC) teams in Slovenia (University of Ljubljana), UK (NatCen Social Research) and Estonia (University of Tartu).

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 - Salima Douhou (ESS ERIC HQ)
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List of abbreviations

CRONOS – Cross-National Online Survey

ESS – European Social Survey

ESS ERIC HQ – European Social Survey Headquarters

NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data

NC – National Coordinator

1. CRONOS' approach to building a probability-based panel

Challenges of building online panels of probability-based samples

Although online panels have been gaining popularity and importance in the social sciences, building a probability-based online panel still poses important challenges related to sampling, coverage and nonresponse sources of error:

- a) Sampling and coverage. The simplest approach to sampling respondents for an online survey would be a list of all members of the target population that contained online contact details, so that online invitations could be sent to the randomly selected sample units. This model, where the sampling frame contains (or can be matched to) information that allows contacting respondents in the same mode used for data collection has worked in the past for face-to-face, telephone and postal surveys. The expected advantage is that giving sample units the opportunity to answer without having to engage in extra steps using other modes may have a positive impact on nonresponse error. However, online surveys cannot follow this model for the time being, as lists of usernames for messaging apps or email addresses of the general population are not available in most countries. Therefore, even for target populations with high rates of internet penetration, offline recruitment is often still necessary to obtain probabilistic samples of the general population, whether it is done by telephone, by letter, or face-to-face.

With the advent and widespread take-up of smartphones, this situation may change: one can go from a text message to browsers in one click, so panel recruitment via SMS has some potential. However, the most common telephone sampling design is still RDD, which generates a substantial proportion of non-working and ineligible telephone numbers and still leaves out individuals without mobile telephone service.

- b) Nonresponse. A second key challenge in online panel recruitment stems from the difficulty of recruiting respondents who do not normally use the internet (Callegaro et al. 2015) and are thus unlikely to participate in an online survey, either because they do not have access to the internet or because they are reluctant to use or unfamiliar with the technology. The magnitude of this problem is declining, as internet networks reach remotes areas and costs fall, but it remains a substantial challenge in many countries around the world. To avoid this problem, online panels either provide members with a device and internet connection to complete the surveys, or enable completion via a different mode like mailed questionnaires or telephone interviews. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages (discussed later in this section), but both prevent the exclusion of a group of the population likely to differ in many aspects from those who have access to the internet.

Approaches to recruitment of online panels: Fresh samples vs piggy-backing

To overcome sampling and coverage challenges, the existing probability-based online panels have recruited using a different mode (face-to-face, mail, or telephone). Most of the established probability-based online panels in Europe have been recruited from scratch via a face-to-face recruitment interview (Blom et al. 2015a). However, this approach entails high costs related to sampling, setting up a fieldwork team, training interviewers, and paying interviewers for their time and travel. The piggy-backing approach—where participants in an existing survey are also recruited to join a panel—can reduce panel recruitment costs, as there is no need to obtain separate sampling frames and participants are invited to join the online panel by interviewers who are already trained and in the field.

However, additional challenges emerge from piggy-backing on an established survey programme. In a fresh sample panel recruitment, interviewer training will focus on successfully persuading sample units to sign up for the panel, explain what it consists of, and show those without internet access how the device works and looks. In a piggy-backing recruitment approach, panel recruitment is just a part of a larger number of tasks the interviewer has to learn and then complete right after the interview. In addition, piggy-backing projects will have little room to adjust the survey features that the ‘parent’ survey relies on, which makes the choice of the existing survey particularly important.

CRONOS was proposed in 2014 as a feasibility study to test a piggy-backing approach of recruiting a cross-national, probability-based online panel of the general population. Since the SERISS proposal was presented in 2014, two national online panels have been constructed by recruiting from existing face-to-face or telephone probability-based surveys: the NatCen Opinion Panel, recruited on the back of the British Social Attitudes survey, and Pew’s American Trends Panel, recruited via the Political Polarization and Typology Survey and the Survey on Government. This approach has also been used in the GESIS panel, originally built from a ‘fresh’ sample but now recruiting new members via the ALLBUS survey. In these three panels, respondents were invited to join the online panel at the end of the survey interview, and sampled units who do not have internet access are invited to participate via a different mode, mail for the GESIS panel and telephone for the other two.

Setting up a cross-national online survey panel

Cross-cultural research is becoming increasingly important and prevalent. In the past few decades, new cross-national efforts have been emerging in the social sciences with the aim of comparing nations and their societies and monitoring those differences. Despite the general rise of online panels in the social sciences, none of the existing online panels of probability samples have been built with a cross-national comparative perspective in mind. The CRONOS panel is thus the

first study to investigate the feasibility of building a cross-national online panel where panel members are a random probability sample of the general population in each country.

Comparison of survey estimates from different populations presumes equivalence of those estimates. This involves not only equivalence regarding how the constructs are measured in each group, but also the impact that essential survey conditions have on all sources of error for each group. The basic strategy that cross-cultural surveys try to follow is to replicate features of survey design in the best possible way across countries and cultures (Harkness, Mohler & Van de Vijver, 2003), from sampling design to data processing. All countries involved are expected to implement the same procedures and follow the same methods. Deliberate adaptation of the procedures and strategies to particular cultures is minimal and usually introduced *ad hoc*. However, it has long been recognised that equivalence is not guaranteed just by using identical procedures and methods across groups (Braun, 2003; Scheuch, 1968; Verba, 1971). Design considerations took this into account at every developmental stage of the CRONOS project and across the survey life cycle. For this reason, we sought to find a ‘parent’ survey that followed functional equivalence principles. The ESS is particularly suitable for the CRONOS pilot study as it uses random probability samples of the general population in all participating countries and follows a centralised survey management approach with a high level of input harmonisation.

Although more than 20 countries have participated in each round of the ESS so far, the CRONOS panel was set up as a pilot study in three countries, with the aim of testing the feasibility of implementing the proposed approach and its potential scalability to a larger number of countries in the future. The selection of these three countries— Estonia, Slovenia and the UK—was based on several criteria that sought to ensure a sufficient number of participants and sufficient country variation to maximise the chances of uncovering the various challenges that one could encounter if the implemented strategy were replicated in a survey project with a larger number of participating countries. These criteria included internet penetration, population size, sampling frame, expected fieldwork period, language, and the type of survey organisations conducting fieldwork and managing the panel at the national level.

Panel name

CRONOS is the acronym used among researchers to refer to the overall project. As the acronym is based on English words, it will not always work in other languages. Therefore, the local teams have been asked to choose a country-specific name to make the panel appealing to respondents and make the connection to the local name of the face-to-face project. The suggestion was to avoid the word ‘panel’, as this is a technical term that may not be familiar to the general population. Two of the countries, however, considered that using the term panel was appropriate:

- In Estonia, the panel is called 'Euroopa Sotsiaaluuringu internetiküsitlus' in Estonian and 'Европейское социальное исследование в интернете' in Russian, which translates as 'European Social Survey in the Internet'.
- In Slovenia, the CRONOS panel has received the name 'Slovenski mnenjski panel' (SMP), which translates as 'Slovenian Opinion Panel'.
- In the UK, the standard ESS project was to be called 'UK Opinion 2016', so the panel has been called 'UK Opinion Panel'.

2. The CRONOS sample

CRONOS target population

The target population for CRONOS comprises adults (18+) living in households in the participating countries (Estonia, Slovenia, and Great Britain). The target population of the ESS is residents 15 years or older living in private households of participating countries, which would allow to expand the CRONOS target population to those between the ages of 15 and 17. However, recruiting participants under 18 years of age for an online panel requires parental consent, which would pose additional administrative and ethical challenges, including setting up how to obtain informed consent from the parents and respondents and evaluating the implications of providing an internet device to minors. Given that only 3% of ESS respondents fall in the 15-17 year old range (ESS Round 7: European Social Survey Round 7 Data, 2014), implementing the extra work did not seem cost-effective and they have been excluded from the CRONOS target population. There is no upper age limit for participation in the CRONOS panel.

CRONOS sampling design and sampling frame

The gross sample for CRONOS is the same as the ESS gross sample—a random selection of sample units in each participating country. Sampling frames and sampling designs differ across the three countries, depending on sampling frame availability and how fieldwork is organised. Estonia and Slovenia will use population registers as sampling frames, selecting units according to different strata; the UK will use an address-based sampling frame to carry out a multi-stage sampling design with systematic sampling at the first two stages and Kish's procedure in the respondent-selection stage (ESS, 2017). All sampling units eligible to participate in the ESS are thus eligible to participate in CRONOS—with the exception of 15 to 17 year old respondents.

How about those who did not complete the ESS?

Reinforcing the CRONOS sample by inviting those who we do not manage to contact, those who refuse to participate or those who cannot participate for other reasons (e.g., language barriers) was

considered during the design of the project, as it may have contributed to increasing the size of the panel. However, the idea was discarded for a number of reasons:

- 1) Several countries in the ESS (including the UK) use address-based or area-probability samples that rely on interviewers to randomly select the final sample unit within each household. If no one is contacted in the sampled household or they refuse to disclose how many 15+ individuals lived in the household, the selection of the final unit would have to be left to household informants. Research has found that compliance with self-administered selection procedures is moderate (Lavrakas, 2008; Olson and Smyth, 2014), and we preferred eliminating potentially introducing a different source of bias in one of the countries.
- 2) The face-to-face ESS interview will act as the CRONOS recruitment and profile interview, allowing us to collect a wide range of data, including necessary demographic information. These data would be missing for individuals who joined the panel without completing the ESS profile interview. If these data were to be collected online, resources would have needed to be invested in adapting the full ESS survey to the web and programming it in all languages, and the resulting data might have been subject to different measurement effects due to mode.
- 3) The recruitment interview is designed to achieve several goals: check eligibility by identifying whether respondents are 18 or older, figure out whether they have internet access, and gain informed consent by providing full details about how data would be handled and protected in the study. Without the interview, we would not be able to ascertain respondent eligibility nor their need to receive a tablet to enable participation.
- 4) Based on prior research, it seemed highly unlikely that a significant portion of sample units that are never contacted, refuse to participate, or cannot speak the language of the survey would agree to join a year-long survey study, even if it was to be completed in a different mode. ESS research has shown that face-to-face data collection yielded much higher participation rates than any other mixed-mode combinations that included web, and that the sample composition of those who participated face-to-face better matched population estimates of demographic variables invitation (Villar and Fitzgerald, 2017). Thus; there is little evidence to suggest that those who say no to a face-to-face invitation would say yes to a web invitation. Hence, investing the extra resources needed to contact these respondents again and invite them to complete the long ESS survey online did not seem cost-effective.

3. Preparing for recruitment

CRONOS follows a centralised approach to recruitment aiming at the highest possible standardisation of procedures across countries while allowing localised adaptation where needed. Recruitment procedures have been developed centrally through close collaboration with all local teams. This section describes the process carried out to develop a standardised approach and the designed plans for interviewer training, the recruitment interview, the panel offer, the incentive approach and the plans for fieldwork monitoring. Where deemed useful, we will also cover alternative approaches that were considered and the rationale behind the final choice.

Standardised approach

The starting point for the discussion of the CRONOS recruitment design was a summary of the evidence from existing probability-based online panels¹, which was circulated among all teams and the Advisory Board. Meetings between the central and local teams were held every other month to discuss progress on the design decisions and ensure that input from the local teams was timely and taken into account. This collaborative approach sought to find state-of-the-art methodological approaches that would be suitable for implementation in all countries, and to ensure as much methodological equivalence as possible.

To facilitate feedback and consistent implementation across countries, ‘source’ fieldwork documents (e.g., interviewer manuals, instructions and protocols) were prepared centrally and distributed to the local teams for translation and localisation. The UK team also helped design and polish leaflets for interviewers with information about the study, and were generous in sharing the design with other local teams. Once procedures were agreed upon and documents finalised², teams were encouraged to keep the local versions as similar as possible to the source version. Any planned deviations were typically discussed with the CRONOS central team. Where discrepancies were deemed necessary, unavoidable, or beneficial for comparability purposes, these were documented centrally (and will be published as part of Deliverable 7.5).

Interviewer briefings

Recruitment to the panel relies on interviewers being able to persuade respondents to join, with only the support of an information leaflet. Interviewers need to assess eligibility of respondents, ascertain whether they have internet access, introduce the project, ensure respondents understand the key aspects of the project so they can provide informed consent, collect contact details, and finalise the interaction before completing the ESS ‘interviewer questionnaire’ and the CRONOS

¹ The results of this exercise were summarised in the SERISS Deliverable 7.1 Summary of existing web panel strategies (Sommer, 2017)

² These procedures and documents were approved by the ESS ERIC Ethics Committee (see Rød, Villar, Johannesen and Finnøy, 2017).

‘Recruitment effort summary’. This is especially challenging considering that some respondents may already be uneasy about having spent one hour answering the main ESS interview. Given the complexity of the task, it is important to carefully train interviewers on the goals of the project, how it should be introduced to respondents, and the importance of making sure respondents understand the scientific nature of the study and how their data will be handled and protected.

Training for CRONOS recruitment will be carried out right after the interviewer briefing for ESS Round 8. It includes an introduction to the CRONOS study, strategies on how to persuade respondents to join the panel, answers to possible concerns, instructions on ensuring informed consent is obtained, and a mock recruitment interview as a practice exercise. Special care has been put into explaining when tablets are to be offered to respondents and why, highlighting that the number of devices is limited and should only be offered if needed. Interviewers will be asked to carefully study the CRONOS interviewer manual before going into the field.

Six source documents were designed to train and support interviewers³, three of which need to be translated, as they are meant to be used by interviewers in each country. The other three documents provided guidance to local teams about how to organise the interviewer training and refresher workshops.

- Overall Guidance for CRONOS Recruitment Procedures
- CRONOS Interviewer Manual
- CRONOS Interviewer Briefing Checklist
- CRONOS Interviewer Refresher Workshops
- CRONOS Participant Information Sheet, turned into a tryptic leaflet by the UK team.
- CRONOS Recruitment interview and Recruitment effort summary

Refresher interviewer briefings

Given the experimental nature of the recruitment approach, preventive measures have been taken in case recruitment rates are much lower than expected. Refresher interviewer briefings have been scheduled for 4-5 weeks after fieldwork starts; all interviewers are required to attend the 2-hour session(s), whether in person or by telephone. These meetings have multiple purposes. First, they are meant to assist and support interviewers. We will encourage interviewers to share successful strategies with each other to help everyone achieve better recruitment rates, and also to help them overcome any difficulties they may be finding when recruiting CRONOS respondents. Second, we plan to provide feedback to interviewers about recruitment progress based on their reports and on analysis of the recruitment data uploaded to the panel management system (see section 4). Finally, the meetings will provide an opportunity to gather information about the CRONOS pilot project for final reporting. To ensure harmonisation of the procedure, local teams

³ These documents are available in the Annexes to SERISS Deliverable 7.4 “Fieldwork Protocols. Documenting the implementation of the CROss-National Online Survey (CRONOS) Panel” (Villar and Sommer, 2017)

have received general guidance from the central team on what issues to address during the workshops, and local teams have been asked in turn to provide a summary of feedback sessions to the central team.

4. Recruitment procedures

CRONOS recruitment interview

The standardised CRONOS recruitment interview, with a total of 5 questions for respondents and 8 questions for interviewer completion, is meant to be programmed in each country's CAPI⁴ system following the last question to the ESS Round 8 interview. The main purpose of the standardised recruitment interview is to guide interviewers through the recruitment process, ensure participants can give informed consent, and collect information that helps monitor and assess the recruitment process centrally.

The recruitment interview starts by checking whether respondents who report being born in 1998 are already 18 and continues by asking all respondents whether they have access to the internet for personal use. For respondents 18 and older, interviewers will read the panel offer while handing over the leaflet, which mentions the key features of the project: number and frequency of waves, incentives, and information about the researchers behind the study (see panel offer in figure 1). For those who do not have internet access, the offer also mentions that the project can give them an internet-enabled tablet to complete the surveys. Respondents will be asked for contact information—e-mail address and telephone number—so that we can invite them to the study when it is launched. In line with ethical requirements, only personal data necessary for the project was collected during the recruitment interview. An email address is essential for participating in an online panel, and mobile telephone numbers were collected to allow sending text message reminders. All variables from the recruitment interview are listed in the CRONOS Data Handling Protocol (Rød, Villar, Johannesen and Finnøy, 2016).

The goal of the CRONOS panel is to recruit as many members as possible. We want to reach the maximum potential recruitment rate. For that reason, we have designed an approach to encourage those respondents who are hesitant at the time the panel offer is presented: recruiters will ask hesitant respondents for an email account so they can receive an invitation to the surveys of the project and decide at that moment whether they want to participate in the study. It will be made clear that participation is voluntary and they can refuse to participate either by ignoring the invitation or contacting the free telephone helpline to have their email removed from the project. Participants who say yes to the panel offer will, of course, also be asked to provide an email address to which the survey invitations can be sent.

⁴ All participating countries used Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) to conduct ESS Round 8.

We would like to invite you to join a new research panel study tracking the values and opinions of people in [COUNTRY].

If you join the study, you will be invited to take part in 20-minute surveys every couple of months for about a year. You will receive a [NC: ENTER AMOUNT voucher] for every survey to which you are invited to participate, as a token of our appreciation. The surveys can be completed online, and you can decide the best time to complete them. By joining the panel you will represent your generation's views on a wide range of social issues.

The data will be used for scientific purposes, following strict data protection rules. Your participation is voluntary, you can decide whether or not to accept each invitation, and you can withdraw from the study any time you wish.

[PROGRAMMER: DISPLAY ONLY IF NO INTERNET ACCESS FOR PERSONAL USE R2a = 2, 7, 8 OR R2c = 2, 7, 8:]

To enable your participation, we will provide you with a free, easy-to-use tablet. If you agree to participate, a staff member from [NC: ENTER NAME OF ORGANISATION WHO WILL DELIVER THE TABLET] will contact you in January to bring you the device and explain how to use it to complete the survey. You will also have access to help and support when you need it.

R3a. Would you be interested in participating in this study?

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| Unsure/Hesitant | 2 |
| Needs time to think | 3 |
| No | 4 |
| Other | 5 |

Figure 1. Panel offer text from the CRONOS recruitment interview

The CRONOS teams and the Advisory Board discussed carefully the positioning of the panel offer with respect to the survey interview. No empirical evidence was found to help inform the decision, therefore practical considerations guided the discussion. On the one hand, waiting until the end of the survey could harm recruitment rates. Having already complied to a pretty large request from the researchers, respondents whose motivation to participate may be to make a contribution to the project may feel like they have already accomplished that. They may also feel fatigued after one hour answering questions or, if they have not enjoyed the experience, avoid going through a similar process again. On the other hand, placing the request at the end could help recruitment rates. Rapport and trust may be built during the interview and make respondents more likely to accept the offer, especially if they have enjoyed the experience.

In addition, there were concerns about placing the offer either at the beginning or at some point during the interview. First, having the panel offer right after a respondent agrees to participate may make them change their mind about participating in the ESS interview, potentially damaging ESS response rates. Second, if the offer was brought up at some point during the interview, this could harm the trust relationship between respondent and interviewer as they may feel 'ambushed', or that the initial interview request was just an excuse to recruit them into the panel. This could increase the risk of interview breakoff and decrease respondent motivation to answer, potentially affecting measurement quality. Third, stopping the interview to present a new request and having to smoothly transition back into the interview seemed like an extraordinarily burdensome and awkward task for the interviewer. Lastly, having the request during the interview could make the consent request less distinguishable from the initial consent to complete the face-to-face interview. Interviewers may feel pressured to rush through the information to return to the survey interview, and respondents be less likely to ask for clarification about what the project entails. An alternative design may be possible, where pre-notification letters mention the online panel and interviewers present the two parts of the project at the beginning. However, setting up such a design would entail careful drafting and pretesting of the offers to ensure that it does not harm the ESS response rates. There were no resources in this project to carry out this work, so the team focused on a piggy-backing approach that had minimal impact on the parent survey. Thus, the final decision was to place the panel offer immediately following the last question of the ESS interview.

Incentives

Unconditional vs. promised incentives

Empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated that unconditional incentives are more effective than conditional incentives for increasing survey participation (Blom et al., 2015b; Millar & Dillman, 2011; Singer et al., 1999). This body of evidence comprises different countries, data collection modes, target populations, and it spreads over several decades. Therefore, rather than contribute to this literature with another experiment, we agreed to offer unconditional incentives as the best possible approach. When eligible respondents are invited to join the panel, interviewers will explain that, to thank them for their contribution, each of the six survey invitations will be accompanied with a small incentive (see also section 7).

Incentive amount

In line with the ESOMAR Guideline for Online Research (ESOMAR, 2015), the CRONOS Advisory Board advised against using high incentives to prevent them being perceived as payment for participation but rather as a symbolic 'thank you' for panellists' cooperation. Concern about high incentives was also expressed by national teams, who were worried that offering high incentives might a) reduce trust in the study if the quantity was perceived as too high to be true, and b) affect

the general survey climate of the country, reducing response rates in other surveys that offer lower or no incentives. After consulting the local teams and comparing similar projects in other countries, it was decided that £5/€5 was an appropriate incentive for a 20-minute survey.

Although the amount is the same across countries, its value might be perceived in a different way depending on the living costs in a specific country. If the goal of this study was to test the effect of offering a specific amount on participation rates, harmonisation of its perceived value would be crucial, and the amount may need to be adjusted. However, this was not the case in CRONOS. In practical terms, those 'equivalent' amounts would need to be rounded up or down, most likely to the nearest multiple of £5/€5 to match bill notes or typical voucher amounts, adding an additional layer of complexity. A 'comparable value approach' was thus deemed unnecessary for this project.

A panel sign-up incentive was also considered, with the goal of building a relationship of trust with the respondent and highlighting the importance of the project. The proposals discussed ranged from €10 to €50. This idea posed several problems: a) the incentive would be granted conditional on respondents agreeing to participate, and soon after they provided their contact information, so this could have been misconstrued as a bribe or buying personal data, which would go against the ESOMAR Guideline for Online Research (ESOMAR, 2015); b) the larger incentive amounts being considered could increase the risk of the potential respondent misrepresenting their intention to participate just to obtain the incentive; c) in some countries, gift amounts over a certain threshold entail tax payments—in Slovenia, for example, the initial planned sign-up incentive exceeded that threshold, which would have meant additional administrative burden for researchers and respondents. As a result, no incentive will be offered for joining the panel.

Type of incentive

Researchers have found that cash incentives are more effective than other forms of incentives like gift cards, vouchers, and objects (e.g., Birnholtz et al. 2004; Millar & Dillman, 2011; van Veen et al., 2016). However, in many European countries there are legal constraints regarding cash incentives for survey participation and sending cash by post. In addition, the setting of an online panel allows us to easily use electronic gift cards⁵ and thus avoid having to post incentives. In the absence of a European-wide gift card system with good value for respondents, local teams were asked to find local providers. To ensure vouchers would be appealing and useful to respondents, providers were to be selected according to 1) their familiarity across the population, 2) the usefulness and range of the products that the card could be redeemed for, 3) the ease of redeeming the gift and 4) the proximity of establishments where the gift card could be used. Estonia and UK found online options for their panels, from Tallinna Kaubamaja Group and Amazon respectively. Slovenia,

⁵ The Estonian team initially considered using bank transfers, as monetary transactions in the country are frequently carried out this way. However, to avoid collecting bank account numbers, they chose an online gift card provider.

however, considered that online incentives would not be appealing to a large sector of the population, and instead searched for options to send by post. This search included prepaid credit cards, but the fees involved in reloading as well as using the card rendered it unsuitable for the project. The Slovenian team could not find a provider that could produce €5 cards, and settled for a national supermarket chain that would send €10 cards to panel members every other wave.

In the end, the planned incentive approach was less harmonised than what one may have hoped for, but it reflected differences in lifestyles, customs and available infrastructures across the three countries. Although it may be difficult to disentangle the effect of different incentives from country differences when analysing participation rates, questions will be included at the end of the project to try to assess differences across countries in respondent's perceptions of the incentives.

Informed consent and contact information

Obtaining informed consent is an important ethical principle and a primary legal condition for processing personal data for research purposes (Couper and Singer 2013). Voluntariness and the right to refuse or withdraw participation are crucial aspects of informed consent, as is transparency about key features of the project, such as the reasons for collecting different types of data and data transfer between different partners. CRONOS recruiters will carry leaflets that serve as participant information sheets, which include information about: all organisations involved in the study, participants' rights, data processing, transfer and protection, and contact details for the local research teams.⁶ Leaflets will be handed to respondents during the recruitment interview and left behind for them to keep. The leaflet also serves as a reminder to those who agree to participate, and for those who need more time to make a decision, as to the means of contacting the local team. The contents of the participant information sheet will also be presented on the landing page of the Welcome Survey, and on the last page of every wave in CRONOS. This approach, as well as CRONOS cross-border transfer of personal data, is in line with the requirements of EU Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC and has been approved by the ESS ERIC Ethics Committee.

Welcome survey

As plans were discussed and outlined, it became clear that the relatively large time gap between the start of the ESS fieldwork period (September 2016) and the first CRONOS wave (February 2017), could affect participation rates if recruited panellists forgot having signed up for the project before receiving the invitation to the first survey. Therefore, a 10-minute survey is planned for early December 2016 to help keep engaged those panel members recruited early in the process.

The contents of the welcome survey have been carefully drafted to provide an enjoyable, positive experience for participants, but data also need to be relevant and important for our

⁶ Detailed information about ethical considerations, including the Ethics proposal and participant information sheet, can be found in Deliverable 7.2 'Data privacy and ethics in cross-national web panel data collection' (Rød et al., 2016).

research goals and those of potential data users. To maximise usefulness of the data from this wave, panellists recruited later in the process (after December 2016) will also be invited to complete the welcome survey. For panellists who require a tablet to participate, the welcome survey will be used as a training tool: they will complete it while the recruiter is present and ready to assist them while they try to find the invitation, open the survey, and complete the survey.

Recruitment monitoring

ESS Round 8 fieldwork and CRONOS recruitment will be closely monitored by local teams and the central team. Local teams will send weekly fieldwork progress reports to the central team, and case-level data will be regularly uploaded to a central panel administration system via the ESS intranet. To ensure the appropriate protocols for data protection, security and confidentiality are followed, the data controller (ESS ERIC HQ) prepared a Data Handling Agreement (Rød et al., 2016) that all data processors (NSD as well as the local teams) have signed.

The central panel administration system will include data from the CRONOS recruitment interview and selected variables from the ESS main interview: gender, age group, education level, urban/rural area, and internet use (see Finnøy et al, 2017 for details). Uploading these data to a central system will allow researchers to assess recruitment progress across all countries, and evaluate whether certain groups have lower propensity to agree to participate in the panel. Using this information, low-propensity groups can be given priority in subsequent recruitment efforts to try and ensure good representation across all groups in the panel. Along with respondent characteristics, information collected during the recruitment interviews about the reasons for refusal can help guide recruitment. Such analyses can be helpful in informing decisions on how to tackle low recruitment rates among specific population groups and how to better customise recruitment strategies. The refresher interviewer briefings will provide an additional source of information for recruitment monitoring.

5. Inclusion of respondents without internet access

A considerable proportion of households in different European countries still have no access to the internet. In particular, 14% of Estonian households, 22% of Slovenian households and 8% of UK households did not have internet access in 2016 (Eurostat, 2016)⁷. Probability-based web panels have been shown to obtain more accurate survey estimates if those with no internet access participate than when they are simply excluded (Blom et al, 2016; Eckman, 2015; Leenheer & Scherpenzeel, 2013; Revilla et al., 2015; Rookey et al, 2008; Zhang et al, 2008). The offline population also differs from those online in that they are older, less educated, and less urban,

⁷ Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/digital-economy-and-society/data/main-tables>

among other characteristics (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013). Excluding this population from the panel could thus harm the representativeness of the data and increase nonresponse error.

Most probability-based online panels include the offline population by inviting them to participate in a different mode (mail or telephone) or by providing them with an internet-enabled device. CRONOS opted for the latter approach. Producing a mail or telephone survey in parallel to the online survey would involve continued effort and investment: first, all contact and data collection materials would need to be adapted for the offline mode; second, maintaining an interviewer force in each country would be costly and increase complexity of management and monitoring; third, measurement differences across modes could affect the estimates obtained, especially if telephone is used as the alternative mode. Given that those answering the offline survey share the characteristic of not having internet connection, it is likely to prove difficult to disentangle mode effects from differences related to not having an internet connection.

ESS respondents who report not having access to internet enabled devices for personal use will be offered a tablet and free internet access for 12 months to enable their participation in the online panel. Panellists can keep the tablet after the end of the project, although personal use during the project is discouraged. Evidence from several probability-based online panels has shown that providing internet devices can be successfully carried out when recruitment is expressly tailored for panel recruitment. However, additional challenges emerge from using this approach in an established survey programme, so an important goal of CRONOS as a pilot project is to investigate whether this offer could work to recruit respondents without internet access.

One of the main challenges is convincing offline individuals to use this technology to participate in the online panel. The proportion of previously offline participants in the three European online panels that provide panellists with internet-enabled tablets (LISS, GIP, and ELIPSS) ranged between 7% and 10%, despite the proportion of the offline population in these countries being typically twice as high at the time of panel recruitment (Blom et al., 2015a). In line with these findings, we expect individuals with no internet access to be less likely to have experience using the internet and more likely to dislike technological devices in general, which may make them more reluctant to join an online panel. Thus, contrary to what many might expect, these individuals may not perceive an offer of a free tablet as an appreciated gift, but as an unwelcome burden. In anticipation of this reaction, interviewers will be trained in persuasive strategies to handle reluctance from these respondents in particular.

Persuading offline respondents to sign up for the panel might be easier if the interviewer can carry the tablet with them during the recruitment interview, to show how it works and how surveys are completed on the tablet. Unfortunately, this strategy is more difficult to carry out in piggy-backing recruitment approaches for several reasons:

- it was unclear how many panel members needing a tablet would agree to participate before recruitment was carried out; the purchase was therefore postponed;
- carrying a tablet would have been an additional burden and risk for interviewers;
- the number of interviewers sometimes exceeded the number of expected offline recruits. For example, more than 200 interviewers are expected to participate in the UK ESS fieldwork, but we only expect about 125 respondents not to have internet access, so it would not be financially sensible to provide every interviewer with a tablet;
- not knowing the exact number of devices needed also delayed the selection of the specific device, which rendered producing a leaflet showing the device impossible.

Given these restrictions, all CRONOS recruiters can do is to emphasise the simplicity of the tool and that free telephone support will be available in case the respondent has problems with it.

Tablet purchase

To maximise efficiency of the project, purchase of the same tablet for all countries was arranged centrally. Having multiple devices would entail designing different manuals for those delivering the devices as well as for respondents. In addition, using the same tablet in all countries is the preferred methodological approach: it can reduce measurement differences because visual design is kept constant among these respondents and reduce measurement error by testing usability for each wave on this device. Finally, the single tablet approach should help to keep the appeal of the device constant across countries. Choosing the same device for all countries, however, posed its own challenges. Devices needed to be available in all countries and the operating system be available in all the languages commonly used in these countries.

Set-up instructions have been prepared by the central team and shared with the local teams, who will set up the tablets to be delivered in their countries. The proposed settings are intended to increase ease and simplicity of the device. Most apps and notifications are to be disabled, and a Gmail inbox installed on the home screen where only survey invitations sent from the email account associated with the local team will be shown. Ideally, we would have liked to install an app to display notifications and links to the survey. However, no apps were found, and designing a new app was not possible due to time constraints. Upon receiving their tablet, panellists will be asked to sign an agreement informing them that the email account should only be used for communication with the research team, as the research team has access to the password.

Tablet delivery is scheduled to start in January 2017, a month before the launch of wave 1, to ensure that panel members remember the project and how to use the device when they receive the survey invitations. This approach was also motivated by two pragmatic considerations: first, research teams can focus on recruitment before having to set up the tablets, train staff, and

organise appointments and visits; second, data contracts for the tablets will start in January rather than in September when recruitment starts, which will reduce costs. Staff will attend a briefing session on how to train panel members to use the device, and will receive a packet containing: a manual to help them through all the tablet delivery steps, a leaflet with instructions to hand out to respondents, and an agreement for panel members to sign in order to receive the tablet. All documents handed to panel members will be translated by the local teams.

During the tablet delivery visit, staff will show panel members how to use the tablet, how to find and open survey invitations, how to access the survey and complete it, and ask them to read and sign the Tablet Agreement Form. The panellists will be asked to complete the welcome survey while the interviewer is available to guide them if they have any technical difficulties or other questions. Panellists will receive an instruction leaflet that details how to use the tablet for survey completion, and will be provided with contact details for a free helpline that offers support during 'regular office hours'.

6. Panel maintenance

Communication with panel members

Communication with panellists is one of the key aspects of panel maintenance and success: we rely on panel members receiving invitations and reminders to be able to participate in our surveys, and we want to make sure they can effectively communicate with the research team if they have queries, concerns, comments or complaints.

The CRONOS panel communication strategy has a central and a local component: invitations and reminders will be programmed and distributed from Questback by the central team, and local teams will handle telephone calls and emails to the panel helpline, as well as prepare and distribute any postal communications. To ensure that all communications from respondents can be efficiently addressed, no fields in the survey platform will collect general feedback from respondents. Such fields would be stored in the Questback raw database, and the central team would have to process, download and distribute any comments to each local team. Instead, each email, letter, and final survey page remind respondents of the email address and free telephone number to contact the local team directly.

Helpline guidelines have been prepared centrally and shared with local teams, including instructions on how to deal with issues panellists might encounter. Incoming queries will be documented by the local teams and shared with the central team if necessary.

Survey invitations and reminders

To ensure similar procedures across all countries, source versions of invitations and reminders have been prepared by the central team in collaboration with all local teams. Source documents

are produced for each wave and shared with the national teams for translation and adaptation. As far as possible, all invitations will be sent on the same day and at the same local time.

The CRONOS panellists will receive an email invitation to each survey with an individual survey link and three email reminders: the first one just 4-5 days after the survey is launched, the second about two weeks after, and the third about a week before the survey closes. This contact protocol has been chosen because clicking a link in an email invitation is a straightforward way for respondents to access a web survey, and because of its low cost (Callegaro et al, 2015). No 'project accounts' will be set up, to avoid requesting participants to memorise login details and take additional steps to reach the survey. Even though personal accounts can help reduce the already small likelihood that someone other than the panel member participates, the danger of increasing panellist burden outweighed the potential benefits. To protect confidentiality of panel members, the surveys will be set up so that resuming an incomplete wave will not allow the respondent to visit any answers provided in previous sessions.

Panel members who do not have internet access for personal use will be sent postal invitations informing them that a new survey is available on their device, and a second postal contact with a reminder two weeks after the survey is launched. Given that the email invitations for this group will be sent to an account created by researchers for project purposes only, panel members would only be able to see the invitation if they are using the tablet. At the same time, our intent is to interfere as little as possible in the lives of those without internet access, so we will discourage them from using the project tablet for personal use. Therefore, if these panel members follow our recommendation and do not use the tablet, they will not notice when survey invitations are received, making the postal invitations crucial to ensure their participation.

When writing invitations and reminders we will aim at using clear and direct language, and we will follow common survey principles to increase participation by creating a positive impression on participants (Dillman, 2007): a) to increase the sense of reward, we will try to highlight the relevance of social research for their country and the topics covered in the survey, b) to reduce perceived costs and burden, we will make the email short and direct, with a prominent 'Take part now' button; and c) to increase trust, we will provide unconditional incentives, include logos of the local organisers, reassure participants of our data protection policies, and provide contact details to the local research team. All email communications will include the name of the project in the country on the subject line to help respondents recognise the email, and address the respondent by name if available. Invitations and reminders will also be clear about the duration of the survey, which may increase the perceived burden but complies with an ethical approach to informed consent at each wave.

Pre-notifications as response rate boosters

Pre-notifications have been shown to have a positive impact on response rates to mail (Heberlein and Baumgartner 1978; Heberlein & Baumgartner 1981; Dillman 2000); telephone (De Leeuw et al 2007), face-to-face surveys (Luppés 1995; Groves and Couper 1998; White et al. 1998), and even web surveys (Bosnjak et al 2008; Kaplowitz, Hadlock & Levine 2004). Furthermore, it has been shown that pre-notification led to a higher increase in response rates compared with just adding an extra reminder (Dillman, 2000; Kaplowitz, Hadlock & Levine 2004). Pre-notifications about an upcoming survey can contribute to higher response rates by raising awareness of an upcoming survey invitation, making the request foreseeable and appear more legitimate (Van Veen et al., 2016). Pre-notifications may also be perceived as an additional cost on the side of the researcher, which may trigger the reciprocity social norm for respondents, potentially boosting participation (Dillman, 2007). However, recent empirical studies show no effect of *email* pre-notifications when the survey invitation is made via email (Bosnjak et al, 2008; Keusch, 2015). Some argue that an email without a survey link may be regarded as a 'missed opportunity' and confuse respondents who are willing to participate right away. The same argument could be made of mailed pre-notifications sent before a mailed questionnaire, yet this approach has been proved effective in past research (Dillman, 2007). Alternatively, the low cost associated with an additional email may be evident to respondents, and the pre-notification may thus lose its booster effect by stimulating reciprocity. In addition, pre-notifications may be less useful for panels with frequent survey requests, assuming legitimacy, relevance and recognisability of the project have been established via recruitment and in early waves.

At the same time, pre-notifications sent using a different mode like mail or text messages can have a positive effect on response rates to online surveys (Bosnjak et al, 2008; de Bruijne & Wijnant, 2014; Keusch, 2015). Using an additional contact channel might make more people aware of the upcoming survey and less likely to perceive the email as spam. A wider range of contact channels might also be effective in reaching different sub-groups of the sample, such as specific age groups or people with different patterns of presence at home. Therefore, although pre-notifications were ruled out from the basic CRONOS contact protocol, the team agreed to consider adding contact channels in an experimental way for some of the CRONOS waves. Section 7 describes early discussions of these experiments.

It is worth noting that, given that the Slovenian incentives will not be sent via email, the letter accompanying the incentive will act as a pre-notification for wave 1, 3 and 5. This may have an impact on participation, although it will not be possible to disentangle whether the effect is due to the immediacy of the incentive on those waves, to the additional contact channel, or to a combination of the two.

7. Experimental testing

Contact mode experiments

Whereas a number of studies have analysed the effects of offline pre-notifications on response rates in web surveys, studies looking at the effects of offline reminders are rare. Kaplowitz et al. (2004) showed that a postal reminder led to higher response rates if there was no postal pre-notification, although the effect of a postal pre-notification alone was higher than the reminder. The Norwegian Citizen Panel (NCP) introduced text messages for the second reminder when inviting a refreshment sample to join the panel in Wave 3. This resulted in an increase of the recruitment rate by 3.2 percentage points (Skjervheim & Høgestøl, 2014). The explanatory mechanism for the positive effects of offline reminders may be similar to those for offline pre-notifications, increasing awareness of the survey especially among those who do not check the email address provided, for those cases where the email may be reaching the spam folder, or those who are simply not reading the email invitations and reminders we send them.

Although research has shown the benefits of having an offline-channel contact, we could not find any experimental studies comparing the effect of different offline channels (e.g., postal vs SMS) for pre-notifications nor for reminders. To address this research gap, our planned contact mode experiments aim at comparing the effects of postal and SMS contacts (pre-notifications and reminders) on participation rates.

Based on previous studies, we reasoned that sending a contact in an offline mode could increase response rates compared to another email contact. Studies analysing contact mode effects, however, have mostly been implemented in cross-sectional web surveys. We may find a reduced effect on participation for a panel study, especially in later waves, as panellists are already familiar with the way invitations and reminders are distributed. However, receiving an offline pre-notification or reminder may increase the likelihood to participate for panel members who do not see our email invitations because they are marked as spam or go to a secondary email account, or who choose not to read them. Thus, we propose two contact mode experiments, one manipulating the mode of the reminder, the other manipulating the mode of the pre-notification. For experiment 1, panellists will be randomly assigned to one of two experimental groups (see table 1) and for experiment 2 they will be randomly assigned to one of three experimental groups (see table 2). Experiment 1 will be limited to two experimental groups because the sample size for reminders is lower than the sample size when a first invitation is sent out, as a number of panel members will have already completed the survey before the reminder is sent out.

Table 1. Contact mode experiment 1

	Invitation	1st reminder	2nd reminder	3rd reminder
Group 1	Email	Postal	Email	Email
Group 2	Email	SMS	Email	Email

Table 2. Contact mode experiment 2

	Pre-notice	Invitation	1st reminder	2nd reminder	3rd reminder
Group 1	Email	Email	Email	Email	Email
Group 2	SMS	Email	Email	None	Email
Group 3	None	Email	SMS	Email	Email

Incentive experiments

As mentioned in section 4, a large body of research has compared the effect of unconditional and conditional incentives, consistently showing that unconditional incentives yield higher response rates without loss of data quality (e.g., Meuleman, Langer & Blom, 2017), as well as the effect of increased amounts of incentives—higher amounts yield higher response rates, but the value for each extra euro or pound has a fast diminishing return (e.g., Scherpenzeel & Toepoel, 2012). Therefore, we considered incentive experiments that would address other elements, such as different frequency of incentive distribution or additional incentives for early participation. Given the complexities we encountered to find comparable incentive approaches across countries, we discarded the idea of experimenting with incentives and decided to focus on using the incentive approach we deemed most effective given our budget constraints.

The UK incentive plan was in fact revisited after evaluating participation and respondent feedback to the welcome survey and an experiment was subsequently incorporated. Panel members contacted the helpline to advise that they could not use this type of incentive, as they did not have an Amazon account, or that they did not want to use it because they did not support Amazon on ethical grounds. Moreover, participation was lower than expected and lower than in the other two countries, so the value of the £5 Amazon e-voucher was questioned. The central and local teams met to discuss this issue, and it became apparent that respondents had not been informed of the type of voucher they would receive during the recruitment interview, which may

explain the observed relatively low acceptance. At the meeting, we considered different ways to circumvent this problem, and we decided to switch to £5 high street vouchers that would be delivered via post. This new method involved mailings to all panel members in each wave, which opened the opportunity to enclose pre-notification letters that may help boost participation rates via other mechanisms.

To implement this new approach, we considered the feasibility of delivering the incentives for all six waves at the beginning of the project, keeping the overall value of the incentive constant, but changing the frequency of delivery. There were theoretical and practical considerations motivating this approach. Theoretically, delivering the entire amount at once would show panellists that the researchers were fulfilling their end of the social contract before the expected time, potentially increasing trust in researchers and highlighting the importance of the project. This could increase willingness to participate in waves. In practical terms, handling one incentive rather than six is more efficient for the survey agency and for panellists. We acknowledged that there were some risks to this approach: it was possible that not receiving an incentive with each wave could lead to higher attrition rates in later waves. At the same time, if higher cooperation rates were achieved in early waves for the experimental group, higher attrition might just lead to similar cooperation rates after six waves. To test the feasibility of this up-front delivery approach, the sample was randomly split into two halves: half of the panellists will receive a postal pre-notification announcing the Wave 1 survey and presenting a £30 high street voucher for the six upcoming surveys, and will receive pre-notifications without incentives for the remainder of the panel life; the other half will receive a £5 high street voucher with a pre-notification letter for each of the 6 waves.

The effect of the contact and incentive experiments on recruitment and retention will be assessed and presented in SERISS Deliverable 7.5, and subsequent recommendations for the optimal strategies to adopt when building a cross-national online survey panel will be presented in SERISS Deliverable 7.7.

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