

# INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SURVEY PROGRAMME (ISSP)

## WORKING PRINCIPLES

(Amended May 2009)

### 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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 The Group chooses new members following a formal application for membership with answers to standard questions about methodology and survey procedures. No deliberate expansion of the Group takes place.
- 1.6 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 and Drafting Groups*

- 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 the Sunday afternoon for discussions of research findings emerging from ISSP data, or methodological issues. The agenda for these discussions is organised by a member of the Group chosen each year for the next year's meeting. 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 seated 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.

The convenor of a Drafting Group may invite up to three topic specialists who are not standard delegates to attend the General meeting. The convenor will inform the Secretariat well in advance.

- 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 Procedures for General Meetings and the drafting of modules are contained in Appendix A of this document.
- 2.6 All countries are encouraged to send delegates to all General Meetings. Unless special circumstances exist, a country's membership will automatically lapse if there is non-attendance at two consecutive General Meetings.

### **3.     *Voting***

- 3.1 If there is no consensus upon a matter, a vote may be taken in which each national group has one vote. Decisions are by simple majority, except for amendments to this document, which are by two-thirds majority of those voting.
- 3.2 Those members who are not to conduct a particular round of the survey will have no vote on the questionnaire for that year.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 Half of all eligible voting members shall constitute a quorum.

## **B.     GROUP COORDINATION**

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).
2. The Group's Data Archive is *GESIS Data Archive and Data Analysis*, Cologne (Köln).
3. Each member nation will designate one national coordinator.
4. Decisions of the Group, plans for meetings, and correspondence with potential new members will be coordinated by the Secretariat.
5. 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.
6. 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.

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.

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. FINANCE**

1. Each national group 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.

## **D. 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. 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 random sample of the adult population, designed to achieve a norm of 1,400 cases, and, in any event, a minimum of 1,000 cases. 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 merged data set.
4. 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.
5. 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. Non-literal translations, that is, "culturally equivalent questions", are to be notified to the Group and indicated in the documentation.
6. Documented data files of each national group, 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). The Data Archive will offer individual national datasets as well as a combined dataset to the scientific community. There are no time limits or other restrictions for the release of individual national datasets by the Data Archive other than those imposed (temporarily) by a particular nation. In any event, the Data Archive will include in the datafile 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.) The combined 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 B gives further details of agreements about archiving.)

By September 15th of each year the Data Archive will report to the Secretariat the status of the studies from each country including the depositing of data, completion of the study monitoring questionnaires, and the submission of the study descriptions. After consulting with the Standing and Methodology Committees, the Secretariat will announce by October 15th, the status of all studies.

7. In order for the data to be considered successfully archived the study monitoring questionnaire must be completed in a timely and satisfactory manner. This questionnaire is to be sent to the convenor of the Methodology Committee. If no questionnaire is completed or if the information supplied raises concerns, the Methodology Committee should report this to the Secretariat.  
The study monitoring questionnaire 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.
8. If the study monitoring questionnaire 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.
9. 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.
10. The Secretariat and Methodology Committee will review responses to the study monitoring questionnaire 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. General Meetings 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 convenor) whose task it will be to prepare a draft questionnaire on behalf of the Group.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Responses and proposed amendments to this second draft should be sent to all ISSP members, and not just to the Drafting Group. This allows all members to get a sense of the range of views, and to ascertain consensus on various matters.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. If members of the ISSP want the General Meeting to discuss and decide about the inclusion of any optional item or items proposed for the module, they should notify the Drafting Group and the Secretariat in advance of the General Meeting and specify the item(s) concerned.
9. 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.
10. The General Meeting will appoint a member or members whose task it is to generate written material on ISSP findings.
11. If a Drafting-Group convenor fails to get a response from a Drafting-Group member after two attempted contacts, the convenor may, in consultation with the Secretariat, drop the non-responding member from the Drafting Group and ask another member to fill the vacancy.
12. Members of a Drafting Group may, as necessary, remove the convenor by majority vote. The Secretariat must be immediately informed of any change in convenor. If the Drafting Group removes a convenor, but is unable to agree upon a replacement, its members should contact the Secretariat for assistance.
13. 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.

## APPENDIX B. Recommendations about archiving, sampling, weighting, response data and background variables

### 1. *Weighting*

- 1.1 The Data Archive should be supplied with unweighted data.
- 1.2 The Data Archive codebook will contain the unweighted marginals for each variable, and this will not serve as a data handbook.
- 1.3 The top of each variable will contain a warning, saying that the frequencies are unweighted, and hence cannot be used directly to make cross-national comparisons. In addition, the codebook will contain a prominent warning to this effect at the beginning of the codebook.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 The weighting variables supplied to the Data Archive will be included as a variable in the international dataset so that analysts can apply it as necessary.

### 2. *Sampling and non-response*

- 2.1 Each member should make sure that the study description 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.
- 2.2 The data description 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: [http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/standarddefs\\_3.1.pdf](http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/standarddefs_3.1.pdf). The numbers in the parentheses are those used in Table 2 of the Standard Definitions.

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. Also, when substitution is used, the total must include the originally drawn cases plus all substitute cases. See AAPOR/WAPOR Standard Definitions, pp 9-10 for further clarification.

- 2.3 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 judgements about sample representativeness of each national dataset.

- 2.4 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.

### **3.       *Standard background variables***

- 3.1 The Data Archive has circulated a list of required background variables. It is available from the Data Archive. All countries are asked to check these variables and to conform to them. The list will be updated from time to time.