
**ESSi-NA2 Quality Enhancement Meeting II:
The Comparative and Harmonized Measurement of
Occupational Status in the ESS**

Held at Mannheim, 27 – 28 September 2007



Anouk Zabal¹
Kathrin Wohn¹
Eric Harrison²

October 24, 2007

1 Zuma-Gesis Mannheim

2 City University London



Participants:

PD Dr Michael Braun, ZUMA-GESIS Mannheim, Germany
Prof Miguel Caínzos, Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, Spain
Prof Peter Elias, Warwick Institute for Employment Research, UK
Rory Fitzgerald, City University London, UK
Prof Harry Ganzeboom, Free University (VU) Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Dr Eric Harrison, City University London, UK
Prof Mike Hout, University of California Berkeley, USA
Prof Håkon Leiulfstrud, Norwegian University of Science and Technology
(NTNU) Trondheim, Norway
Prof Peter Ph. Mohler, ZUMA-GESIS Mannheim, Germany
Hilde Orten, Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) Bergen, Norway
Prof Peter Robert, TÁRKI RT Social Research Institute Budapest, Hungary
Knut Utvik, European Commission DG-Eurostat Luxembourg
Dr Heike Wirth, ZUMA-GESIS Mannheim, Germany
Kathrin Wohn, ZUMA-GESIS Mannheim, Germany
Anouk Zabal, ZUMA-GESIS Mannheim, Germany

Outcomes of the Quality Enhancement Meeting II on Comparative and Harmonized Measurement of Occupational Status in the ESS

As a part of the European Social Survey Infrastructure Programme, the networking activity NA2 convened a second Quality Enhancement Meeting on the Comparative and Harmonized Measurement of Occupational Status in the ESS (held in Mannheim, 27-28 September 2007). The concrete aim of the meeting was to bring together international experts to look into the measurement and coding of occupation in the ESS and the requirements users have of the data. This document summarizes the main recommendations that were compiled at the meeting as the agreed upon outcome.

The QEM II brought together international experts from both within and outside the ESS. The agenda covered general problems with producing comparative occupational data both in the ESS and beyond, discussed ISCO and future developments, included concrete proposals for improvement from experts appointed by the ESS teams from Spain and the Netherlands, and also allowed for feedback from data users.

Agenda

Day 1 (27 Sept.) 13.00-18.00		Chair: Michael Braun
Peter Mohler	Welcome	
Rory Fitzgerald	Capturing employment information on a general attitudinal social survey: challenges and examples from the ESS	
Peter Elias	Creating comparative occupational data within the ESS: problems and possibilities	
Hilde Orten	The ESS Data Archive's work with ISCO	
Harry Ganzeboom	ESS measurement of occupational status in NL: Review, critique and recommendations	
Miguel Caínzos	Whose occupation, whose class? Some proposals to extend the coverage of the occupation module of the ESS questionnaire	
Day 2 (28 Sept.) 9.00-13.00		Chair: Peter Robert
Mike Hout	Occupational Coding in the GSS: Positive and Negative Lessons	
Håkon Leiulfstrud	Getting from occupation to class measures with ESS data	
Heike Wirth	Some issues in the measurement of the supervisory function in the ESS	
Eric Harrison	Trading Precision for Reliability: The Creation of an ESeC from three digit ISCO.	
Day 2 (continued) 14.00-15.30		Chair: Eric Harrison & Anouk Zabal
Final discussion and recommendations		

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants of the QEM declare that the recommendations below would greatly improve the measurement of occupational data in the ESS. **Recommendations 1-5 can be regarded as essential and should receive first priority.** This list of recommendations is neither exhaustive nor complete, and does not cover all the desiderata discussed at the meeting. However, it does reflect the main aspects that were recognized and affirmed by the group.

1. *Improve documentation of occupation*

In view of changing coding frames and the need for continuity and comparability of data over time, it is essential to centrally store all verbatim information collected on occupation. Furthermore, there is an overall clear need to elaborate on the sparse documentation available to date. Before suggestions for improvement can be made, we need to find out what happens exactly at the different relevant levels in the ESS. The following are thus strongly recommended:

- a) Keep all verbatim information of occupation, i.e. for respondent, spouse, father and mother. Store full text in an identical, easily usable standard format and add as a required deliverable to NSD. Privacy issues associated with making this information available will need to be explored.
- b) Obtain exact coding documentation used by countries, i.e. the ISCO (COM) guides (translations, where applicable), national classification frames, as well as other material made available to coders. This should be added in the specifications of deliverables.
- c) Add to the National Technical Summary questions concerning the coding process (e.g. who does the coding, countries coding first into their national specification should be required to specify their conversion process to ISCO (COM), information on coding procedure etc.).
- d) Obtain information on the translations of ISCO (COM) actually used.

2. *Changes to questionnaire*

Various possible changes to the questionnaire were discussed, and the following proposed amendments met with unanimous and immediate approval:

- a) Harmonize occupation questions for all targets
 - Use identical question blocks for items pertaining to respondent's and partner's occupation (especially important is size of enterprise and industry information for partner which is not there so far).
 - If partner is not working, ask about partner's last job.
 - If parents were not working when the respondent was 14 years of age, ask about parents' last job.
- b) Change showcard for closed-format question on parents' occupation to ISSP87 version. Additionally, further efforts should be made to make some minor adjustments (for example, the world „manual“ is suboptimal, and gender-sensitivity should be considered).
- c) Implement the double-measurement of occupation already in place for parent's occupation also for respondent's and partner's occupation: Always use both an identical closed-format „crude“ question, as well as

the detailed open questions. This is a very powerful tool for improving measurement at relatively low cost.

- d) Obtain information on the main source of income for the respondent's household. Occupation of the main income earner is relevant for the allocation of mediated class. In order to clarify whether the main income earner in the family is covered by the current information on the respondent, partner and parents, as a first step it is proposed to modify the existing question F31 in order to find out about differences between countries in this respect³. Furthermore it can be used as a pointer to tell us which occupation would be relevant and in some cases it will allow to link to occupational information already collected (e.g. father or mother). The proposed modification is to add the following response alternatives to Question F31, card 52 (R3):

- ◆ Father
- ◆ Mother
- ◆ Partner
- ◆ Former partner
- ◆ Other family member

3. Improve procedures

The interviewer's role in collecting occupation data is crucial and the ESS should provide more guidance here. This would entail:

- a) Add more detail to interviewer instructions (cp. General Social Survey instructions); stress the logic of the coding frame.
- b) Allow for time to have interviewers code some occupation (and industry) items to sharpen their understanding of the logic behind these questions.
- c) Put more emphasis on occupation in interviewer training by briefing Field Directors more explicitly.
- d) Coding procedures of open occupation questions should mirror the standard ESS translation procedures: the coding should be done by two independent scorers and the final code produced by an adjudicator. The three codes should all be included as deliverables thus allowing for analyses of coding reliability and its consequences.

4. Establish an ESS panel on socio-structural variables (i.e. variables with larger complex coding frames such as education, occupation, industry, enterprise size, income etc.). The expert group is aware that the implementation of this recommendation would have serious cost repercussions, but the consensus is that it is absolutely worthwhile investing here as there is a clear need for an overarching group to advise and guide the data collection and processing for these variables.

5. Provide a section on the website with „tools“ for creating derived variables. This would comprehend routines plus readable documentation with the justification and instruction for use. **Develop an EDUNET module** on occupation and class schemes.

6. Include a public or private sector question. However, it is recommended to carefully look for an appropriate question format/frame that would work in all

³ F 31: „Please consider the income of all household members and any income which may be received by the household as a whole. What is the main source of income in your household?“

countries. For example, it seems necessary to include a response category for “mixed” cases (i.e. partly public, partly private). This should be tested in the ESS pilot Round 4.

7. Rethink order of questions: **Consider asking the industry question before the occupation questions.** The logic behind this suggestion is that the industry question has a priming effect on the occupation questions, making it easier for the respondent to answer these. This should be tested in the pilot.
8. **Consider adding a closed-format question on first occupation** after leaving full time education. This is relevant for the analysis of social structure, lifetime mobility, school-to-work transition etc. However, one would need to carefully consider how to clarify what should be regarded as “first occupation” (e.g. would this include menial jobs below qualification level, or would one rather ask for first fulltime employment, etc.).
9. **Extend MTMM analyses to occupation variables.** This would be easily possible if the double measurement of occupation information is implemented as recommended in 2c. Furthermore, it would be desirable to extend MTMM analyses to other background variables as well.
10. Find out more about past national practice. In particular, make efforts to recover the verbatim information on occupation collected in rounds 1-3 for respondents and spouses. Also try and obtain documentation of coding procedures in previous rounds.
11. Research is needed on how to best ask supervisory question in ESS and how to define supervision exactly.
12. Switch to ISCO-2008 as soon as feasible and **consistently double-code all occupation information to both ISCO-88 AND ISCO-08 in the future for all targets** (due to the fact that there is no straightforward crosswalk between 88-08). For the time being, closely follow progress of ISCO-08 as well as Eurostat’s and National Statistical Institutes’ implementation.