Adult Care, Work and Well-being in Europe

Ad hoc module for submission to ESS call for rotating modules

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Authors: Alzbeta Bartova Wim Van Lancker

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Risks, Resources and Inequalities: Increasing Resilience in European Families

Title: Adult Care, Work and Well-being in Europe. Ad hoc module for submission to ESS call for rotating modules

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Responsible organisation: KU Leuven

Author(s): Alzbeta Bartova, Wim Van Lancker

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Introduction

In this deliverable, we propose a Rotating Module to be included in the European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS is a long-standing, representative cross-national European survey focused on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of the population. The ESS is fielded every two years, covers over thirty European countries and is highly regarded as a crucial source fuelling European academic and policy debates.¹ The ESS consists of a core questionnaire including identical sociodemographic background and attitudinal items, and usually two rotating modules of maximum 30 questions each.

We propose a new rotating module with questions on adult care responsibilities within and beyond households and the effect of these care responsibilities on employment, social and wellbeing outcomes. Such a module will greatly enhance our ability to produce much-needed evidence on this issue, and link this to people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. This will open up new avenues for future cross-national European research.

The submission of a rotating module to the ESS is a two-stage process. In the first stage, the rationale and relevance of the proposed module needs to be submitted on maximum 4 pages by the end of April 2026. That is what we present in this deliverable. Although the actual questions are formally not needed in this stage, we do add an annex with a set of proposed questions that tap into the issue of adult care responsibilities within and beyond families, and briefly discuss how they link with the standard questions included in each round of the ESS. If admitted to the second stage, a definitive set of questions will need to be included, alongside with a more elaborate discussion on the relevance of the proposed questions. The questions included hence will be subject to change, depending on the results from the pilot testing of the questionnaire in the Belgian The Social Survey (TSS, see deliverable D8.4). Upon acceptance, the rotating module will be part of data collection in 2029/2030 Round 14 of the ESS.

In the next section, we discuss the relevance of our proposed module following the guidelines for the stage 1 application. Criteria for inclusion as a rotating module as indicated by ESS include (1) whether the proposed topic is relevant and timely to academic and policy debates in Europe; (2) how the module will add to our understanding of the topic theoretically and/or empirically; (3) whether the module will have wide appeal to academic and non-academic audiences; and (4) how suitable the set of questions is for the ESS and the surveyed populations (i.e. how relevant the questions are from the whole population instead of only a subset).

¹ The ESS is a recognized European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC). According to a 2022 impact study, the ESS has growing user numbers, being increasing recognized and used as a teaching tool, is viewed positively for its exceptionally high methodological standards, and has clear academic impact (with ESS publications being citated above average) and non-academic impact (in terms of generating insights, agenda setting and influence on the public debate). See https://technopolis-group.com/report/sustain-2-impact-study-of-the-european-social-survey/, last accessed on 24 April 2025.



First stage proposal for an ESS Rotating Module

Is the proposed topic relevant and timely to academic and policy debates in Europe?

European countries are going through major transformations in response to rising climate, health and security threats as well as population ageing. All these new have considerable impact on the labour market. The green transition and the digital transformation are both promised to bring economic security through new highly skilled jobs but not without a cost. Although it is expected that green transition will not affect large part of the labour market, it will significantly impact brown jobs (mining, manufacturing, and agriculture) that are not evenly distributed among European countries (Vandeplas et al., 2022). It is therefore expected that some regions will be affected more than others. Similarly, the digital transformation will likely limit job opportunities for low-skilled labour force through reduced need for employees in production and performing routine tasks or clerical work whilst creating opportunity for high-skilled workforce (Konle-Seidl & Danesi, 2022). At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic uncovered vulnerabilities in the way we work and especially showed the importance of familial care. The inability to provide familial care during lockdowns affected the well-being of caregivers and those in need of care alike (Van Herreweghe & Van Lancker, 2024). At the same time population ageing puts pressure on the fiscal sustainability of most European welfare states, in particular on the funding of pensions, health and long-term care services (LTC) (OECD, 2019). Country responses to these major transformations will depend on the ability to retrain and prepare the workforce for the new labour market demands whilst accounting for people's care responsibilities that are one of the biggest hindrances of employment and training. This means that families, whether and how they can cope with care demands and adapt to changing labour markets, are central to this issue.

The main gap in academic and policy debates pertains to adult care. It is well known how childcare responsibilities affect employment outcomes, with a disproportionate effect on women. The issue has been widely researched (Akgunduz & Plantenga, 2018; Morrissey, 2017; Waldfogel, 2002), and meticulously monitored through surveys coordinated by the European Statistical Office (Eurostat). A comprehensive benchmarking framework has been set up to monitor EU Member States' progress towards and implementation of the right of children to childcare of good quality, as enshrined in principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).² Childcare has also been recognised as one of the vulnerabilities of the EU Member

² Social Protection Committee Indicators' Sub-Group & European Commission DG for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion (2024). Benchmarking Framework for Childcare and Support to Children. https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=27370&langId=en

States threatening Europe's resilience during its important transitions and their ability to withstand future shocks not dissimilar to those we experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although childcare responsibilities gained wide recognition, adult care and its effect on employment outcomes of family members who provide it remained largely on the periphery of interest. Although the right to affordable LTC services of good quality has been enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights (principle 18), the focus is almost exclusively on services for older persons with ill health. Within the Indicators Subgroup of the Social Protection Committee, a monitoring framework in the field of long-term care has been developed, again with a focus on collecting comparative data on the availability, adequacy, and quality of LTC services³. What is absent, however, is comparative and high-quality data on adult care provision to family members both within and outside carers' households and the impact of this type of care on the carers' employment outcomes.

In the context of ageing populations and shrinking families, the care for relatives represents a growing risk to labour market activity for many individuals in productive age, as well as for gender equality and the well-being of caregivers. The risk can be further amplified if more adult family members need assistance or when care for an adult relative collides with childcare responsibilities, which would be an accumulation of the care burden (cumulative care). Furthermore, care provided by adolescent young carers who are between 15 and 17 years old is completely missing from the public debate despite the harsh negative consequences for their education, employment and mental well-being (Lewis et al., 2023). Families are key to European countries' efforts to improve labour market outcomes, and adult care provision might have important ramifications for family resilience and their capacity to adapt to changing labour demands (Daly, 2025), certainly given vast inequalities in the command of resources to avoid poor outcomes across families (Nieuwenhuis et al., 2023). Understanding how care responsibilities affect working lives of family members is an important piece of the puzzle that is currently missing.



³ See Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2025). Monitoring and benchmarking frameworks. <u>https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/social-protection-social-inclusion/social-protection-committee/indicators-sub-group/monitoring-and-benchmarking-frameworks_en.</u>

How will the Module add to our understanding of the topic theoretically and/or empirically?

The module will map previously uncharted care responsibilities for adults with health-related conditions and their impact on carers' ability to combine these care responsibilities with education and employment. It will not only focus on the care responsibilities for people who live with the respondent in the same household but also those who live outside these households. The module will place the care responsibilities in the context of people's capacity to deal with unexpected circumstances such as loss of employment. We developed and tested an earlier version of the module in Belgium with The Social Study (TSS), a Belgian, representative social survey that is based on self-completion questionnaires designed for both web and paper.⁴ The first results of this study confirm our suspicion that current comparative social surveys are mising an important aspect of care by omitting questions on care responsibilities for other people than young children. Our data indicate that 22.8% of Belgians care for or provide support to family members who need help due to age, illness, or disability (Figure 1). Out of these carers, 5.6% care for a family member in the same household. However, the number of people who care for someone who does not live in the same household is almost three times larger (14.4%, Figure 2). The number of people who care for family members who live both in and outside their household is about 2.8%. When we look at the intensity of care, we see that majority of these respondents care for one person (Figure 3), but the number of people respondents care for is considerably higher for those who care for family members outside their household and those who care for members both in and outside the respondents' household. When we consider another indicator of care intensity, the total number of hours spent on care per week, we see that on average the care provided is of relatively low intensity (under 5 hours per week). This outcome is primarily driven by respondents who care for a family member outside their household. For people who provide care for a co-residing family member and those who care for family members both in and outside their household. If we add care for children under 12 years old, we find that more than a third of the Belgian population have some kind of care responsibilities towards their family members (Figure 4). Out of these, 20% care for a person with health-related issues, 14.7% care for children under 12 years old, and 2.8% care both for children under 12 and family members with health-related problems who need a support. We have reason to believe that similar outcomes can be observed in other European countries with possibly greater numbers in more familialistic countries of Southern and Eastern Europe (e.g. Cattaneo et al., 2025).

Moreover, our data from the test module point to a potentially sizeable share of young adults who care for their family members with health-related issues (Figure 5). This is largely overlooked topic with important consequences on young people's educational and employment outcomes. The ESS, with its age span that includes respondents from the age of 15, can shed a light on the extent of care responsibilities among adolescents and their consequences in Europe.



⁴ <u>https://thesocialstudy.be/</u>

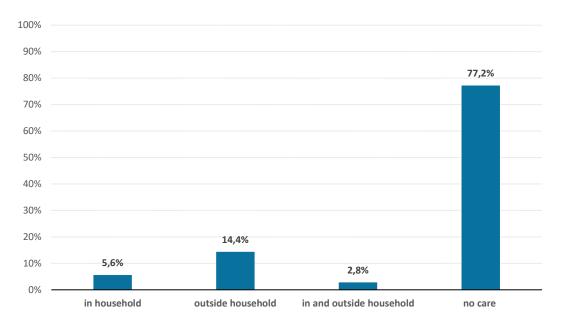
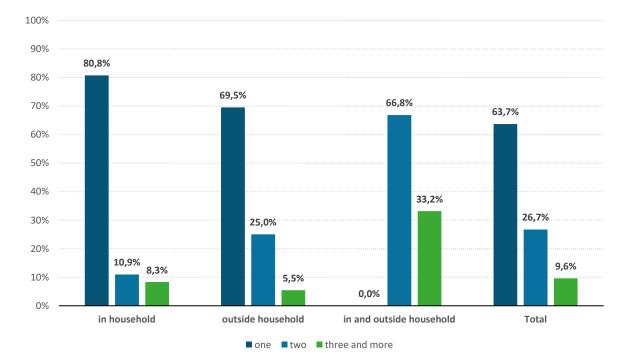


Figure 1. Share of the adult population providing care for family members with health-related issues, Belgium, 2025.

Source: own calculations based on The Social Study.

Figure 2. Share of the adult population providing care for family members with health-related issues by number of persons cared for, Belgium, 2025.



Source: own calculations based on The Social Study.



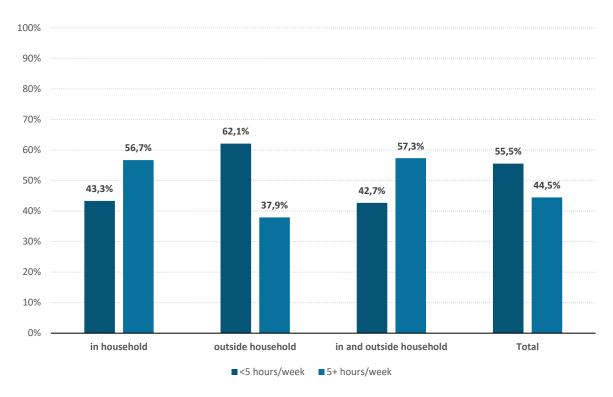
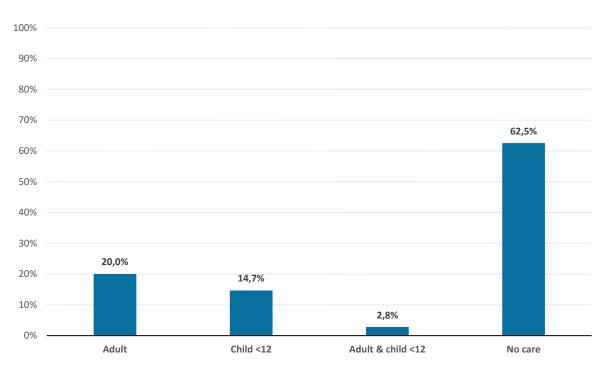


Figure 3. Share of the adult population providing care for family members with health-related issues by number of hours spent on care, Belgium, 2025.

Source: own calculations based on The Social Study.

Figure 4. Total care responsibilities, Belgium, 2025.



Source: own calculations based on The Social Study.



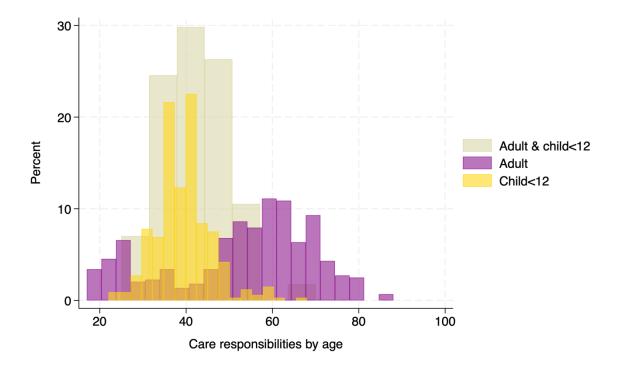


Figure 5. Care responsibilities of the adult population by age and type of care, Belgium, 2025.

Source: own calculations based on The Social Study.





Will the Module have wide appeal to academic and nonacademic audiences?

Given the lack of clear insight into the amount of adult care provided within and beyond households across countries and its potentially substantial impact on employment, income and well-being, we believe that the new questions will have a wide appeal to academic users of the ESS. In combination with the core questions included in the ESS, the high-quality comparative ESS data will open up multiple new research avenues. This also holds for policymakers, since there is currently no tool that would allow to systematically monitor the amount of care family members provide to their relatives and whether or how these care responsibilities affect their working lives. This makes it difficult for policymakers to enact and monitor policies to support and sustain family resilience in times of adult care needs. As such, the new data will underpin European strategies such as the European care strategy, the EU's strategy on gender equality, and the European countries' employment targets (for EU Member States set at 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 who should be in employment by 2030).

Suitability of the Module for ESS

The ESS is an ideal survey for fielding these types of questions. First, the large number of countries that field the questionnaire will allow us to control for the institutional differences in support for formal care services and their effect on the extent and intensity of informal care and consequently on the employment outcomes. Second, the focus on the general population offers a great opportunity to map the distribution of care responsibilities spanning from adolescent carers as young as 15 to elderly citizens providing care to their partners and other family members or friends. The module will be largely relevant for the whole population with the exception of the small number of questions on employment, which will not be relevant for most retired respondents. The ESS allows to construct a household typology in which family relations are central (Bartova et al., 2025), which allows for linking the amount of adult care provided to relatives within and beyond the household to the diversity of family structures across countries, and allows for an evaluation of how these families cope with care demands and adapt to changing labour markets. The ESS also includes comparative questions on socioeconomic background of respondents (employment, education, income), which allows to investigate the inequalities in exposure to labour market risk, as well as a number of standardized questions on different dimensions of well-being. As such, including questions on adult care in the ESS would allow to gauge the impact of care responsibilities within and beyond households on income, employment and well-being of carers, across family types and countries.

An earlier version of the module was fielded in Belgium through The Social Study (TSS). The questions that will finally be proposed for inclusion in the module in stage 2 of the process will be pilot-tested in terms of their non-response, validity and reliability (see Deliverable D8.4).



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Annex: List of 30 questions to be included in the ESS Rotating Module

	Care for elderly, disabled or sick persons
Q1	Is there anyone living with you who needs support due to <u>disability</u> age or illness whom you look after or give special help t (accompanying to medical appointments, regular shopping,) Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.
1	Yes
2	No
Q2	Is there anyone <u>not</u> living with you who needs support due t <u>disability, age or illness</u> whom you look after or give special help t (accompanying to medical appointments, regular shopping,) <i>Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.</i>
1	Yes
2	No
Q3	How many people who are elderly, sick and/or disabled <u>living both i</u> <u>and outside your household</u> do you care for or provide regular hel to?
	Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.

Q3_2			people not living in my household
Open only	answer	numbers	open answer (numbers only)
Q4			How many hours in total each week do you typically spend on providing care or regular help to people who are elderly, sick or disabled? For those not living in your household, please, include the time it usually takes you to reach them and return. Please, don't include anyone who you care for as part of your job.
1			0-4 hours
2			5-9 hours
3			10-19 hours
4			20-34 hours
5			35-49 hours
6			50-99 hours
7			100 or more hours per week/continuous care
Q5			Thinking about the person you <u>care for the most hours</u> , how likely or unlikely is it that the following people would care for this person at times when you are temporarily unavailable to do so?
Q5_1			My partner
Q5_2			(Other) family member of the person I care for who lives in the same household
Q5_3			(Other) family member of the person I care for who doesn't live in the same household
Q5_4			A friend or neighbour of the person I care for
Q5_5			Paid care service
Q5_6			Other:
1			Very unlikely
2			Rather unlikely
3			Rather likely
4			Very likely
5			This option is available to me but I haven't tried it.

6	I don't know whether this option is available to me.
7	This option is not available to me.
Q6	In the past month, how many times did you need to arrange someone to provide this care or help instead of you due to unexpected circumstances?
1	Zero times
2	One to two times
3	Three to six times
4	Seven times or more
	Employment impact of care
Q7	Did you ever have to turn down a job offer due to childcare issues or conflicts with your other care responsibilities?
1	Never
2	Yes, once or twice
3	Yes, more times
4	Not applicable
Q8	Thinking about the care or help you provide to all persons you mentioned in the previous questions (children, elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to not currently actively looking for a job?
Q8 1	mentioned in the previous questions (children, elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in
	mentioned in the previous questions (children, elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to not currently actively looking for a job?
1	mentioned in the previous questions (children, elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to not currently actively looking for a job? Not at all important
1 2	mentioned in the previous questions (children, elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to not currently actively looking for a job? Not at all important Slightly important
1 2 3 4 5	mentioned in the previous questions (children, elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to not currently actively looking for a job? Not at all important Slightly important Important Fairly important Very important
1 2 3 4	mentioned in the previous questions (children, elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to not currently actively looking for a job? Not at all important Slightly important Important Fairly important

2	undergoing education or training
3	personal illness or disability
4	want to work more hours but cannot find a job or work of more hours
5	housework, looking after children or other persons
6	other reasons
Q10	Thinking about the care or help you provide to all persons you mentioned in the previous questions (children, elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to work less than full-time hours?
1	Not at all important
2	Slightly important
3	Important
4	Fairly important
5	Very important
Q11	Thinking about the care or help you provide to all persons you mentioned in the previous questions (children, elderly, sick or disabled persons), how important are these care responsibilities in your decision to be self-employed?
1	Not at all important
2	Slightly important
3	Important
4	Fairly important
5	Very important
Q12	Does your job require you to work evenings or nights?
1	No
2	Yes, 1-2 times a month
3	Yes, 3-6 times a month
4	Yes, more than 7 times a month
Q13	Does your job require you to work weekends?
1	No

2	Yes, about once a month
3	Yes, more than once a month
4	Yes, nearly every weekend
	Your resources
Q14	Thinking of the whole household, which of the following situations best describes how the incomes in your household are dealt with?
1	we share all incomes
2	we share some income but keep some as private to the person receiving it
3	all incomes are kept private to the person receiving it
Q15	Are the following people normally responsible for managing your household finances?
Q15_1	my partner
Q15_2	my mother/mother-in-law
Q15_3	my father/father-in-law
Q15_4	my daughter
Q15_5	my son
Q15_6	myself
Q15_7	other person in my household
Q15_8	other person NOT living in my household (not an accountant)
1	Yes
2	No
Q16	What part of your personal income do you keep separate from the common household budget?
1	all my personal income
2	more than half of my personal income
3	about half of my personal income
4	less than half of my personal income
5	none
6	I have no personal income
Q17	Do you have access, meaning the right to withdraw funds, to any ofthefollowingbankaccounts?Please, select all that apply to you.

Q17_1	personal account held in your name
Q17_2	personal account held NOT in your name (for example, you regularly use your partner's bank card to cover some costs)
Q17_3	joint account (with your partner or other household member)
Q17_4	personal savings account
Q17_5	joint savings account (with your partner or other household member)
Q17_6	I don't have access to any bank account
Q18	Do you feel free to spend money, without asking permission of your partner or other household members, on purchases just for yourself including hobbies and leisure?
1	yes, always or almost always
2	yes, sometimes
3	no, never or almost never
Q19	Do you feel free to spend money <u>on your children</u> , without asking permission of your partner or the other household members?
Q19 1	
	permission of your partner or the other household members?
1	permission of your partner or the other household members? yes, always or almost always
1 2	permission of your partner or the other household members? yes, always or almost always yes, sometimes
1 2 3	permission of your partner or the other household members? yes, always or almost always yes, sometimes no, never or almost never
1 2 3 4	permission of your partner or the other household members? yes, always or almost always yes, sometimes no, never or almost never I don't have any children. Could your household afford the following things, if you wanted them? Your household includes all the people living at the same address as you.
1 2 3 4 Q20	permission of your partner or the other household members? yes, always or almost always yes, sometimes no, never or almost never I don't have any children. Could your household afford the following things, if you wanted them? Your household includes all the people living at the same address as you. If you live alone, this means yourself.
1 2 3 4 Q20 Q20_1	permission of your partner or the other household members? yes, always or almost always yes, sometimes no, never or almost never I don't have any children. Could your household afford the following things, if you wanted them? Your household includes all the people living at the same address as you. If you live alone, this means yourself. Paying for a week's annual holiday away from home
1 2 3 4 Q20 Q20_1 Q20_2	permission of your partner or the other household members? yes, always or almost always yes, sometimes no, never or almost never I don't have any children. Could your household afford the following things, if you wanted them? Your household includes all the people living at the same address as you. If you live alone, this means yourself. Paying for a week's annual holiday away from home Eating meat, chicken or fish or vegetarian equivalent every two days

า	No
2	No
Q21	If your household is obliged to pay unexpected expenses for about € 1300, can your household pay this amount with own means (wage, savings, pension,)?
1	Yes
2	No
Q22	Do you think (if you have to) your household could get a loan by a bank or another finance company for the total sum of €1,300?
1	Yes
2	No
Q23	Do you think (if you have to) your household would be able to pay the total sum of €1,300 with help from family, friends or acquaintances?
1	Yes
2	No
Q24	In the past 12 months, were you able to save money (either personally or jointly with your partner or another household member if applicable)?
Q24_1	yes, regularly (for example every month, every three months,)
Q24_2	yes, occasionally (not regularly, for example when you receive tax return or money as a gift)
Q24_3	no, I/we didn't manage to save any money
Q24_4	I don't know/I prefer not to say
Q25	At any time in the <u>last 12 months</u> has your household been unable for financial reasons to pay as scheduled any of the following bills?
Q25_1	Rent for accommodation (main place of residence)
Q25_2	Mortgage payment (main place of residence)
Q25_3	Utility bills such as for electricity, water, gas, heating (main place of residence)
Q25_4	Purchase instalments or other loan repayments (other than mortgage instalments)

Q25_5	Payment for care services (childcare, elderly care, etc.)
Q25_6	Health expenses
1	Never
2	Once
3	Twice or more
4	Not applicable
Q26	Do you own the following items for your own personal use and do you do any of the following activities? If not, please indicate whether you cannot afford it, or don't have it/don't do it because of some other reason.
Q26_1	Have access to Internet for personal use <u>at home</u>
Q26_2	Have access to car or a van for personal use
Q26_3	Have two pairs of shoes in good condition (including a pair of all-weather shoes)
Q26_4	Replace worn-out clothes by some new (not second-hand) ones
Q26_5	Get together with friends/family for a drink/meal at least once a month
Q26_6	Spend a small amount of money each week on yourself, for your own pleasure
Q26_7	Visit family member in another town each month
Q26_8	Pay for an extracuricular activity for each child (sport, music lessons,)
Q26_9	Take a public transport subscription
1	Yes, I have it/do it
2	No, I cannot afford it
3	No, I don't have/do it for a reason other than financial.
Q27	During the last two weeks was there ever a day when you did not have a substantial meal due to money?
1	Yes

No
Do you have an internet connection for personal use when needed?
Yes
No
Thinking of your household's cost for formal education, for example registration, school books, school trips, school meals, etc., are you able to meet these costs
With great difficulty
With difficulty
With some difficulty
Fairly easily
Easily
Very easily
Not applicable
What is the proximate net income of your household per month? Your household includes all the people living at the same address as you.
Less than €500 per month
€500 – €1,000 per month
€1,001 - €2,000 per month
€2,001 - €3,000 per month
€3,001 – €4,000 per month
€4,001 - €5,000 per month
More than €5,000 per month
I don't know/I prefer not to say

Table 1 List of 30 questions for inclusion in the ESS Rotating Module



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Consortium members



Contact

Alzbeta Bartova, KU Leuven alzbeta.bartova@kuleuven.be