

## The ISSP Standard Background Variables (June 2001)

The paper sets out the ISSP core background variables agreed upon at the 2001 ISSP meeting in Umeå. The background variables are compulsory except of nat\_ETHN. They should be used beginning with the ISSP module 2002 'Social Networks II'.

The first part is the list of variables and gives an overview. The variable names in bold are the variable names also used in statistical packages (e.g. SPSS), the first line of text following the variable names are used as variable labels in statistical packages (e.g. SPSS)

### List of variables:

<b>SEX</b>	Sex of respondent
<b>AGE</b>	Age of respondent
<b>MARITAL</b>	Marital status of respondent
<b>COHAB</b>	Do you live together with a partner?
<b>EDUCYRS</b>	Education I - years (of full time) schooling
<b>DEGREE</b>	Education II - highest education level / degree
<b>nat_DEGR</b>	Education II – country specific categories
<b>WRKST</b>	Current employment status, main source of living
<b>WRKHRS</b>	Working hours - number of hours (usually) worked weekly <u>(including regular overtime work)</u>
<b>ISCO88</b>	Occupation - four digit 1988 ISCO / ILO occupation code <u>(if R not working ask most recent job)</u>
<b>WRKSUP</b>	Supervises others at work - Do you supervise the work of any other people? <u>(if R not working ask most recent job)</u>
<b>WRKTYPE</b>	R: Working for private sector, public sector or self-employed <u>(if R not working ask most recent job)</u>
<b>NEMPLOY</b>	(If self employed) Do you have any employees? If so, how many? <u>(if R not working ask most recent job)</u>
<b>UNION</b>	Is respondent member of a trade union <u>(or was in the past)?</u>
<b>SPWRKST</b>	Spouse / partner: current employment status, main source of living
<b>SPISCO88</b>	Spouse / partner: occupation, four digit 1988 ISCO / ILO occupation code <u>(if R not working ask most recent job)</u>
<b>SPWRKTYP</b>	S-P: Working for private sector, public sector or self-employed <u>(if R not working ask most recent job)</u>
<b>INCOME</b>	Family income

<b>RINCOME</b>	Respondent's earnings
<b>HOMPOP</b>	How many persons in household
<b>HHCYCLE</b>	Household composition: adults and children (less than 18 years)
<b>PARTY_LR</b>	Party affiliation - left-right <u>(Not asked but coded in a 5-point left - right scheme by data producers)</u>
<b>nat_PRTY</b>	Party affiliation - Country-specific
<b>VOTE_LE</b>	Vote last general election: Yes/no
<b>ATTEND</b>	Attendance of religious services
<b>RELIG</b>	Religious denomination <u>(asked country-specific but re-coded to standard)</u>
<b>RELIGGRP</b>	Religious main-group derived from RELIG
<b>TOPBOT</b>	10 point top-bottom scale
<b>nat_REG</b>	Region - Country-specific
<b>nat_SIZE</b>	Size of community - Country-specific
<b>URBRURAL</b>	Type of community: urban / rural – self-assessed
<b>WEIGHT</b>	Weighting factor
<b>MODE</b>	Administrative mode of data-collection
<b>(Optional:)</b>	
<b>nat_ETHN</b>	Ethnic identity / family origin Country specific

## Variables in detail:

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**SEX** R: sex  
Sex of respondent

1. Male
  2. Female
  9. No answer
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**AGE** R: Age  
Age of respondent

exact age  
99. No answer

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**MARITAL** R: Marital status  
Marital status of respondent (legal status)

1. Married
2. Widowed
3. Divorced
4. Separated (married but separated / not living with legal spouse)
5. Single, never married
9. No answer

**Comment:** The aim of this variable is to measure the 'legal' status. Cohabitation should be asked separately

Further points to consider in this context are:

- The current procedure in some countries mixes legal status and cohabitation up
  - The category 'Single' should be 'NEVER married'. Is this always clear in the respective languages?
  - If the question just asks whether respondents are married, we still do not know if they are living with this partner. Do respondents then get asked whether they are or not ?
  - Are respondents really followed through these questions considering the correct filter-instructions?
  - 'Married' should be 'married AND living together with spouse', otherwise 'separated' should be coded.
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**COHAB** R: Steady life-partner  
(If not married and living together with spouse)  
Do you live together with a partner?

1. Yes
2. No
9. No answer
0. INAP (living together with spouse - Code 1 in MARITAL)

**Comment:** This additional variable measures the dimension not included in the variable MARITAL: living together with a partner but not being married. It is still open whether what the ISSP wants is 'living together' or 'having a steady life-partner' or both. The life partner may not be someone you live with. This is one reason for the great variance in frequency-distributions for this variable. Another reason is how respondents are filtered. It must be clear that all respondents are asked this question who are not living together with their legal spouse i.e. code 1 in MARITAL.

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**EDUCYRS** R: Education I: years in school  
Education I - years (of full time) schooling including university but not vocational training

- 95. Still at school
- 96. Still at College/University
- 98. Don't know
- 99. No answer
- 0. No formal schooling

**Comment:** It should be documented clearly whether this variable has been asked directly to the respondent or whether it has been derived from the nat\_DEGREE variable. If vocational training is a substantial part of the education with some kind of every-day schooling, it should be included whereas vocational training with only a few hours in school per week should not be counted.

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**DEGREE** R: Education II: categories  
Education II - highest education level / degree

The DEGREE of education should ASKED country-specific, NOT using the ISSP categories in the questions to the respondents. These ISSP categories should be computed from the country-specific degrees (nat\_DEGREE)

- 0. No formal qualification
- 1. Lowest formal qualification attainable
- 2. Qualifications which are above the lowest qualification, but below the usual entry requirement for universities (intermediary secondary completed)
- 3. (Usual) Entry requirement for universities (higher secondary completed: the German Abitur, the French Bac, English A-level, etc.)
- 4. Qualifications which are above the higher secondary level, but below a full university degree
- 5. University degree completed
- 9. No answer

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**nat\_DEGR** Country-specific degrees of education  
(Original categories should be translated into English)

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**WRKST** R: Current employment status  
Current employment status, current economic position, main source of living

**SPWRKST** S-P: Current employment status

Spouse / partner: current employment status, current economic position, main source of living

1. Employed - full time
2. Employed - part time
3. Employed - less than part time / temporarily out of work
4. Helping family member

Not in labour force

5. Unemployed
6. Student / in school / in vocational training
7. Retired
8. Housewife / home duties
9. Permanently disabled
10. Others not in labour force
99. No answer

only for SPWRKST:

00. INAP (no spouse, no partner - Code 2-9 in MARITAL or 2, 9 in COHAB)

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**ISCO88** R: Occupation ISCO 1988

**SPISCO88** S-P: Occupation ISCO

Spouse / partner: occupation

**Ask ISCO88, SPISCO88 of most recent job (if R or Spouse has no current job)**

Occupation - four digit 1988 ISCO / ILO occupation code

99997. Refused
99998. Don't know, inadequately described
99999. No answer
00000. INAP (never had a job)

Only for SPISCO:

00000. INAP (no spouse, no partner - Code 2-9 in MARITAL or 2, 9 in COHAB)

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**WRKTYPE** R: Working for private sector, public sector or self-employed

**SPWRKTYP** Spouse: Working for private sector, public sector or self-employed

**Ask WRKTYPE, SPWRKTYP of most recent job (if R has no current job)**

1. Works for government
  2. Works for publicly owned firm
  3. Does not work for government or publicly owned firm, and not self employed
  4. Self employed
- 
9. No answer
  0. Never had a job

Only for SPWRKTYP:

0. Never had a job, INAP (no spouse, no partner - Code 2-9 in MARITAL or 2, 9 in COHAB)

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**NEMPLOY** R: Self-employed: how many employees  
(If self employed) Do you have any employees, how many?  
(exact number of employees)

**Ask NEMPLOY of most recent job (if R has no current job)**

9999. No answer  
0. INAP (Code 0, 1-3, 9 in WRKTYPE)

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**WRKHRS** R: Hours worked weekly  
Working hours - number of hours (usually) worked weekly

97. Refused  
98. Don't know  
99. No answer  
00. INAP (currently not in labour force - Code 5-99 in WRKST)

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**WRKSUP** R: Supervise  
Supervises others at work  
Do you supervise the work of any other people?

**Proposal:** ... supervise or are you held responsible ...

**Ask WRKSUP of most recent job (if R has no current job)**

1. Yes  
2. No  
7. Refused  
8. Don't know  
9. No answer  
0. INAP (currently not in labour force - Code 5-99 in WRKST)

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**RINCOME** R: Earnings  
Respondent's earnings

**INCOME** Family income  
Family income

**Suggestions for handling the income questions for the moment**

Income questions for the ISSP BV respondent income RINCOME and family income INCOME

Different countries ask different questions with different outputs. Comparing incomes across countries is difficult.

Some countries ask before deductions.

Countries that do this usually remind respondents what to consider as income. The details of this and the vocabulary used (even in English) differ naturally from country to country - some

include child benefits, veteran 'allotments', mention income from rents and pensions etc. Here is one example from the US GSS:

The American GSS asks income 'before taxes and other deductions' and instructs respondents 'in addition to employment, income total income includes interest or dividends, rent, social security, other pensions, alimony or child support, unemployment compensation, public aid (welfare), armed forces or veteran's allotment'.

Some of these categories show cultural anchoring fairly clearly.

Other countries ask for income after deductions. They tend then to focus on reminding respondents what sort of things count as deductions. The German GSS income question, for example, asks about income after deductions and on a monthly basis.

In reminding respondents about what count as deductions, the ALLBUS question is rather general (taxes and other deductions). The question is more salient for employed people. It is not at all certain that this kind of formulation reminds people who do not work to think about their various sources of income.

In some economies, income might be measured in livestock as much as in monetary units, so different reminders will be needed in different places.

In sum, in order to improve measurement mid term, we suggest the following:

a) We need information from members about how income is measured in their countries in larger social surveys.

b) We need them to send us a translation of how they are currently asking it in ISSP alongside the formulation they use in their questionnaires in their own languages.

On the basis of this, in conjunction with the demographics group working on income or with the Methodology Committee, we can come up with a suggestion for the kind of formulations that might be most useful. (We will not suggest a common formulation, of course).

c) ISSP questions need to specify the time span involved - is it weekly income, monthly income or annual income. It is unlikely that the ISSP will be able to agree on one time period. Some regions seem still to work more on weekly bases than on monthly, for example. Members should also consider that asking for annual income may be tricky for people who are not working. Pensioners in Germany at least are more likely to be able to say what they 'earn' or have on a monthly basis than on an annual basis.

d) ISSP income questions need to specify whether the income is calculated before deductions or after deductions. In cultural and socio-economic terms it is probably not possible to agree that we all ask the same.

It would be a good idea to remind respondents of what counts as income (not just wages) and, if asked after deductions, what count as deductions. The problems this may pose for self completion

should be discussed and tested. The demographics organisers (Braun and Uher) can collect this information and provide feedback to the group as a whole.

Even given that we then know what the time period is and whether income is calculated before or after deductions, it is still not a simple matter to compare incomes across countries.

e) Countries should provide national statistics on distribution of income. Details of how this could / should be organised - what information in which format - still need to be agreed upon among members.

f) Members may be already using default questions or want to try default questions. The Methodology Committee or the demographics group on income could help with suggestions here we hope.

e) Members who have developed strategies for comparing incomes are asked to write them up and send them into the demographics group organisers (Braun and Uher). They will pass them on to the methodology Committee or the income group for discussion.

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**ATTEND** R: Religious services - how often  
Attendance of religious services

People with 'no religion' should not be excluded from this question.

1. Several times a week
2. Once a week
3. 2 or 3 times a month
4. Once a month
5. Several times a year
6. Once a year
7. Less frequently
8. Never
97. Refused
98. Don't know
99. No answer

(If codes '2' and '3' cannot be distinguished, '2' will be coded)

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**RELIG** R: Religious denomination

Question:

What is your religious preference?

[Alternatively: To which religious denomination do you belong?]

[Also possible: Do you belong to a religious group or community, a denomination, or a church? - 1 Yes; 2 No; If yes: Which one is that?]

**Coding scheme:**

0	No religion
100	ROMAN CATHOLIC
200	PROTESTANT
210	Episcopalian, Anglican, Church of England, Church of Ireland
220	Baptists
230	Congregationalists
240	European Free Church (Anabaptists)
250	Lutheran
260	Methodist
270	Pentecostal
280	Presbyterian
290	Other Protestant (no specific religion mentioned)
300	ORTHODOX
310	Greek Orthodox
320	Russian Orthodox
390	Orthodox (no specific religion mentioned)
400	OTHER CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS



- 401-489 Specific Christian Groups
- 490 Unspecified Christian Religion
- 500 JEWISH
- 510 Orthodox
- 520 Conservative
- 530 Reformist
- 590 Jewish Religion general (no specific group mentioned)
- 600 ISLAM
- 610 Kharijism
- 620 Mu'tazilism
- 630 Sunni
- 640 Shi'ism
- 650 Isma'ilis
- 660-689 Other Muslim Religions
- 690 Muslim; Mohammedan; Islam (no specific religion mentioned)
  
- 700 BUDDHISM
- 701-789 Specific Buddhist Groups
- 790 Buddhism general (no specific group mentioned)
  
- 800 HINDUISM
- 810-889 Specific Groups
- 890 Hinduism general (no specific group mentioned)
  
- 900 OTHER ASIAN RELIGION
- 901-949 Specific Groups (Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism)
- 950 Other East Asian Religion(no specific group mentioned)
  
- 960 OTHER RELIGIONS
  
- 998. Don't know
- 999. Not answered

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## RELIGGRP

Derived Variable from the coding scheme above

1. No religion
  2. ROMAN CATHOLIC
  3. PROTESTANT
  4. CHRSTIAN ORTHODOX
  5. JEWISH
  6. ISLAM
  7. BUDDHISM
  8. HINDUISM
  9. OTHER CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS
  10. OTHER EASTERN RELIGIONS
  11. OTHER RELIGIONS
  
  98. Don't know
  99. Not answered
-

**TOPBOT** R: Top-Bottom self-placement

10. Highest
- 9.
- 8.
- 7.
- 6.
- 5.
- 4.
- 3.
- 2.
1. Lowest

99. No answer

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**UNION** R: Trade union membership  
Is or was R member of a trade union?

1. Currently member
  2. Once member, not now
  3. Never member
  
  9. No answer
- 

**PARTY\_LR** R: party affiliation: left - right  
Party affiliation - BUT ASKED country-specific, NOT using the ISSP categories. These should be computed from the country-specific parties (nat\_PRTY) into the right scheme by the data-producer

1. Far left (communist etc.)
  2. Left / centre left
  3. Centre / liberal
  4. Right / conservative
  5. Far right (fascist etc.)
  6. Other
  7. No party, no preference
  8. Don't know
  9. No answer
- 

**nat\_PRTY** R: party affiliation – country-specific

National parties mentioned are coded country-specific. Names and abbreviations for parties should be supplied in original language and also in English. The position of Parties in the left-right-scheme should be supplied as well for the construction of PRTY\_LR.

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**VOTE\_LE** Did R vote in last general election?

1. Yes
  2. No
  
  9. No answer
- 

**HOMPOP** How many persons in household  
Number of people in household

01. One person
02. Two persons

...

99. No answer
- 

**HHCYCLE** Household cycle  
Household composition: adults and children (less than 18 years)

01. Single
  02. One adult and one child
  03. One adult and two children
  04. One adult and three or more children
  05. Two adults
  06. Two adults and one child
  07. Two adults and two children
  08. Two adults and three or more children
  09. Three adults
  10. Three adults with children
  11. Four adults
  12. Four adults with children
  13. Five adults
  14. Five adults with children
  15. Six adults
  16. Six adults with children
  17. Seven adults
  18. Seven adults with children
  19. Eight adults
  20. Eight adults with children
  21. Nine adults
  22. Nine adults with children
  23. Ten adults
  24. Ten adults with children
  25. Eleven adults
  26. Eleven adults with children
  27. Twelve adults
  28. Twelve adults with children
  95. Otherwise
  99. No answer
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**URBRURAL** Urban - Rural

Type of community: urban / rural - self-assessed by R

1. a big city
  2. the suburbs or outskirts of a big city
  3. a town or a small city
  4. a country village
  5. a farm or home in the country
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**nat\_SIZE**      Size of community - country-specific

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**nat\_REG**      Region

Country specific - codes should be supplied together with data and further documentation

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**WEIGHT**      Weighting factor

1. No weighting

**Comment:** Details about construction of the weight are necessary

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**MODE**      Administrative mode of data-collection (OR Data collection method)

The scheme developed in discussions between members of the, the modes demographics group, the archive and the secretariat covers both data collection methods permitted in the ISSP and methods not currently permitted.

If we keep the entire scheme we will therefore regularly have categories no one in the ISSP uses, nor is allowed to use. The methods permitted in the ISSP context run from numbers 1.0 to 3.4 below. Further data collection methods are described in 4.0 to 6.3.

We propose to drop those from 4.0 to 6.3 in the ISSP compulsory background variables set-up.

Notes should be attached as necessary to remind members what one or the other category actually refers to (e.g. 1.1 and 1.2 below )

10-19 Face-to-face, paper and pencil

- 10 No visuals
- 11 Visuals
- 12 Respondent reading questionnaire
- 13 Interpreter or translator - no visuals
- 14 Interpreter or translator – visuals

20-29 Face-to-face, computer-assisted

- 20 No visuals
- 21 Visuals
- 22 Respondent reading questionnaire (paper or on monitor)
- 23 Interpreter or translator - no visuals
- 24 Interpreter or translator – visuals

30-39 Self-completion, paper and pencil

- 30 Arrives with interviewer, interviewer attending
- 31 Arrives with interviewer, drops-off, picks up later
- 32 Arrives with interviewer, drops off, mailed back by R
- 33 Mailed to, complete and hold for pick up
- 34 Mailed to, mailed back by R

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**Optional variable:**

**nat\_ETHN**    Origin country / ethnic group / ethnic identity / family origin