

ESRA’s Statement to Support and Accompany the “Survey Futures Position Statement on Response Rates” (16.03.2026)

The Board of the European Survey Research Association (ESRA) welcomes and supports the statement of Survey Futures (Maslovskaya et al., 2025) and its effort to provide expert perspectives on the interpretation of response rates in the context of survey quality. Promoting informed discussion and contributing methodological expertise to such debates is closely aligned with the goals of ESRA.

In addition to the Survey Futures statements, we would like to emphasize the following considerations:

1. On the relationship between response rates and non-response bias

We agree that response rates are not, by themselves, a reliable indicator of non-response bias. However, this does not imply that no relationship exists. A formal view on non-response bias, such as $bias = (1 - RR)(M_R - M_{NR})$ illustrates that, all else being equal, surveys with higher response rates (RR) will have lower average non-response bias than surveys with lower response rates. In this context, it is also important to consider that approaches such as responsive surveys designs (e.g., Brick & Tourangeau, 2017) aim to reduce non-response bias by strategically increasing response rates. We therefore view response rates as neither sufficient nor irrelevant with respect to non-response bias. They are structurally related but must be interpreted alongside additional indicators and design features.

2. On response rates within the broader concept of survey quality

When the discussion is situated within the Total Survey Error paradigm, it becomes evident that response rates cannot assume the role of the most important measure of survey quality. Rather survey quality is the result of the combined effects of multiple sources of random and systematic error across the survey life cycle, including coverage, sampling, non-response, measurement, and processing. Non-response error was therefore always conceptualized as only one contributor among many components of total survey error.

Brick, J. M., & Tourangeau, R. (2017). Responsive survey designs for reducing nonresponse bias. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 33(3), 735-752. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jos-2017-0034>

Maslovskaya, O., Lynn, P., Calderwood, L., Durrant, G., Fitzgerald, R., Nicolaas, G., & Williams, J. (2025) Survey Futures position statement on response rates. https://surveyfutures.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Response-Rates-Posititon-Stateme nt_Survey-Futures.pdf

This statement was drafted by Sharan Sharma, Tom Smith, Jonas Klingwort, and Daniel Seddig and is supported by the ESRA Board of 2026.