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**Access panels in market, opinion and  
social research — Vocabulary and  
service requirements**

*«Access panels» pour les études de marché, études sociales et  
d'opinion — Vocabulaire et exigences de service*

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**Contents**

Page

Foreword.....	iv
Introduction .....	v
1 Scope .....	1
2 Normative references .....	1
3 Terms and definitions.....	1
4 Requirements .....	3
4.1 General requirement.....	3
4.2 Organization and responsibility .....	4
4.3 Recruitment of new panel members .....	4
4.4 Access panel structure and size .....	6
4.5 Access panel management.....	7
4.6 Access panel usage.....	9
4.7 Client reporting .....	11
4.8 Professional rules of conduct .....	11
Annex A (informative) References to clauses of ISO 20252:2006 in this International Standard .....	13

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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO 26362 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 225, *Market, opinion and social research*.

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## Introduction

The intention and objective of this International Standard is to apply the quality requirements as specified in ISO 20252 to market, opinion and social research by the use of access panels and to harmonize already available national standards on this issue. Requirements only apply where these services are provided. This International Standard is intended to supplement and be used in conjunction with ISO 20252.

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# Access panels in market, opinion and social research — Vocabulary and service requirements

## 1 Scope

This International Standard specifies the terms and definitions, as well as the service requirements, for organizations and professionals who own and/or use access panels for market, opinion and social research. It develops the criteria against which access panel providers can be evaluated and against which the quality of access panels can be assessed.

This International Standard is applicable to all types of access panels, whether recruited and used online (e.g. via internet) or offline (e.g. via telephone, post or face-to-face interaction).

NOTE 1 Some individual access panel providers carry out only some processes relevant to the requirements of this International Standard. Relevant processes could also be the responsibility of separate organizations, e.g. an access panel owner and a research service provider carrying out a survey using the access panel.

NOTE 2 Access panels are actively managed and, in this way, differentiated from sampling frames, simple databases and lists of addresses and names including respondents to previous surveys.

## 2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 20252:2006, *Market, opinion and social research — Vocabulary and service requirements*

## 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 20252 and the following apply.

### 3.1

#### **access panel**

sample database of potential respondents who declare that they will cooperate for future data collection if selected

NOTE 1 Continuously reporting panels, e.g. TV-rating panels, consumer panels and re-contact databases (asking for permission for follow-ups) are not covered.

NOTE 2 Adapted from ISO 20252:2006, definition 2.1.

### 3.2

#### **access panel provider**

service provider that manages and is responsible for the access panel(s) to be used by researchers for conducting surveys

NOTE For the purposes of applying requirements of ISO 20252 to this International Standard, “research service provider” and “access panel provider” are regarded as having equivalent meaning.

**3.3 active panel member**  
panel member who has participated in at least one survey if requested, has updated his/her profile data or has registered to join the access panel, within the last 12 months

**3.4 bias**  
systematic deviation between the estimate and the true parameter value

[ISO 20252:2006, definition 2.7]

**3.5 client**  
individual, organization, department or division, internal or external, which requests or commissions a research project

[ISO 20252:2006, definition 2.8]

**3.6 continuous panel**  
group of selected respondents who have agreed to provide information at specified intervals over an extended period of time

NOTE 1 The term “continuous panel” does not cover “access panel”.

NOTE 2 Adapted from ISO 20252:2006, definition 2.37.

**3.7 database**  
centrally held collection of data that is accessible to users

[ISO 20252:2006, definition 2.18]

**3.8 de-duplication**  
process to remove individuals who are registered more than once on the same access panel, so that they are entered only once

**3.9 double opt-in**  
explicit consent at two separate points to become a panel member

**3.10 fraudulent panel member**  
panel member who deliberately misrepresents his/her identity, profile data or responses

**3.11 inattentive panel member**  
panel member who does not give an adequate level of thought to the responses he/she provides

NOTE A poor quality of response is not necessarily the panel member’s fault, and could reflect poor questionnaire design.

**3.12 incentive**  
gift, payment or other concessions offered to potential respondents to increase response rates

[ISO 20252:2006, definition 2.28]

NOTE The term “response rate” cannot be used to describe respondent cooperation for access panels [see **participation rate** (3.16)].

**3.13****opt-in**

explicit consent to become a panel member

**3.14****opt-out**

explicit request from a panel member to leave an access panel

**3.15****panel member**

individual recruited from a documented source who has provided profile data and appropriate information for validation of identity, given explicit consent to participate in research surveys according to the terms and conditions of panel membership, and not opted out

**3.16****participation rate**

number of panel members who have provided a usable response divided by the total number of initial personal invitations requesting members to participate

NOTE A “usable response” is one where the respondent has provided answers to all the questions required by the survey design. Where it is possible to determine undelivered invitations (e.g. returned to sender owing to a full email inbox, incorrect postal or email address, or invalid phone number), it is recommended that these be taken into account when calculating the participation rate. The number of panel members who did not receive an invitation would then be subtracted from the total number of panel members invited to participate.

**3.17****profile data**

descriptive characteristics of a panel member

**3.18****screening**

initial questions in a questionnaire used to establish eligibility of respondent

[ISO 20252:2006, definition 2.55]

**3.19****validation**

procedures to check that data have been collected according to specification

NOTE Adapted from ISO 20252, definition 2.61.

**3.20****validity**

extent to which the results of a research process represent what was intended

[ISO 20252:2006, definition 2.62]

## 4 Requirements

### 4.1 General requirement

Access panels to which this International Standard applies shall be actively managed. Such management shall include interface and ongoing communication between the access panel provider and the panel members.

NOTE 1 Access panels are, in this way, differentiated from simple sampling frames, simple databases and lists of addresses and names, including those of respondents to previous or other surveys.

At the recruitment stage, the access panel provider shall obtain from panel members their agreement to participate in research projects.

Access panels shall contain a set of profile data of panel members (see 4.4.3).

NOTE 2 Access panels as covered by this International Standard are on-going and can be used for a range of surveys or other research purposes (e.g. qualitative research). They are distinguished from special purpose continuous panels, such as those used for audience measurement, to which this International Standard does not apply.

Active panel members shall meet all the following criteria:

- they are recruited from a documented source;
- they have provided appropriate information for initial confirmation of identity;
- they have provided profile data at recruitment;
- they have given explicit consent to participate in research surveys according to the terms and conditions of panel membership.

In order to remain an active panel member, at least one of the following criteria shall be met:

- a) participation in at least one survey, if requested, within the last 12 months;
- b) update of profile data within the last 12 months.

## 4.2 Organization and responsibility

The access panel provider shall apply a quality management system which covers all the requirements of this International Standard and documents the provider's organizational structure in accordance with ISO 20252:2006, 3.1.

Records and documents shall be established and maintained to provide evidence of traceability in accordance with ISO 20252:2006, 3.3.

Competence and training procedures shall be in place and documented in accordance with ISO 20252:2006, 3.4.

The access panel provider shall be responsible for ensuring that any subcontracted processes covered by this International Standard are controlled in accordance with ISO 20252:2006, 3.5.

## 4.3 Recruitment of new panel members

### 4.3.1 Confidentiality and transparency

Access panel providers shall ensure the confidentiality and security of all personal data relating to panel members which are obtained as part of the recruitment process or otherwise.

Access panel providers shall not provide data in an identifiable form to any third party unless explicit consent from the panel member is obtained in accordance with applicable laws and relevant codes of conduct. This principle of confidentiality shall be communicated to potential panel members during the recruitment process.

The general purposes of the access panel, its mode of operation and the general nature of how data collected from panel members at the recruitment stage or through panel research projects may be used shall be communicated and transparent to potential panel members during the recruitment process.

The type of personal data to be collected from panel members, how long it will be retained and security of its storage shall be communicated to potential panel members.

Where cookies or similar elements are used in the panel members' interface, this shall be communicated to panel members in at least general terms, including the differences between cookies used, for example, as routing and those which capture data about panel members and their behaviour. At the recruitment stage, panel members shall have the opportunity of refusing cookies, even though this may make them ineligible for inclusion on the access panel.

The access panel provider shall prepare and make available a documented privacy statement.

Where incentives are to be offered to panel members, the incentive policy statement (see 4.5.2) shall be summarized to potential panel members at the recruitment stage and the full statement shall be communicated to active panel members.

Access panel providers shall add to the access panel only panel members who confirm in the recruitment process their explicit consent to the terms and conditions of membership of the access panel and their future participation in research projects to be carried out through the access panel.

Where it is intended to recruit children as panel members, the access panel provider shall obtain the explicit permission of each child's parent or legal guardian or other responsible adult before initiating any contact with the child. Where it becomes apparent during recruitment that a potential panel member is a child (and this was not known beforehand), the informed permission of the child's parent or legal guardian or other responsible adult shall also be obtained before proceeding further with the recruitment process. A record shall be made of such permissions.

NOTE The term "child" is defined in accordance with applicable legislation and relevant codes of conduct.

When obtaining permission to recruit, the type of research to be covered shall be explained to the responsible adult. The permission to contact the child shall be renewed regularly (at least every 12 months or at the next survey opportunity). In the case of sensitive topics, the responsible adult shall be asked for permission on each occasion. The access panel provider shall check that each project conforms to the permission given. Records of this check shall be kept.

During the recruitment process, potential panel members shall be informed that co-operation and membership in the access panel is voluntary and that upon their request, at any time after recruitment, they will be removed from the access panel.

#### **4.3.2 Methods of recruitment**

The access panel provider shall disclose to clients, upon request, the methods of recruitment used.

Where potential panel members are to be contacted from an existing database or contact list, the access panel provider shall ensure that such contact conforms to applicable legal requirements and relevant codes of conduct. Where such databases or contact lists are provided by a third party (e.g. the client), the access panel provider shall request the third party to confirm that use of the source is in conformity with legal requirements.

#### **4.3.3 Source of recruitment**

The access panel provider shall disclose to the client, upon request, the types of sources used to recruit to the access panel, including whether recruitment is from a representative sample of the target population. The proportion of the total access panel represented by each type of source, including from a representative sample, shall be quantified.

NOTE The client is then able to review this information in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the recruiting sources and to determine whether they can cause any issues of bias or validity.

#### **4.3.4 Validation of identity**

##### **4.3.4.1 General**

The access panel provider shall validate the claimed identity of new panel members.

Appropriate methods (e.g. de-duplication) shall be carried out to avoid individuals being included more than once in the access panel.

The access panel provider shall document the process of validating panel members' identity and record the results and any actions taken. This documented process shall be available to the client upon request.

#### 4.3.4.2 Validation of identity at the recruitment stage

Identity shall be validated at the recruitment stage. The access panel provider shall devise and document the techniques and variables used to do so. Techniques and variables can include, for example

- telephone number;
- name and postal address;
- bank details;
- official identity number.

NOTE 1 In specialist access panels, other techniques and variables can be more appropriate.

NOTE 2 In online access panels, an e-mail address alone is not sufficient to validate identity.

#### 4.3.4.3 Subsequent validation of identity

Subsequent validation of identity, using appropriate documented methods, shall be carried out every time a panel member participates. Appropriate methods of subsequent validation of identity can include panel member signature, password, panel identity number or similar method.

#### 4.3.5 Request to unsubscribe or opt out of the access panel

Panel members shall be given a straightforward method for being removed from the access panel if they choose. A request for removal shall be completed as soon as practicable and the panel member shall not be selected for future research studies within the access panel unless a new acceptance is obtained from the panel member in future recruitments or research.

### 4.4 Access panel structure and size

#### 4.4.1 Access panel structure

The access panel provider shall describe the structure of the access panel and make this information available to clients upon request and as far as is relevant for the specific research project. The structural description should cover:

- the population group included in and/or excluded from the access panel, e.g. domestic consumers, professional practitioners, a business group;
- any sub-groups within the access panel from which specific samples or sub-samples can be selected, as well as their size relative to the total size of the access panel.

Where the process of recruitment of the access panel has the objective to mirror a population profile, e.g. by age or socio-economic class, this should be demonstrated by relevant supporting data.

Terms such as "representative" shall be used only if tightly defined.

#### 4.4.2 Access panel size

The size of the access panel shall be defined and transparent to clients. The following shall be taken into account when defining access panel size and capacity:

- only active panel members shall be included, as defined in 3.3;
- the typical participation rate (and calculation method) of the surveys conducted within the last 12 months;
- access panel size shall be of respondents recruited as panel members and shall not include other members of panel members' households, although estimates of total household numbers may also be provided;
- access panel size shall be given for a specific date (since panel members may leave and join continuously).

NOTE The number of panel members is not, in itself, an adequate quality criterion for an access panel. The quality of an access panel, and hence also the quality of samples drawn from it, is mainly determined by the recruitment and selection procedure for panel members, the structure of the access panel and the maintenance and usage of the access panel, rather than by the number of panel members.

#### 4.4.3 Profile data of panel members

NOTE The profile data is collected for two main purposes. The first is to provide information for use in the validation and auditing of the panel members, and the second is to provide relevant stratification data for employment in the sample design.

When using profile data for analysis purposes, one should proceed with caution, since these data are not always kept consistently up to date. Wherever possible, any variables to be used in analysis should be verified as part of the main questionnaire.

During recruitment, profile data shall be collected from all new panel members and this shall be updated. The profile data definitions shall be available to clients. Relevant panel member data definitions can include:

- home address;
- demographic and socio-economic variables, e.g. gender, age, marital status, educational level attained, socio-economic group;
- product and service usage or ownership, as well as other behavioural data.

For specialist access panels, other equivalent classifications may be appropriate.

### 4.5 Access panel management

#### 4.5.1 General

The management of an access panel shall be performed by competent staff. The individual responsibilities and duties shall be documented by the organizational structure within the access panel provider, in accordance with ISO 20252:2006, 3.1.

Access panel management procedures shall be documented and a summary of these procedures shall be available to the client upon request.

#### 4.5.2 Incentives

Where incentives are given to respondents, the nature of these incentives shall be documented as part of project records.

Incentives should be used as a token of appreciation and as a means to stimulate participation. As part of quality control, the incentive for taking part should be as neutral as possible in terms of the research project and the target group, so as to ensure that the type and scope of the incentives do not lead to response bias.

Where incentives are to be offered, access panel providers shall have a documented incentive statement for each access panel operated or a common statement for all access panels, with any variations between access panels identified. The incentive statement shall cover, as appropriate:

- the nature of the incentives, e.g. cash, vouchers, points and redemption process;
- the types of participation for which incentives are offered, including panel membership and/or participation in surveys (with participation defined), loyalty, etc.;
- how and when incentives are given or redeemed;
- the fair and equitable treatment of all panel members;
- methods of resolving queries or disputes about incentives.

The incentive statement (details of reward for panel members) shall be easily available to all panel members.

Where panel members include children, the child's parent or legal guardian shall be made aware of the incentive scheme and give their explicit permission (see 4.3.1).

Clients shall be informed, upon request, that incentives are offered to panel members, and the nature of the incentives shall be specified.

Panel members shall be able to check the incentives owed to them.

#### 4.5.3 Maintenance

The access panel provider shall interact with panel members at least once every 12 months, whether as part of research project participation, updating of profile data, or otherwise. Such interaction shall entail two-way communication between the access panel provider and panel members and shall be documented.

The access panel provider shall maintain data on the panel members' participation history. Relevant variables of panel members' participation may include:

- the length of time on the access panel;
- the number and duration of research projects in which panel members have been invited to participate, as well as the number of projects where responses have been provided;
- the subjects of projects in which the panel member has responded;
- when the profile data was last updated.

NOTE It can be necessary to exclude panel members from projects on the basis of prior participation in other projects.

The access panel provider shall inform clients, upon request, of policies relating to access panel maintenance, including the variables available for access panel participation analysis.

Panel members who no longer meet the requirements of an active panel member should be removed on a periodic basis (at least once every 12 months) from the access panel, based on their co-operation history. This history shall be retained for a minimum of two years.

#### 4.5.4 Updating profile data of panel members

Panel members shall be asked to update their profile data information at least once every 12 months and shall be able to update their information when they wish.

If no changes are needed to a profile, this can be considered as an update and confirmed by recording the confirmation date.

#### 4.5.5 System requirements

The access panel provider shall have available effective systems (computer-based or otherwise) to implement all requirements of this International Standard and to provide all relevant data on access panel recruitment, structure and size, panel members' profile, access panel management and research participation (response patterns and behaviour).

The systems shall also provide for regular back-up of all data and safeguards, in order to ensure the security of data (including in respect of clients) and panel members' confidentiality.

The requirements in ISO 20252 for back-up, retention and security of data apply.

Online surveys should be available for access at all times while they are ongoing, unless there are unavoidable technical issues.

A technical support/helpdesk service shall be available to panel members by e-mail, web, mail, telephone or other means. The access panel provider should acknowledge or respond to a request within a reasonable period of time.

### 4.6 Access panel usage

#### 4.6.1 Sampling

The access panel provider shall agree with clients on the design and methods to be used to draw samples from access panels for surveys or other research purposes and shall document these in sufficient detail that they can be repeated in other surveys (see 4.7). Any important facts or events in the sampling stage, such as possible sampling biases that might reduce the projectability of the sample to the defined target population/target universe, shall also be documented and reported to the client. The requirements of ISO 20252:2006, 4.5.1.4, apply.

#### 4.6.2 Frequency of participation

The frequency of participation of panel members can be an important design issue that affects the type and magnitude of error in certain types of research. For this reason, access panel providers shall monitor the frequency of participation of all panel members.

The access panel provider shall implement procedures by which fieldwork management is able to identify which panel member has taken part in which survey, so that this information can be used to include/exclude particular sets of panel members.

Detailed records (including the date) of survey participation shall be stored for each panel member, including:

- surveys sampled for (e.g. including type of survey and/or product category);
- response to the invitation.

#### 4.6.3 Questionnaire

The requirements for questionnaires and online questionnaires (including screening questions) in ISO 20252:2006, 4.4, apply.

#### 4.6.4 Pre-testing and translation

The research documentation/questionnaire to be used shall be pre-tested in accordance with ISO 20252:2006, 5.6.4.

Where language translations of research documentations/questionnaires are required, this process shall conform to ISO 20252:2006, 4.4.2.

#### 4.6.5 Invitations to participate in research projects

Each panel member invited to participate in a project (i.e. a member of the selected sample) shall be provided with appropriate information, including:

- a general description of the purpose of the project;
- the estimated length of the interview;
- a statement of the confidentiality and anonymity of each panel member's responses;
- the closing date for completed responses (if applicable);
- full disclosure of incentive terms and conditions applying to the project;
- information as to whether the invitation is sent out on behalf of another research service provider;
- the opportunity to unsubscribe or opt out of the access panel.

NOTE 1 Disclosure of the target group or the product category or identity of the client can bias the results of the project.

NOTE 2 The requirements of 4.3.1 apply regarding the participation of children.

#### 4.6.6 Validation of data

The access panel provider, working with the researcher, shall implement procedures to identify and remove fraudulent and inattentive panel members, documenting these procedures and actions taken.

Responsibilities in this matter may be split between a panel service provider and a separate research service provider, and neither alone may be able to cover this requirement in full.

Relevant validation data shall include:

- a) questionnaire completion time, if applicable (e.g. in online, telephone, CAPI);
- b) the number of questions unanswered and, if relevant, whether specific core questions are unanswered;
- c) a comparison between at least one item of the profile data of the panel members and data from the questionnaire (e.g. age).

In addition to this, relevant validation data may include:

- a cross-reference and cross-validation to external data, e.g. usage and attitude data;
- a consistency check within the dataset, or a consistency check on an individual dataset basis, with either external data or certain scores of the overall data file;
- responses given to open-ended questions.

The requirements of ISO 20252:2006, 5.6.3 and 6.4, apply.