

Publishable summary

GGP: A European Research Infrastructure on the Causes and Consequences of Demographic Developments

Current demographic developments in Europe have far-reaching implications across all spheres of society, including economic development, social cohesion, sustainability and equity. These developments pose key challenges to public policy-making. The GGP design study aims to improve our ability to explain the causes and consequences of demographic developments, in particular the changing relationships between genders and generations.

Population challenges

Major demographic developments like increased longevity, low fertility, and high levels of marital instability pose – in particular in combination with other developments like increased female labour force participation – major challenges to European societies. These challenges have become even more urgent given the economic and financial crisis that has struck Europe – and other Western countries – in the recent years. Therefore, understanding these challenges and providing answers to them is important both from the perspective of individuals and families, and from the perspective of societies.

Gender relationships - Individuals and couples have aspirations with regard to parenthood and occupational careers and try to strike a balance between the two. At a societal level, a balanced level of fertility and a sufficiently high level of labour force participation are also important to assure a sustainable future.

Generational relationships - People need care. Families are the most important providers of such care. Support is provided both from the older to the younger generation and vice versa. For families, a major challenge is how to uphold the provision of care in situations of increased longevity, smaller families and decreased time availability due to labour market obligations. At the societal level, a challenge is to prepare for a future in which the demand for care is almost inevitably expected to rise.

What can be the role of the family in this regard?

The Generations and Gender Programme is a Research Infrastructure developed to provide scientific and policy-relevant answers to questions like these. It allows the monitoring of demographic developments and the improvement of our understanding of their causes and consequences.

About the Programme

The GGP, initiated in 2000, is a system of nationally comparative surveys and contextual databases which aims at improving the knowledge base for policy-making in Europe and developed countries elsewhere. Central survey topics are fertility, partnership, transition to adulthood, economic activity as well as the intergenerational and gender relations between people expressed in care relations or the organization of paid and unpaid work. The contextual database contain information on variations of context over time and among regions that are believed to have an impact on human behaviours and relations: legal norms and regulations, statistical norms, measures of welfare state policies and institutions as well as general economic and cultural indicators. The programme is run by institutes with strong traditions in academic research on population and family change. GGP is developing into a European research infrastructure in order to ensure a sustainable knowledge base for academic research and population-related policy formulation. This effort builds upon ten years of experience and commitment of the institutes backing the GGP which are committed to ensure the long term sustainability of the programme.

Key features

- Comparative. The GGP is a cross-national enterprise. Studying generational and gender relationships needs a comparative focus in order to understand how policies, culture and economic development influence individual decision-making.
- Longitudinal. The GGP applies a panel design – collecting information on the same persons with a three-year interval – to allow the examination of causes and effects.
- Large sample size. The GGP has an average of 10,000 respondents per country, making it possible to study numerical minorities and uncommon events.
- Wide age range. The GGP includes respondents between the ages of 18 and 79, making it possible to address research and policy issues across the entire life course.
- Combining micro and macro data. The GGP includes a contextual database, enabling analyses of individuals and families in their cultural, economic, political, social and policy contexts.
- Multidisciplinary approach. The GGP provides not only relevant demographic information, but also on values and economic, psychological, and health characteristics.
- Theory-driven. The GGP uses the theory of planned behaviour with its focus on both objective and subjective determinants of demographic decision-making as its overarching framework.

Aim of the GGP Design Study

The current design study has as its main objective to further develop a European research infrastructure to ensure a sustainable knowledge base for population related scientific research and policy formulation. To do so, it will

- Provide easy and well-documented access to GGP data.
- Analyse the quality of measurement instruments and make recommendations for improvement.
- Develop new research areas and measurement tools.
- Improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of survey data collection.

Achievements and future plans

Participation

Nineteen countries (14 EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Sweden; and five other states: Australia, Georgia, Japan, Norway, and Russia) have fielded a Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). Twelve countries have fielded the second wave of the GGS. France, The Netherlands, Australia, Hungary, Russia and Japan have already fielded three waves of the GGS.

Availability of micro-data

In order to assure the comparability of GGS micro-data across countries, a set of rules for data harmonization has been developed and centrally implemented. Harmonized micro-level data sets for all countries are made available through the GGP website. Currently, first-wave data are available in a harmonized format for sixteen countries: Austria, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Georgia, Norway and Russia). In addition, a dataset of the Turkish sub-sample of the German GGS is available. In 2012, the first second-wave harmonized datasets were released for six countries (Bulgaria, France, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, and the Netherlands). A further four wave 2 datasets are to be released in 2013/14.

To allow optimal data access to a broad range of interested users, several ways to use and analyse the data have been developed. First, data are being made available through an on-line data-analysis tool (NESSTAR), accessible through the GGP website. Registered users can perform on-line analysis ranging from simple frequency tabulations to more sophisticated correlational or regression analysis. This tool is available for all released datasets. Second, registered users can download the available harmonized datasets and perform all types of analysis on their own preferred computing platform.

Availability of macro-data

Information on relevant macro-characteristics of countries participating in the GGP – and a large range of additional countries – is available in the Contextual Database (CDB). Contextual data is available both at the national and at the regional level, and covers not just demographic data, but also data on policies (e.g. parental leave regulations, tax-benefit regulations), economic development and culture. The database has a user-friendly interface and allows for downloading of relevant information as well as for on-line graphical analysis of contextual information. The CDB is accessible through the GGP website. At the current stage, contextual data for around 100 indicators have been harmonised and made available in the GGP Contextual Database, covering up to 60 countries in Europe, North America, Asia and Oceania.

Representativeness and panel maintenance

High non-response – both in cross-sections and in panels – is a major problem in survey research. Within the GGP much attention is paid to the selectivity of both initial response and panel attrition. The representativeness of the GGP survey data is generally fine and ways to correct for potential bias have been developed. An inventory of best practices of panel maintenance has been made and – based on these best practices – procedures to assess and correct for cross-sectional and panel non-response have been refined.

Data quality issues

In comparative research, it is imperative that data are available and comparable for as many of the participating countries as possible. Data quality and data comparability are important both at the level of individual items and at the level of item-sets. The quality of item-sets collected in wave 1 of the GGS for fifteen participating countries has been studied. Most item scales included in the GGS performed well and showed satisfactory cross-national comparability. Respondent-based item non-response generally is low. However, most item non-response results from countries not having implemented the full GGS questionnaire. In developing the new standard GGS questionnaire, full compliance to the GGS questionnaire is aimed for.

Development of new GGS questionnaire

One of the aims of the current EU-funded Design Study was to develop a new questionnaire for the future GGS. Developing such a questionnaire asked for a careful balancing of retaining well-functioning existing instruments (of particular importance in a panel survey like the GGS) and including new promising research instruments. In 2010, a first draft of a new GGS questionnaire was developed. This draft questionnaire was tested during a pilot study in Slovenia in the fall of 2011. The experiences gained from the pilot were used in developing a final version of the questionnaire, that was published at the beginning of 2013.

Designing a new GGS

Designing a new GGS entails, however, much more than developing a new questionnaire. Decisions have to be taken about the number of respondents, sampling, mode of data collection, panel maintenance procedures, spacing of panel waves and many more. Existing experiences with the GGS, as well as best practices from other major surveys inform this process. Special attention will be given to cost-effectiveness. Given that national participants have to provide their own funding, the costly nature of a large-scale panel-survey can be prohibitive. Based on these considerations, a mixed-mode approach to data collection has been developed that will be implemented in future waves of the GGS.

Programme website

A programme website is an essential tool to communicate with current and potential users of the GGP. In the fall of 2009, a new Programme Website was launched (<http://www.ggp-i.org>). It contains general information about the Programme, the GGS waves 1 and 2 questionnaires, field reports, but also allows access to the online NESSTAR data-analysis tool and the Contextual Database.

Dissemination activities

Stimulating researchers to use the GGP data and disseminating key GGP findings to policy makers and the general public are key activities for the years to come. As of 31st March 2013, a total of 517 registered research projects are using the GGS data. Apart from presenting the GGP at conferences and invited lectures, a number of key activities were organized. At a policy conference organized by the UNECE in May 2008, first results of the GGP were presented to a policy audience, including a number of ministers. This was followed in March 2013 with a policy seminar in Brussels which successfully showcased the work of the GGP. In 2011, a GGP User Conference – organized in Hungary during the Hungarian EU presidency – was held, with more than 110 participants from 25 different countries. A 2nd User Conference is planned for October 2013 in Milan. In addition, several training workshops have been organized to promote the use of the GGP and to introduce our new mixed-mode strategy to data collection. Finally, a collaboration with Population Europe, the network of Europe's leading demographic centres, was initiated to expand our outreach activities to both policy makers and the general public.