

# Generations and Gender Programme - Micro-Macro Data Source on Generational and Gender Ties

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**Abstract:** The Generations and Gender Programme is a system of national surveys and contextual databases. It is a panel survey of a nationally representative sample of 18-79 year-old resident population and a three year inter-wave period. The contextual databases complement micro-level survey data with macro-level information on policies and aggregate indicators. The present paper introduces the GGP as a new data source for innovative data analyses.

**Keywords:** Generations, Gender, Social Networks, Panel, Longitudinal design, micro-macro perspective, multilevel analysis

## 1. The Need for New Data

To better understand linkages between demographic behaviour and the economic and social context, data are needed which are not provided by the existing surveys. The family-building and childbearing age brackets are not well covered by the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) and the European Social Survey (ESS), and need to be expanded using a longitudinal perspective to allow for analyses of childbearing and family behaviour, gender relationships and work-life balance. Likewise, the issues of intergenerational relationships need to be addressed longitudinally from the perspective of young, middle-aged and young-old adults. The surveys of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) include a longitudinal element, but do not allow for investigation of the dynamic interplay between income, social inclusion and living conditions, on the one hand, and demographic behaviour, on the other.

Almost a decade has past since the last internationally comparative demographic survey was completed. Family and Fertility Survey (FFS) was a project involving 21 national surveys of individuals in their reproductive ages (15-49), mainly in European countries. Although it provided retrospective information on demographic behaviour, the limited age coverage and scarcity of complementary information (e.g. economic well-being, social support, norms and beliefs) proved to be equally impedimental as some of the more contemporary surveys mentioned earlier. Numerous publications emanating from the programme demonstrated its successes but also shortcomings due to the survey design and data collected. The need for a new data source was voiced.

New theoretical developments in demographic research also call for new and different data sources. The recent shift in theoretical approaches can be traced back to the theory of second demographic transition (van de Kaa, 1989) which provides a rationale for placing demographic behaviour into a broader context. To understand the mechanisms underlying demographic behaviour, explanatory analyses need to tap into individuals' beliefs and norms as well as into broader social, economical and cultural contexts of geographic units and social groups. In the past two decades the theories have grown more elaborate and the need for new data sources to enable empirical validation has become increasingly evident.

Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) represents a ground-breaking development in demographic perception of data sources. Its design and goals have built on the existing empirical evidence as well as the new theoretical approaches. The present paper elaborates on the design features of the GGP and suggests possible analytical approaches that it offers. To understand the complexity and potential of the GGP it is best to approach the discussion through the conceptual framework on which GGP is based – the life course approach.

## **2. Conceptual framework**

The life course approach to understanding demographic behaviour perceives the individual through the perspective of time. Individuals change through time but so do their surroundings or contexts (Dykstra and Van Wissen, 1999). The individual's time can be decomposed into three different levels: biographical, social and historical time. The biographical time represents the person's demographic events such as partnerships, childbirths and changes in activities. Biographies run parallel in time and are often strongly interrelated. The social time encompasses the expectations of individuals themselves as well as of their significant others and last but not least the society at large. The expectations are manifested in the form of beliefs, norms and social transfers. The third time level is historical time. It embodies the time outside of the individual's immediate surroundings, and evolves independently corresponding to economic, social, cultural, political events. An individual's life course is therefore an interplay of the three time dimensions. First hand perception of causality is relatively straightforward. Social and historical time influence the evolution of individuals' biographies. Namely social, political, economical and cultural environments constitute the context in which a member of the society enters different stages of her/his life and influence thus decisions on transitions between them.

## **3. GGP Data**

The Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) is a panel survey of a nationally representative sample of 18-79 year-old resident population with at least three panel waves and an interval of three years between each wave. As of to date 16 countries have collected Wave 1 data: Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Romania and the Russian Federation. The first country to complete the data collection was Hungary in 2001. Belgium will become the 17<sup>th</sup> country with the GGS Wave 1 data and is currently in the field. Data were mainly

collected via personal interview with (CAPI – Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) or without (PAPI – Paper And Pencil Interviewing) computer assistance. Norway is the only country so far to use a mixed mode of data collection combining register information with CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) and drop-off-pick-up self-completion interviews. The realised Wave 1 sample sizes range from 7,682 respondents in Australia to 25,000 respondents in Hungary with the majority around the 10,000 respondent mark.

### **3.1 Context**

The contextual databases are designed to complement micro-level survey data with macro-level information on policies and aggregate indicators. The Contextual Database includes information on laws and policies that affect age and sequencing norms as well as the consequences and risks associated with the life-course events studied in the GGP. It also contains indicators of gender and generational relations and a range of social, economic and political indicators (Spielauer, 2008). Data collection is decentralized and carried out by national teams. Data collection is supported by standardized table templates, definitions, a commented list of international data sources, and guidelines for data collectors.

### **3.2 Content**

The main substantive goal of the GGP is to improve the understanding of demographic and social development and of the factors that influence these developments. The analytic domains covered by the survey include economic aspects of life, such as economic activity, income, and economic well-being, education, values and attitudes, intergenerational relationships, gender relationships, household composition and housing, residential mobility, social networks and private transfers, public transfers, health, and reproductive health (Vikat et al, 2007; United Nations, 2005). By including all these topics, the GGP covers most of the factors social science has found to play a role in shaping demographic choices in contemporary developed societies.

In order to best understand the complexity of the data included in the GGS one should once more return to the conceptual life course framework. The framework entails very clear and distinctive handles for data structures. The biographical time is represented by the micro (individual) level data. GGS focuses on measuring childbearing, partnership dynamics, home leaving, and activity dynamics, including retirement, in the form of event histories. The biographic time as represented in the GGP enables simultaneous recording of changes in different life course domains. Questions on attitudes and belief form a core of the social time dimension. Moreover, normative expectations are not limited to the respondent only, but include the expectations of important others. The weight of important others for the respondent is evaluated through the description of the structure, size and type of transfers within the individual's social network. A prospective projection of the social time is also recorded within the GGS data, as intention questions are paired with concepts of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control to form the corner stones of the Theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985). The historical time dimension is captured within the database of contextual information collected at the national and sub-national levels. The contextual database captures the macro conditions of biographic time by providing

information on relevant policies such as childcare allowance and parental leave. It also depicts economic and social conditions around the biographic events the individual is experiencing and positions them in time, often in retrospective time series. The historical time can thus be linked to both social and biographical times.

Information on biographic time is collected for the whole life span of the individual. The historical time is effectively accompanying the biographic events since much of the information collected in the GGS contextual database is period-specific or presented as a time series. Social time, however, cannot be represented retrospectively due to its subjective nature. As the GGP is a panel survey with a prospective time dimension, changes in all three time lines can still be observed simultaneously in Wave 2 and beyond.

#### **4. Reversed causality?**

The GGP data offers a great richness of data and variety of possible analytical approaches. The theoretical framework of the life course approach best depicts its potentials. But were all the possibilities covered in the presented overview? The presented approach stipulated the causality from historical and social time dimension upon the biographic one. Could the causality also be reversed so that the biographic time would influence both the social and historical times? The theoretical framework allows for this twist of thinking and the future of the GGP could provide the data structures to empirically test it. GGP as the prospective programme with a panel survey at its centre offers the potential to take earlier biographic time data in order to explain changes in the broader social, economic and political contexts later in time.

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