

Generations and Gender Programme:  
A new approach to old research issues

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## *Beginnings*

This presentation is about the work in progress on the Generations and Gender Programme, which was initiated last year by the Population Activities Unit. The purpose is to share with you information on research and data collection aims of the programme and hopefully provoke questions and comments. I must emphasise that GGP is still at an early stage of development – this certainly applies to this programme’s conceptual framework and data collection plans - and that we hope to have this stage completed in the second half of the next year. Within this time frame, the group behind the programme, including us at PAU will be eager to share its ideas and plans with and listen to reactions of members of the demographic research community in Europe and North America who may have interest in GGP.

GGP has its roots in the two UNECE-wide projects that PAU pursued during the 1990s, the Fertility and Family Survey Project and the Project on the Status of Older Persons. The former focused on reproductive and partnership behaviour of people in their childbearing years, while the latter sought to contribute to knowledge on social and economic conditions of older persons. Though unrelated, the two had much in common. Both developed and standardised micro-level data, in particular, survey and population census data respectively and promoted research based on easily accessible, micro-level data sets. These common features and a number of other considerations led PAU and its then Advisory Group to propose in 1999 a new long-term programme focusing on selected aspects of behaviour and quality of life of members of different generations.

The proposal has approved by the Conference of European Statisticians, the PAU’s oversight intergovernmental body, the top management of our organisation and the United Nations Population Fund. It is UNFPA along with UNECE that provides initial funding for the programme. About a year ago we invited seven European national research, statistical and academic institutions to join PAU and form together with us the GGP Consortium. Shortly thereafter, we held a meeting in Geneva with interested national institutions from Europe and North America. Initial ideas, contained in four solicited papers have been shared and discussed. Subsequently, the Consortium Board has met a few times, a GGP web site to communicate information on the programme has been created, and the GGP overarching goal and research aims have been taking shape. The work on instruments for a future Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) and other data has recently begun. This work is expected to accelerate during this summer. This September in Budapest we will meet with colleagues from national institutions interested in taking part in the programme to chart further work.

### *What is novel about GGP?*

GGP has various novel features, regarding which we have broad agreements within the Consortium. They, I believe, warrant the use of the phrase “a new approach” in the title of the presentation. GGP builds on accomplishment of its predecessor – the Fertility and Family Survey Project – but at the same, due to the novelties in question,

parts company with it in several important respects. We hope that this will open new opportunities for promising survey-based demographic research.

Let me touch upon several of these features now and expand on them later. Firstly, GGP will not only study behaviour resulting in events, such as births and the beginning and end of unions but also relations created or terminated by these events, as well as interactions between events and relations. In brief, put differently, we are not only interested in transitions but also in states. Secondly, individual's behaviour pertaining to events and relations will be studied within his or her environment, ranging from an immediate environment to a more remote one. Unlike earlier Europe-wide survey-based research endeavours, GGP will recognise that individual's context conditions his or her behaviour. Thirdly, the programme is predicated on the supposition that intergenerational and gender relations have a bearing on individual's behaviour. A number of authors have recently argued that gender relations greatly matter. Our hypothesis is that intergenerational relations matter, too. We feel that both hypotheses warrant empirical verification. Fourthly, both economic circumstances and insecurity, and perceptions of these, along with norms, attitudes and values influence behaviour. GGP will, therefore, seek to accommodate both classes of these variables within its framework. Fifthly, we expect GGP to accord relatively equal attention to behaviour of the middle and older generations, focusing on individuals between 18 and 79. If we are successful, this would amount to a break with the tradition where the object of comparative survey-based demographic research focuses only on the middle generation. And sixthly, the programme, we hope, will provide a major shift towards prospective panel data collection.

### *GGP goal*

Without much further ado, let me introduce the overarching goal of the programme. The goal is an international comparative study of the dynamics of child-parent and partner-partner relations of persons of different years of age as part of broader changes in their households, multigenerational families and support networks. In particular, the following aspects of the relations will be investigated: (i) the coming into being of these relations through birth, adoption and the onset of stepparenthood, and through the formation of partnerships; (ii) the change in the nature and content of the relations; and (iii) the coming to an end of the relations through death, union dissolution and other forms of separation. The relations will be studied within the following three contexts: (i) intergenerational relationships; (ii) gender relationships; and (iii) social, economic and institutional conditions. A related objective, important both to demographers and statisticians, is the production of data capable of yielding comparable descriptive statistics essential for continued monitoring on-going developments, the examples of which are the spread of step families and of non-marital cohabitation.

The GGP framework recognises three levels, namely the micro, mezzo and macro levels. The micro level pertains to the individual's parent-child and partner-partner relations. The mezzo level refers to the household, multigenerational family, and the support network of the individual – this is the immediate environment of the individual.

In the case where a partner is present, this level also refers to the partner's multigenerational family and network. The families and networks of the two may overlap to a lesser or greater degree. The macro level pertains to the community, country and/or the ethnic group that the individual and the partner reside in or belong to – this is the more remote environment. The explicit recognition of the three levels is expected to open possibilities for multi-level analyses, where in addition to the usual micro and macro levels there is an intermediate, mezzo level. The mezzo and macro levels, in combination with the three contexts referred to above would make it possible to study influences on micro-level relations of intergenerational and gender relationships as well social, economic and institutional factors comprising the individual's immediate and more remote environments.

*Research options: illustrations*

Let me now take up child-partner or partner-partner relations before providing a few illustrations of many research options that GGP will provide. These, like any other inter-personal relations involve exchanges of tangible items, such as money, goods and services, or intangibles, such as time, advice, companionship, emotional support, and affection. The exchanges may, however, be absent, as relations may be characterised by lack of affection, and by conflict and/or abuse. Items being exchanged may flow in either direction. Some of these flows may be rooted in voluntary actions, others may be a result of legally binding obligations. The individuals involved in a relation can be both givers and recipients although not necessarily of the same categories of items at any given time. And each can have his or her own perspective on giving and receiving involved. Moreover, implications of the exchanges for the two may be quite different.

Let us next consider research options that arise if one were *only* to focus on the child-parent relation at the stage when the relation begins and/or child nurturing occurs. The perspective is that of the parent as a giver. The research may be on the onset of parenthood or what may be a repeated parenthood, which may of biological, social and step, allowing for three different modes of the onset of the child-parent relation – birth, adoption and the formation of a union with the child's parent. The specific aim may be to understand transitions to first, second and third child. The research may also be on what the parent gives to the child while raising him or her, namely on resources – tangible and intangible – involved in child-raising. As these transitions and investments in children may affect one another, the purpose may also be a study of their interactions.

The parent also receives from the child during the nurturing phase. What he or she receives in most contemporary settings is unlikely to include money, goods and possibly services, but is certain to comprise companionship and affection. How these are perceived and evaluated by parents as well as non-parents must be of quite some importance in the present-day low-fertility societies. The motivation to become a parent or to have two or more children is probably very strongly conditioned by perceptions of psychological benefits of parenthood. Research options would include a study of the way these transfers, the anticipated as well as actual, influence the onset of parenthood, repeated parenthood and quality of parenthood.

### *Data sources*

The programme will be grounded in three data sources: (i) the Generations and Gender Survey, (ii) the 2000-round of population and housing censuses and (iii) a variety of macro-level social, economic and institutional data. GGS, which will be the prime source, will generate information for the micro and mezzo levels. The census will be used in many countries as a GGS sampling frame. Also, along with the various social, economic and institutional data, it will provide information for the macro level. In countries, where accurate and complete population registers and other micro-level administrative data are available, relevant data are likely to be pulled from the records and complemented by a reduced-form GGS.

#### *(i) GGS*

#### *Survey design*

GGS will be a unitary survey, which is, however, likely to accommodate two competing designs. The two are (i) a purely retrospective design adhered to, for example, by the FFS and (ii) a prospective panel design adopted, for instance, for the European Community Household Panel. The latter design will allow for collection of limited retrospective information. This dual approach, which will have implications for the GGS questionnaire will respond to (i) the need felt in a growing number of countries to adopt the prospective panel design and (ii) the inability of other countries to do the same, as they are not in a position to meet financial, human-resource and institutional preconditions of initiating and sustaining a panel survey. Interestingly enough, demographers from several central and east European countries, who were recently asked about their preferred design, opted, sometimes tentatively, for the panel design.

Let me briefly refer to a few substantive pros and cons for the two designs. A properly executed purely retrospective design can provide data for causal analyses of the kind already extensively used in modern demographic family research, such as that based on the FFS data. In addition, this design, like its alternative, is capable of generating information essential for monitoring and describing recent developments. Its use in central and eastern Europe would greatly add to our still grossly incomplete picture of the developments that took place there in the past ten years. The purely retrospective design has a major drawback, however. It does not allow the analyst to follow the respondents through subsequent life-cycle stages and to exploit what would otherwise be richer information on the status of time-varying covariates.

It is rather the prospective panel design that enables us to gather and use in analysis information on many time-varying covariates that are not amenable to collection by methods used to gather event histories. For instance, incomes and assets can be measured in each panel round, as can norms, attitudes and values, and this can enrich covariates used in analysing demographic behaviour. A study of the interactions between such covariates and demographic behaviour can greatly enrich explanatory analysis and

can give the analyst a better chance to properly specify causal relationships, which may work in both directions in dynamic processes.

As the panel design holds a greater promise, I will address a possible GGS based on this type of design. Regarding the sample size, it may be on the order of some 10,000 primary respondents or anchors within the age range 18-79. There may be a group of secondary respondents, who will be partners of the anchors. Waves would be spaced three years apart. (Note that the Hungarian Social-demographic Panel Survey, which was inspired by GGP and will be initiated this year, will have 15,000 respondents and will have multiple three-year waves over a decade or longer.) In order to ensure a sufficiently large number of salient events, for example, births, a scheme providing for over-sampling of certain categories of persons may need to be devised and used. In countries where conditions mandate it, respondents belonging to the childbearing-/working-age and older-age spans may need to be interviewed in different years, which would lead to a two-track multi-wave arrangement that spreads out the survey data collection effort more evenly over time. Moreover, it is possible that some countries will opt to collect information only from respondents in one of the two broad age groups, something that the Consortium will discourage.

#### *GGs data*

I have already hinted at the types of survey data that we hope to see collected. Let me now expand on this, looking first at the type of information that may be collected by means of a GGS questionnaire core. This and subsequent lists may well look like wish lists – we are aware of this. Sooner or later we will arrive at a point where some very difficult choices will have to be made. That aside for a moment, let us consider possible questionnaire-core types of information. They would include a variety of data on personal characteristics of the anchor and the partner. Similar information plus that on relations to the anchor would be collected for co-resident close kin and others, comprising the household along with the anchor and the partner. Data on the dwelling of the household will be collected, too. Furthermore, information on selected personal characteristics of close kin of the anchor and the partner and on relations to the two will be gathered. This would yield information on the multigenerational families of the two, which are pools of members of the support networks of the two. Data on the networks, including its non-kin members and their basic characteristics would be collected, as well.

Intergenerational relations along with other within-network relations are of prime importance to GGP. Data on these relations will include (i) transfers (money, goods, services, time etc.) to individual members of the household coming from members of the support networks and (ii) transfers flowing from household members to the support networks' members and possibly others. Clearly, the interest here will be to arrive at a picture of resources flowing into and out the anchor's household through private transfers. Having this information may be particularly important in countries with high incidence of low living standards and poverty, namely in large parts of central and eastern Europe.

Equally important to the programme are gender relations. There is not enough experience with survey data collection feeding into demographic research having gender relations as prime covariates. Against this backdrop, we are climbing a learning curve and are at an early stage. We intend to include into the GGS questionnaire core questions that would yield information on activities and roles, which the anchor and the partner respectively engage in and play both within and without the household. In addition, data on the assessment of and satisfaction with their roles and the relation would be collected.

To round off the picture on the material resources available to the anchor's household, information on incomes, public transfers and assets will be collected. Ideally, the information should be collected for each household member, with public transfers disaggregated by type so that we can tell what the household receives from the state in accordance with the various prevailing family and other policy provisions. Where other non-private transfers, such as those originating from businesses or trade unions are quantitatively important, information on them should be collected, too.

Norms, values and attitudes are also on the list. Information on them may pertain to general attitudes and value orientations as well as on inter-generational and gender relationships. This category of data would complete what would be needed in order to have a relatively rich set of often difficult to measure but important time-varying covariates. As indicated earlier, information needed for these variables cannot be collected by event-history data collection methods. Collecting these data through a GGS based on a purely retrospective design would add a wealth of current-status information but would be of limited value for analytical purposes.

The core questionnaire of the GGS based on a prospective panel design would also compile information on formation and dissolution of unions, and employment, unemployment and related activities but not education; education would be left for a particular module. As part of the first wave, histories of these events would be collected for as yet unspecified longer time period. In subsequent waves, information on these events occurring within the preceding inter-wave intervals would be gathered.

Questionnaire modules, which would complement the core, would be targeted at specific groups of respondents, such as prospective parents and parents passing through the nurturing stage. A module targeted at this group would provide information on their expectations and/or past experiences pertaining to the onset of the child-parent relation. Childbearing histories for as yet unspecified period would be collected through the first wave and for the inter-wave periods preceding subsequent waves. Persons who may become parents along with parents who may continue to procreate, would provide current information on their attitudes, knowledge and practices pertaining to contraception, abortion and medically-assisted procreation. Also, information on children, in particular on their education, as well as data on various childrearing expenses would be collected. In addition, information on family- and child-related norms, attitudes and values would be gathered. Allotted time does not permit me to talk about what may be in other modules.

### *Other data*

Like the immediate environment of the individual, his or her more remote environment sets out constraints and opportunities that impact on choices the individual contemplates and/or makes. Briefly, this is the rationale for GGP to identify and develop relevant macro-level variables that would make it possible to add the societal-level dimension to the programme. As indicated earlier, the macro level will comprise three contexts, namely those pertaining to intergeneration relationships, gender relationships and social, economic and institutional conditions. At this time, our ideas on the macro-level variables and data are still underdeveloped. In what follows, I offer a few preliminary thoughts of my own on this subject rather than well-developed ideas that have been explored and agreed upon within the Consortium.

Let me start with the broad social, economic and institutional conditions. The relevant variables that may be worth including pertain to general economic, labour market, housing and public policy conditions having a bearing on the two classes of relations. Many of these conditions, perhaps all but those concerning policies that are national in nature, refer to the community level, which remains to be defined and can, due to data availability constraints, vary across countries. The variables may measure the conditions of the local economy and the local labour market, which may respectively be positioned anywhere between depressed and booming and from slack to tight. Housing conditions, broadly defined, may be captured by variables reflecting conditions of the housing market, which can also be anywhere between slack and tight; conditions in which housing stock finds itself; access to rent-controlled and/or state-subsidised housing; access to and conditions prevailing at the mortgage market and so on. Variables concerning public policies, in particular benefits and free or low-cost services that are aimed people of various ages and genders would pertain to unemployment benefits and related provisions, social assistance arrangements, public health care.

Variables pertaining to the intergenerational and gender contexts at the macro level would try to capture some of the same conditions just discussed, but as they pertain to the different generations and to the two genders. These variables may include labour market conditions specific to the younger and older people and to women and men, again at the community level. They should capture opportunities and constraints these face when seeking employment, seeking to continue working, and when looking for more lucrative and/or family-friendly jobs. The variables should pertain to a plethora of public policy provisions that are targeted at the young, often through their parents, and at the old. Many examples come to mind, however, the time does not permit me to refer to them. These provisions should be part of the GGP macro picture irrespective of whether or not they are intended to redress gender inequality and help families better balance their work and family roles. The variables should also capture legal provisions governing intergenerational relations, for example filial responsibilities towards old parents, and gender relations within the family, e.g. those concerning alimony and/or child-support payments after divorce. The list is obviously long and again cannot be explored further on this occasion.



### *Concluding remarks*

As this conference testifies, researchers continue to seek answers to a number of research questions posed over the past two or more decades, during the period when the Second Demographic Transition has been unfolding first in western Europe and more recently in central and eastern Europe. Some of the fundamental questions remain under-explored, even unanswered. Rather than listing the questions, let me say that, I believe, that we still do not know with a reasonable degree of certainty as to what have been contributions to the multifaceted SDT changes of ideational changes, shifts in the economy and labour markets, public policy developments and, in central and eastern Europe, of the sea political and institutional change of the 1990s. In brief, the long-standing research issues remain with us and the list is being extended by new questions. And it is these issues, among others, that we have been having on our minds while pursuing the early stage of GGP. While doing so, I am sure we should continue to refrain from having unrealistic expectations about GGP potential to expand knowledge. In brief, I feel that GGP will not be able to add much new knowledge about prime forces behind the phase of the Second Demographic Transition that is behind us. This may sound very pessimistic, but I believe that the past has been in a way lost to us. The programme should, however, be able to add to our understanding of underpinnings of SDT as it continues to unfold.