

PART TWO
***The Contextual Database of the Generations and
Gender Programme***

Martin Spielauer

ABSTRACT

The increasing recognition that the study of human behaviours has to take into account the multiple contexts in which these behaviours occur has opened a promising research avenue in social sciences. In particular, it has a potential of enhancing the policy-relevance of the research, by integrating the analysis of the policy context with that of behavioural motivations on the level of the family or an individual. It also presents new challenges, such as the need for a common conceptual framework for micro-level surveys and contextual data. The Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) provides such a framework, by providing a comparative collection of around 210 variables on a national and subnational level, which complement the micro-level data collected in the Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS).

1. Introduction

This paper describes the conceptual framework and information content of the Contextual Database of the GGP. The Database was developed to complement the core element of the programme, the GGS, a panel survey with panel intervals of three years (see the first part of this volume). The GGP is expected to generate the main data source for a cross-national, comparative and multidisciplinary study of the dynamics of family relationships in countries of the UNECE region and possibly beyond. The Contextual Database currently provides data for Bulgaria, Canada, Georgia, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania and the Russian Federation. It is freely available on the website of the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research².

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.

The Contextual Database is organized around the following 16 topics:

General demographic indicators	Health and health care system
Labour and employment	Unemployment and unemployment system
Pension system	Parental and care leave systems
Military and/or national service	Education
Legal regulations of personal relations	Childcare
Elderly care	Economy
Housing	Tax-Benefit system
Culture	Political system

This contribution is organized as follows. First, it provides general information on the database, organization of data collection and the Web implementation. Second, it discusses the extent to which the Contextual Database meets the key demands of contextual and multilevel analysis and describes the key measurement dimensions of

the Contextual Database. Third, it describes how the database is linked to the GGS and introduces the list of variables per topic.

This organization of this paper reflects the three principles of the Contextual Database: (a) a theory-based conceptual framework, (b) the support of innovative methods of data analyses, and (c) integration with GGS. Besides these theoretical considerations, the Contextual Database relies on a thorough review of existing international data sources.

2. Organization

2.1. Development of the Contextual Database

The idea of developing a contextual database to complement data collection on the micro level was already expressed in connection with the Family and Fertility Surveys (FFS), the programme preceding the GGP. It was driven by the desire “to go beyond the analysis of single countries to consider how differences in context shape the processes that seem to be having an impact on these new family patterns” (Goldscheider, 2000, p. 1). More generally, it is based on the increasing recognition that behaviour cannot be explained solely by relations observed on the micro level and on an increasing understanding of the potential of comparative research. As the next step, Patrick Festy (2001) presented a contribution entitled “Designing a Macro Context for the Generations and Gender Individual Data” at the first meeting of the Generations and Gender International Working Group (IWG) in 2001. With the establishment of the Contextual Database Working Group by the IWG in 2002, the development of a contextual database became an integral part of the GGP.³

The activities and discussions alongside the database development are documented in various written contributions, starting from the development of ideas for a contextual database (Festy, 2001), concepts of welfare-state research that are useful for the conceptual framework (Neyer, 2003), and methodological issues

² See the “online databases” section at <http://www.demogr.mpg.de>

³ A list of team members and national representatives who contributed to the development of the database is found in the appendix.

(Racioppi and Rivellini, 2002). Discussion papers preceding this publication are Spielauer (2004a) and Spielauer (2004b). A feasibility study on data availability was carried out for Bulgaria. The final choice of variables was influenced by discussions at an international workshop with participants from Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary and the Russian Federation.

2.2. Data collection

Data collection is decentralized and carried out by national teams. Institutionally, this usually involves both national statistical offices and research institutes or research departments within statistical offices.

Data collection is supported by standardized table templates provided in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, definitions, a commented list of international data sources, and guidelines for data collectors.⁴

Work and time requirements for data collection vary by country due to the different availability of published data and different coverage in international databases.

2.3. Web implementation

Technically, the Web implementation of the Contextual Database is realized as an active database-driven Web application. The Contextual Database website includes full documentation both for the user and data collector. It supports fast navigation by country and database topic for fast access to individual tables. Tables are complemented by variable definitions and links to all available corresponding tables of other countries. Besides the html format, all variables can be downloaded in comma-delimited text files or Excel workbooks per topic and country.

⁴ The respective documents are available at the Contextual Database-website at <http://www.demogr.mpg.de>

3. Conceptual framework and content

This section describes the conceptual framework and data content of the Contextual Database from three perspectives. First, the main data types from the angle of data analysis are defined, thereby distinguishing time series, policy histories, and cross-sectional subnational information. Second, theoretical concepts are used to identify and classify key context types and measurement dimensions, which are general indicators and statistical norms, legal norms and regulations, and the welfare-state context, with the dimensions of social rights, security, equality, and agency. The third approach starts from the GGS questionnaire and identifies 16 key database topics. These belong to four thematic context types: the individual life-course context, the context of generational and gender relations, the socio-economic context, and the cultural context. For each topic, a list of variables is included. These are selected on the basis of the described concepts and by keeping in mind the key dependent variables of the GGS: fertility, partnership formation and dissolution, transition to adulthood, and retirement.

3.1. A database to support comparative and multilevel analysis

To support a multilevel approach, the variables in the Contextual Database need to link with the micro-level collected in the Generations and Gender Surveys. This link can be established by time, region, or individual characteristics, e.g. sex, education, or eligibility to policies.

In order to meet the historical depth of the GGS, the Contextual Database provides around 65 national-level time series and 70 policy histories ranging back to 1970. These variables allow analyzing how changes in context affect individual behaviours and demographic processes. Time series are usually yearly numerical indicators; policy histories give text and standardized numeric descriptions of key policy changes and changes in legal regulations.

In order to capture the subnational variation of context, around 60 variables of the contextual database are collected on subnational level. As GGS does not provide individual migration

histories, subnational information is usually provided for panel years only or in the form of short time series, which capture recent subnational trends. The choice for an appropriate subnational level is taken individually for each country, considering sample size requirements of multi-level models (see Racioppi and Rivellini, 2001), availability of subnational data according to national statistical systems, and the subnational identifier available in the national GGS.

Besides the general link of individuals to context by time and region, different population groups find themselves in very specific contexts. According to the importance of the generations and gender perspective in the programme, contextual data are frequently provided by sex and age group. Marital status, educational attainment and occupation are other important classifying variables. In order to determine the policy contexts for individuals with different characteristics, the description of policy measures pays particular attention to eligibility criteria.

The Contextual Database is a comparative database: the same set of variables is collected for all participating countries, following the same definitions. In practice, this has proven difficult for various reasons. For many variables, definitions in different international databases vary. For other variables, international definitions became standards only recently, not allowing the collection of time-series data according to them. The general aim is to capture variations over time as fully as possible; this, however, sometimes restricts the user to national definitions only. Shorter, comparable time series are then provided additionally.

3.2. Context types and measurement dimensions

The Contextual Database distinguishes between two partly overlapping theoretical concepts of context assumed to influence individual behaviour: the normative one – statistical and legal norms – and the welfare-state context expressed in policies and their underlying values.

3.2.1. Norms

Statistical norms refer to regular behaviour: a behavioural pattern becomes a norm if the majority of actors behave according to this pattern. Thus, norms are objectively observable and measurable, e.g. by means and distributions of individual events and characteristics. Unlike with the descriptive concept of norms, legal norms are prescriptive and linked to sanctions.

In the contextual database, statistical norms are included in the form of mean values and age distributions of key demographic events, e.g. the mean age at childbearing and marriage. Many economic indicators fall into this group. As statistical norms change over time, they can serve as indicators of the developmental stages, assuming universal transition mechanisms as in demographic transition theory. In this sense, statistical norms can be used as indicators of the prevalence or emergence of certain behaviours (e.g. unmarried cohabitation).

Legal regulations influence individual behaviours in various ways. They impose important timing norms that impact the key domains of the individual life course. In particular, this applies to education systems that define, for example, the minimum compulsory time of schooling. Important timing norms are set by work time regulations, paid maternity leave periods, the conscription age, or the legal retirement age. Legal norms impose important quality standards, e.g. staff requirements of childcare institutions, which may impact individual decisions on the organization of care. They define family responsibilities and may restrict, prohibit or regulate certain behaviours and personal relations, with examples being abortion laws, divorce regulations and the legal treatment of same-sex partnerships. Variables that describe legal norms are found in most of the topical sections of the Contextual Database; legal regulations of personal relations constitute a database topic in themselves.

3.2.2. Welfare-state context

The welfare-state context is expressed in policies and their underlying social values and concepts. Policy data constitute key variables of the Contextual Database. Concerning the selection of the aggregation level and data types of policy variables, a mixed approach was followed,

combining policy indicators on the level of individual policy measures with indicators and text descriptions on an aggregated level. The selection of measurement dimensions and eventually of the database variables is heavily influenced by concepts developed in welfare-state research and on those used in existing policy databases.

Policy data provided by the Contextual Database can be classified into four main groups reflecting different aggregation levels and approaches of policy analysis.

The first group consists of short text descriptions of the key characteristics of policy fields and social security institutions in the form of policy histories, that is, recording major changes and identifying and characterizing time episodes since 1970. This variable type is used both for the description of broad policy fields (e.g. housing policies) and for the collection of information on very specific policy-related questions (e.g. “Which policies exist to promote part-time work?”). The variable definition includes keywords indicating which information to collect in order to capture the key policy dimensions.

Variables of this type are frequently combined with a set of numerical indicators. The use of this information type is two-fold. First, it aims at providing a focused overview on the national policy context by providing qualitative information on the key characteristics of policy domains as well as on the principles and priorities underlying governmental action. Second, it supports the study of policy effects by identifying time episodes characterized by certain (combinations of) policies.

A second type of variables concerns political actors, recording information on the participation of political parties in government coalitions.

The third group of variables widely used as measures of the welfare state is public expenditure in the social sphere. While the general level of such expenditure gives an indication of the extent to which a State engages in the provision of economic and social security, the study of how spending is distributed between different categories provides additional information. The Contextual Database focuses on the purpose of public expenditures and on the extent to which provisions are allocated to certain means and – explicitly or implicitly – to certain population groups, such as age groups. The

Contextual Database provides time-series data on public and for some concepts also of total) expenditures for nine selected means: active labour market programmes, unemployment benefits, elderly care services, housing, pre-school childcare, education, health, total social expenditures and military expenditures.

Besides these highly aggregated and abstract indicators discussed so far, the Contextual Database contains detailed standardized descriptions and quantifications of key features of selected single policy measures, most importantly parental leave institutions and childcare provision. One of the challenges of the Contextual Database was the development of standardized measurement schemes that capture important dimensions of policies and suit a wide range of them.

An important general measurement dimension directly linked to the timing of life-course events is time, which can be expressed, for example, in the length of parental leave periods constituting important timing norms. Besides setting norms, the welfare state influences individual behaviour through various other channels. Measures of the Database thereby cluster around four main concepts derived from comparative welfare-state research: social and economic rights; equality; risks and security; and individual agency. A description of welfare-state concepts which heavily influenced the selection of variables is given in Neyer (2003); the remaining part of this section is based on this contribution.

The term “welfare state” is closely linked to Marshall’s (1950) concept of social citizenship, based on the recognition of material and social needs and giving rise to economic and social rights. An influential way of specifying social citizen rights is linked to Esping-Andersen’s concept of de-commodification: a weakening of the connection between income and market participation (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The degree to which policies and social security systems are designed in recognition of social and economic rights is reflected in legal entitlements, eligibility, coverage, the linkage of benefits to individual contributions, and the existence and level of minimum standards, e.g. minimum benefits or the quality standards of services. A good example of this concept is the recognition of full-time childcare as a social right in Scandinavian countries.

The concept of equality refers to the cross-sectional differentiation of living conditions and the equality of life chances, e.g. the distribution of opportunities, resources and capabilities, including their intergenerational transmission. Equality has important gender, generational, and class dimensions. Measures of the extent of equality are participation and enrolment rates (e.g. labour-market participation by sex and age) and the distribution of, *inter alia*, income. Policy dimensions reflecting equality concepts include benefit eligibility and coverage, public sector involvement in service provision (e.g. schools), the existence and mechanisms of measures to provide access to services and markets (e.g. housing, education), the treatment of unmarried and same-sex partnerships, the special protection of institutions such as the family, and affirmative actions to actively promote equality.

Risks and security deal with the likeliness of unfavourable events (e.g. unemployment and sickness), the consequences of such events (e.g. poverty and dependence), how these risks and consequences are related to the life-course events and relations, and the ways in which the State impacts these risks and consequences. Risks directly addressed in the database are poverty and unemployment. Important policy dimensions are replacement rates, including the underlying concept (e.g. poverty prevention vs. status maintenance), durations (e.g. of benefits and average durations of unemployment) and the treatment of unpaid care work by the pension system.

Agency refers to a set of choices, the ability to choose, and to the incentive system that influences the choice to be made. This also includes the individual's power or bargaining position within the family. The concept of agency is frequently combined with the concept of equality in terms of "equality in the freedom to achieve" and is especially useful for the study of gender differentials (Korpi, 2000). Policies interfere with agency in various ways, addressed in the Database: the economic burden and time commitment associated with behaviours studied in the GGP: e.g. costs and opening hours of childcare institutions; the flexibility of policies (influencing the set of choices, e.g. the deferability of parts of leave periods); and incentives to promote gender equality, e.g. in the organization of paid and unpaid work and the taking of leave.

3.3. A database to complement the GGS: topics and variables

This section presents the 16 topics or domains of the Conceptual Database, their relation to the GGS, and the list of variables by domain. The selection process of appropriate database topics is based on a structured inventory of the information collected by the survey. The choice of variables is then made following the theoretical considerations described in the sections above. Concerning the study of the information content of the panel survey, the life-course perspective is followed. Socio-economic variables and values are not fully captured by this approach and are therefore studied separately.

Apart from theoretical concepts, the selection of variables is heavily influenced by a series of existing international databases. The Contextual Database distinguishes itself by the set of countries participating in the GGS: these are usually not covered together in any single existing database. A second distinction, mainly concerning policy information, is the longitudinal dimension of the Contextual Database. Existing policy databases provide a wealth of information pertaining to the current situation or to the recent past, while time series of such data are not easily accessible.

3.3.1. Life course context

An individual's life course and its context

The life course refers to "a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time" (Giele and Elder, 1998, p. 22). These life-course events are central issues in the GGS and constitute key dependent variables.

The description of individual lives by means of event-history data is not independent of the context. For example, the activity status "on parental leave" depends on the existence of parental leave regulations. This places individual choices into a context that may vary considerably between countries. The GGS distinguishes several such domains, with most of their various states and dimensions displaying a direct link to contextual domains.

A first group of life-course information collected in the GGS concerns demographic events. Here, births and partnership transitions constitute central dependent variables; the survey contains

full birth and partnership histories. Fertility and partnership events are related to many contextual domains of the database, and the existence of theoretically sound hypotheses about the influence of certain contextual variables on these events is one of the main selection criteria of variables.

Another such domain is health. The GGS collects data on current illness, disabilities (including some retrospective information), care needs, and well-being. Corresponding contextual information can be found under topic 2 below.

Topic 1 – General demographic indicators. A brief selection of key demographic indicators on the national and subnational level. The behavioural focus lies on the classic demographic events of birth, marriage, divorce, migration, and life expectancy; additional topics are abortion and single motherhood.

National level	National and subnational level
Age-specific fertility	Total Fertility Rate
Cohort mean age at birth	Life births (all, first)
Completed fertility	Marital life births
Induced abortions	Mean age at birth (all, first)
First marriage rate female	Marital status by age and sex
Cohort ever married	Population by age and sex
Marriage by ethnic group	Mean age at first marriage
Total divorce rate	Marriages (all, first)
Median marriage duration	Single parents
Median age	Divorces
Net migration	Life expectancy

Topic 2 – Health and health care system. The contextual variables include measures on healthy life expectancy as well as general, maternal, and infant mortality. Main features of national health care systems are also included.

National level	
Health care system description	Healthy life expectancy
Health expenditures	Infant mortality
Health insurance coverage	Physicians per 10,000
Maternal mortality	Hospital beds per 10,000

An important life course domain in the GGS concerns activities. The survey distinguishes between various main activities, e.g. working, retirement, parental leave, unemployment, education and National Service. Information on the main activity is collected for all household members. Detailed questions regard the respondent's and partner's current job and/or education and intentions to start or resume work. Full activity histories are to be collected during the second wave. Again, a close link is established between individual states and contextual domains, which are:

Topic 3 – Labour and employment. A selection of indicators including gendered labour-market participation, sectoral employment, wages and wage distributions, and work related regulations and policies. Concerning the latter, the focus is on measures that impact the reconciliation of work and family life: work time regulations, policy information on the promotion of part-time work, legal entitlement to part-time work, standard hours, and extra compensation for work during non-standard hours.

National level	National and subnational level
Weekly hour bands by sex	Labour market participation by sex
Normal working hours	Employment by International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) and sex
Minimum vacation days	Employment mothers
Average vacation days	Employment fathers
Entitlement to part-time	Average wage
Measures to increase part-time	Public employment by sex
Non-standard hours – measures	Wage by age and sex
Non-standard hours – compensation	Wage deciles by sex
Wage by activity and sex	
Minimum wage	
Public expenditures for active labour market policies	

Topic 4 – Unemployment and unemployment system. The focus is on three aspects of unemployment: (a) unemployment rates by individual characteristics such as age, sex, and education; (b) measures on the duration of

unemployment; and (c) the main characteristics of the unemployment insurance system.

National level	National and subnational level
Unemployment system description	Unemployment by age and sex
Unemployment benefit formula	Long-term unemployment by sex
Unemployment benefit duration	
Unemployment benefit eligibility	
Unemployment. by occupation	
Unemployment by education and sex	
Unemployment by ethnicity	
Unemployment by ISIC and sex	
Average time in unemployment	
Public Expenditure on unemployment	

Topic 5 – Pension system. Indicators focus on retirement age and system descriptions, e.g. the link of contributions to benefits and the extent to which child and family care are accounted for.

National level	National and subnational level
Pension system description	Average pension
Legal retirement age	
Average retirement age	
Link contribution – benefit	
Care and pensions	
Minimum pension	
Pension spending	
Pension receivers	

Topic 6 – Parental and care leave systems. The database provides a detailed standardized table of variables for all national maternity, parental, and childcare leave systems. Indicators include eligibility, timing, cash compensation, and the flexibility of leave systems.

National level

Comparative table of leave systems – for each system:

National level	National level
Title of programme	Eligibility
Start of leave	Regular duration
Maximum shareable duration	Duration reserved for partner
Duration of parallel paternal leave	Duration of financial compensation
Type of financial compensation	Compensation formula
Deferrable time	Means tests
Deferrable until	Compatibility with work
Duration/payment options	
Sick child leave	
Take-up time of leave	

Topic 7 – Military and/or national service. The indicators focus on the service age and service durations of compulsory military and civilian services and the range of choices concerning service type and timing.

National level

National level	National level
Description national service	Alternative service
Conscription age	Reconciliation family military
Duration national service	People in armed forces
Population exempt	Military expenditure

Topic 8 – Education. The data cover various aspects of education, including a description of the national school system, timing norms such as entry age and school duration, standard school hours, enrolment rates and educational attainment, school finance and school quality.

National level	Subnational level
Education system	Educational attainment by age and sex
Private schools	School enrolment by age and sex
School entry age	
Compulsory school duration	
Common education	
School leaving age	
School days and hours	
Pupil-teacher ratio	
Education expenditures	
Fees and support	

Relations

A second important component of the life-course perspective is the concept of linked lives, that is, the relations between people over the life course. In the GGS, data on relations are collected for persons in the household, current and previous partners, children and parents as well as other persons if they are important providers or receivers of care. Personal relations are investigated in various dimensions, including their legal nature, co-residence, intensity, satisfaction, quality, perceived decision-making power, earnings and time. One of the key areas of relations is the organization, interchange, and provision of care, which constitutes a central link between gender and generational relations. The Contextual Database complements the micro-level information in the following fields:

Topic 9 – Legal regulations of personal relations. Including information on marriage and divorce regulations and restrictions, restrictions on abortions and legal obligations concerning care.

National level

Abortion restrictions	Divorce restrictions
Social security abortions	Guardianship
Same-sex partnerships	Care obligations

Topic 10 – Childcare. Contextual data concern the availability of care institutions as well as costs, and the extent to which they are shared between parents and the public, the quality of childcare institutions, the existence of legal entitlements to institutional care, enrolment rates, and timing norms such as (pre-)school entry ages and typical school hours

National level	Subnational level
Childcare institutions	Childcare enrolment
Childcare entitlement	Children in institution
Preschool	
Typical hours	
Child-staff ratio	
Staff requirement	
Public childcare expenditures	

Topic 11 – Elderly care. This database section contains the measures that support the elderly in need of care, supportive measures for caregivers, and general indicators on people receiving institutional care of different types.

National level

Elderly care	Elderly in institutions by sex
Pension benefits of caregivers	Homecare by sex
Measures for caregivers	Public expend elderly care

3.3.2. The socio-economic situation

The socio-economic situation of the respondent and the household is usually closely linked to employment and other activities. The GGS collects information on labour and transfer incomes, wealth, and some selected expenditures on care and household services. This information is complemented by the contextual data of three domains:

Topic 12 – Economy. This database section consists of a selection of general economic indicators that are not directly linked to specific activity statuses: economic output, growth, stability, income distribution and poverty.

National level	Subnational level
Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita	Household income deciles
Consumer Price Index (CPI)	Poverty – children
Gini coefficient	Poverty – mothers
Poverty by age and sex	Poverty – active age
Poverty by activity and sex	Poverty – elderly
Poverty by household type	Gini coefficient

Topic 13 – Housing. Information on housing stock and housing production by type, general housing situation and relevant housing policies.

National level	Subnational level
Housing situation	Average dwelling size
Housing policies	
Housing construction	
Housing stock	
Public expenditures on housing	
Living arrangement by sex	

Topic 14 – Tax-Benefit system. Including tax rates, child benefits, and the impact of marriage on taxes and benefits.

National level	
Income tax system	Social security contribution
Marginal income tax rate	Social expenditure
VAT rate	Marriage and taxes/benefits
Child benefits	

level data is placed within the context of the cultural, political, and religious heritage of a country or region:

Topic 15 – Culture. Selected indicators on the religious, linguistic, and ethnic composition of the population.

National level	Subnational level
Internet use	Religious composition
	Language composition
	Ethnic composition

Topic 16 - Political system. Information on the main political parties and government coalitions.

National level	National and subnational level
Political parties	Government coalitions

3.3.3. Culture and values

The GGS includes a section on attitudes and value orientations on gender and intergenerational relations as well as on religiousness. The micro-

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⁵ See Appendix.

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Appendix

Members of the Contextual Database Working Group and Workshop Participants

The conceptual framework of the Contextual Database was developed and discussed by an international group of experts of various fields and institutions – the Contextual Database Working Group, constituted in 2002. Additionally, various national experts participated in a concluding workshop contributing to the final choice of variables and variable definitions by providing information on the feasibility of data collection in the various national contexts. The following list presents the persons who have contributed to the development of the conceptual framework of the database and/or its discussion in meetings and workshops.

Members of the Contextual Database Working Group:

Enrico Bisogno, United Nations, Population Activities Unit (PAU), Geneva
 Patrick Festy, INED, Paris; Coordinator until mid-2003
 Jacques Légaré, Statistics Canada, Ottawa
 Alphonse MacDonald, United Nations, Population Activities Unit (PAU), Geneva
 Tereza Munzi, Luxembourg Income Studies, Luxembourg
 Gerda Neyer, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock
 Antonella Pinnelli, University La Sapienza, Rome
 Filomena Racioppi, University La Sapienza, Rome
 Giulia Rivellini, Catholic University Sacre Cuore, Milan
 Martin Spielauer, Coordinator 2003-2007, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research; Statistics Canada

National experts:

Aline Désesquelles, INSEE, Paris
 Gert Hullen, German Federal Statistical Office, Wiesbaden (Germany)
 Dora Kostova, Bulgarian Center for Population Studies, Sofia
 Jaroslav Kraus, Charles University, Prague
 Vera Kucharová, Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs, Prague
 Jitka Rychtaříková, Charles University, Prague
 Norbert Neuwirth, Austrian Institute for Family Studies, Vienna
 Oxana Sinyavskaya, Independent Institute for Social Policy, Moscow
 Ákos Tárkányi, Hungarian Statistical Office, Budapest
 Sergei Zakharov, Independent Institute for Social Policy, Moscow