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Gender segregation in education and employment and its relationship with the gender pay gap

Gender equality over the life course: insights from the Generations and Gender Programme

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Summary

In this paper, we examine gender inequalities over the life course by using data from the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) which is a collection of longitudinal surveys that have been carried out in 17 member states of the UNECE.² The paper is organized around three main topics: (1) gender equality in the occurrence, timing, and sequence of demographic events; (2) gender equality in the interlinking of different life domains; and (3) gender equality in the relationships between family members.

I. Introduction

1. The concept of the life course captures the whole period between birth and death with a focus on key life events. Finishing school, getting married, and becoming grandparents are all examples of life course events which mark major life transitions. The study of the life course is obviously not a new topic as national statistical agencies have been collecting data on events such as birth, marriage and divorce for a very long time. As will be argued in this paper, the

¹ Prepared by Anne H. Gauthier and Tom Emery.

² In order to avoid very complex graphs, we report in this text data from only a few countries. Comparable statistics are available from all the other GGP participating countries.

increasing availability of longitudinal data is however providing us with a much richer understanding of the life course and its underlying gender inequalities.

2. In this paper, we examine gender inequalities over the life course by using data from the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) which is a collection of longitudinal surveys that have been carried out in 17 member states of the UNECE.³ The paper is organized around three main topics: (1) gender equality in the occurrence, timing, and sequence of demographic events; (2) gender equality in the interlinking of different life domains; and (3) gender equality in the relationships between family members.

II. Gender equality in the occurrence, timing, and sequence of demographic events

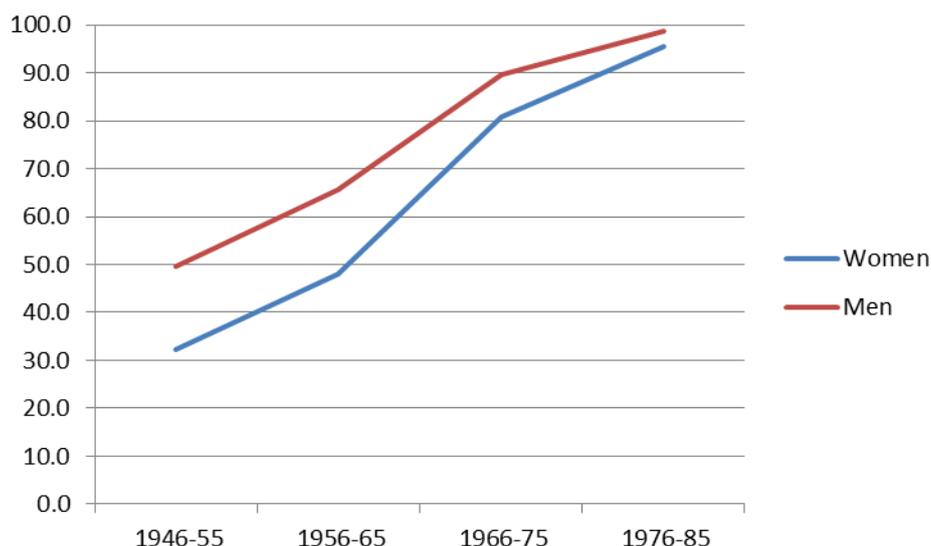
3. The life course of individuals is best captured through three key dimensions: the occurrence of life events (e.g. percent having a child in a given year), the timing of such events (e.g. median age at first birth), and the sequence of events (e.g. percent having their first child before their first marriage). We already know quite a bit about the first two dimensions through data regularly reported by national statistical agencies. For example, we know that on average women are more likely to become parents at some stage of their life compared to men, and we know that women tend to have their first child at a younger age than men. What we know much less about are life events that are not captured by official statistics, in particular non-marital cohabitation, as well as the actual sequencing of these life events, for example whether or not marriage was preceded by cohabitation. To capture these, longitudinal –as opposed to cross-sectional -- data are needed.

4. The GGP is unique in its longitudinal coverage of the whole life-course from the age of 18 to 79 and in its collection of the full fertility and partnership histories of men and women. Moreover, it is not confined to officially registered life events such as marriage and divorce, but instead also collects data on other events including cohabitation. It thus constitutes a rich source of comparative cross-national data on the occurrence, timing and sequence of key life events (Vikat et al 2007).

5. Figure 1 provides a first illustration of gender inequality in the occurrence of life events. The indicator used here is the percentage of people whose first union was cohabitation rather than marriage for various birth cohorts. The graph uses the case of France as an example and clearly displays the rapid rise of cohabitation as a first union. While for the older cohorts, only a minority of individuals experienced cohabitation as their first union, this trend has been extended to the very large majority of people among the younger cohorts. What the graph also shows is that while the experience of cohabitation was more common among men in the older cohorts, the gender gap has gradually been closed.

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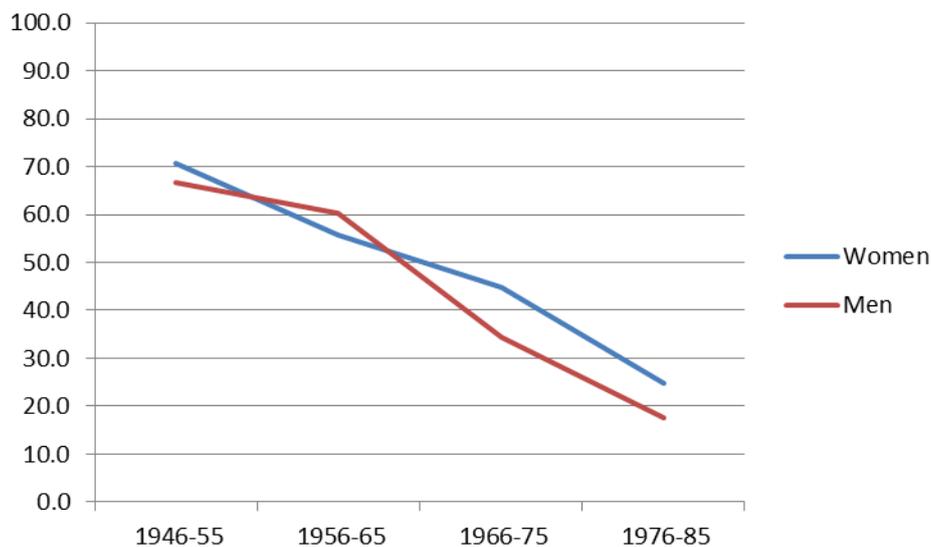
Figure 1
Percentage of people whose first union was cohabitation by birth cohort in France



Source: GGP data wave 1 (own calculation)

6. The timing of life events is another key dimension of the life-course. Using again the example of cohabitation, we know that this form of union is especially prevalent among young people either as a way of testing a new relationship or as an alternative to marriage (Hiekel, Liefbroer, Poortman 2012). Recent analyses of the GGP have however revealed the occurrence of cohabitation also at later ages including after divorce or widowhood (Gierveld and Merz 2012).
7. Information on the occurrence and timing of life events is however not sufficient. Information on the sequencing of life-events is also essential to adequately capture the life course of individuals and their related inequalities. For example, it is interesting to follow up what happened to the cohabitators and ask the extent to which people whose first union was cohabitation eventually ended up marrying their partner. Here we see a totally different trend than that displayed earlier (Figure 2). When cohabitation was still relatively rare among the older cohorts, the likelihood of marrying one's cohabiting partner was quite high. This has since plummeted. Among the more recent cohort, whose experience of cohabitation as a first union is almost universal, the likelihood of marrying one's partner is very small, less than 25 percent. The trend is furthermore very similar for women and men.

Figure 2
Percentage of people whose first union was cohabitation and which was followed by marriage with the same partner by birth cohort in France



Source: GGP data wave 1 (own calculation)

8. Other examples of statistics that can be produced using the GGP and which adopt a life-course perspective are listed below in Table 1. By using information on people’s partnership and fertility histories, these indicators can provide us with new ways of examining how and where gender inequalities in the life course emerge.

Table 1
Examples of life-course indicators from the GGP

Domains	Indicators
Fertility	Partnership status of parents at the birth of their child
Union formation and dissolution	Risk of divorce among those who have cohabited before marriage
Reproductive health	Fertility treatments and subsequent fertility histories

III. Gender equality in the interlinks of different life domains

9. . The above discussion all pertained to demographic life events. A comprehensive overview of the life course of individuals cannot however be confined to these types of events and has instead to take other life domains into account including education, paid & unpaid work, and health & well-being. Of these, the interlinks between the family and paid work domains have been the subject of much attention among social scientists during the last few decades, but again is made richer using a life-course perspective.

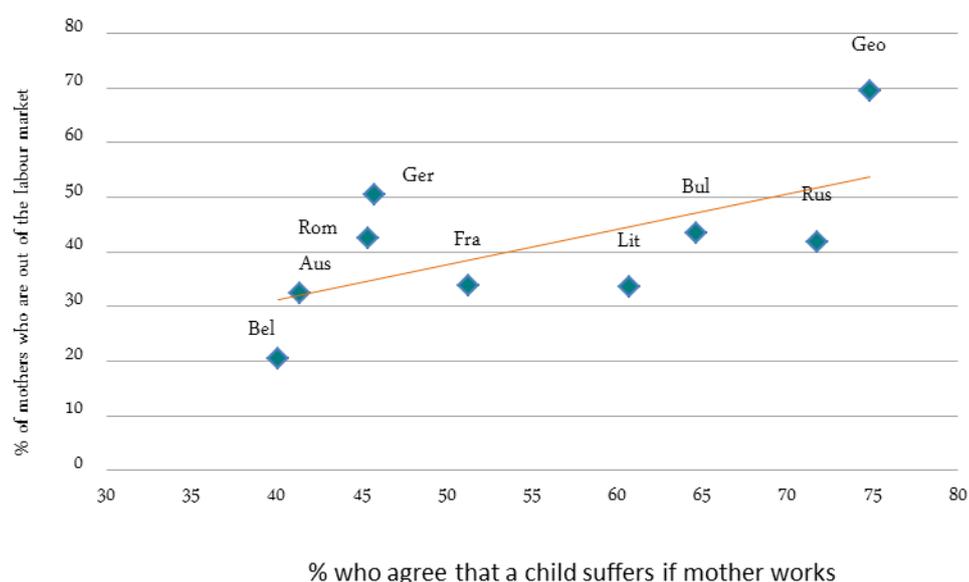
10. In the GGP, there are two different sets of indicators that link the family and paid work domains: objective indicators that describe individuals’ experiences in these two domains, and subjective indicators that capture individuals’ perception of work-family balance. With regard to objective indicators, the GGP contains data that allow us to put in parallel people’s demographic and work histories and their related gender inequalities. For example, we know that mothers are much more

likely to experience work interruptions in connection with childbearing and child-caring than fathers, and that they are also more likely to switch to part-time work in order to better reconcile work and family responsibilities (Kitterød and Lappegård 2010; Theunynck and Neels 2012).

11. Figure 3 displays the correlation between the percentage of mothers out of the labour force and societal norms regarding gender roles and what is best for children. The item used here is the percentage of respondents agreeing with the statement ‘a child suffers if her mother works’. Overall, the results suggest a positive correlation in that the more conservative a society is, the greater the percentage of mothers out of the labour force. Other factors including mothers’ level of education, economic opportunities, and work-family reconciliation policies have also been shown to be influencing mothers’ employment decision (Gauthier 2012).

Figure 3

Percentage of mothers out of the labour force and societal attitude towards working mothers

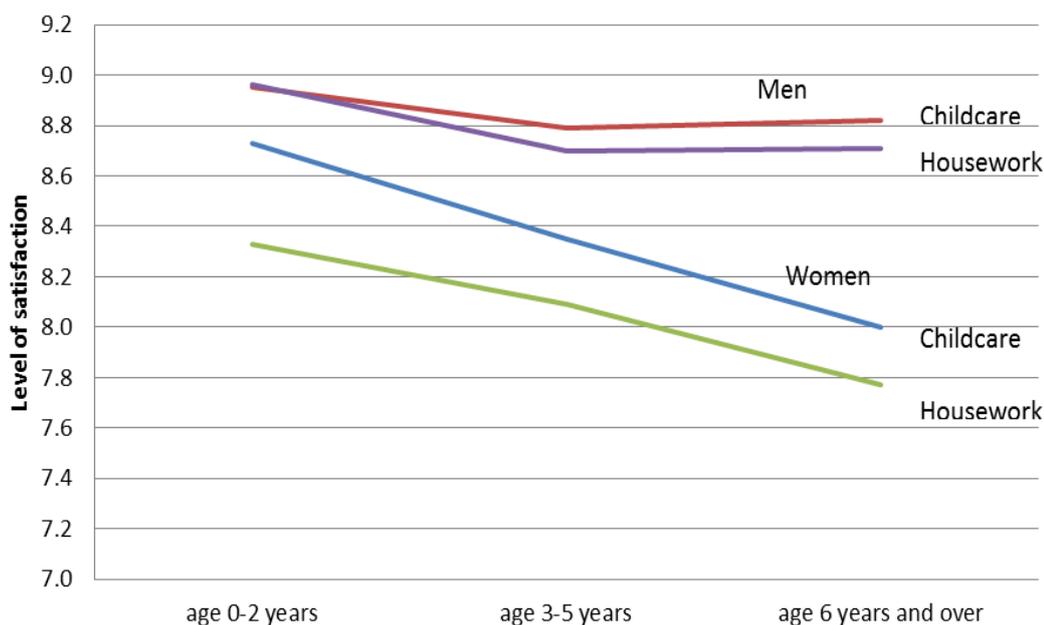


Where: Aus: Austria, Bel: Belgium; Bul: Bulgaria; Fra: France; Ger: Germany; Geo: Georgia; Lit: Lithuania; Rus: Russia; Source: GGP data wave 1 (own calculation).

12. In the GGP, objective indicators such as those mentioned above are complemented by subjective ones that capture individuals’ perception of work-life conflict as well as perceived fairness in the division of unpaid work between partners. For example, one of the recurrent findings in social research is the discrepancy between men and women in terms of their level of satisfaction regarding the gender division of unpaid work. This is illustrated below using GGP data from Hungary (Figure 4). What is clear is that men are consistently more satisfied with the gender division of housework and childcare tasks than women. For men, this level of satisfaction is furthermore relatively constant over time as children grow older while for women it appears to decrease over time. The actual trends tend to vary across countries, but it is yet another illustration of the type of indicators that can be used to unravel gender inequalities over the life course.

Figure 4

Satisfaction with the way childcare and household tasks are divided between spouses for two-child households by age of the youngest child in Hungary (with satisfaction rated from 0= "not all" to 10="completely")



Source: GGP data wave 1 (own calculation)

13. Box 1 below lists other subjective indicators regarding work-life balance and gender roles that are available in the GGP. These indicators can be very useful to assess gender equality among various subgroups of the population (e.g. by education level) and to monitor changes over time. Furthermore, they can also be linked back to the experience of key life events, for example to see changes in gender equality before and after the birth of a child. They can also be used to predict life events, for example the likelihood of having another child based on subjective indicators of gender equality (Neyer, Lappegård, and Vignoli 2013).

Box 1: Subjective indicators of work-life balance and gender roles in GGP

- Index of childcare tasks (6 items)
- Index of household tasks (7 items)
- Frequency of disagreement about household chores
- Satisfaction with the way childcare tasks are divided with partner/spouse
- Satisfaction with the division of household tasks with partner/spouse
- Household- work reconciliation (4 items)
- Attitudes towards gender roles

IV. Gender equality in the interlinks between family members

14. Finally, the third way of studying gender equality in the life course is by focusing on the relationship between family members. In particular, the GGP contains rich data on the network of personal care and emotional support received and given as well as the frequency of contact and relationship quality. Some of these indicators are listed in box 2.

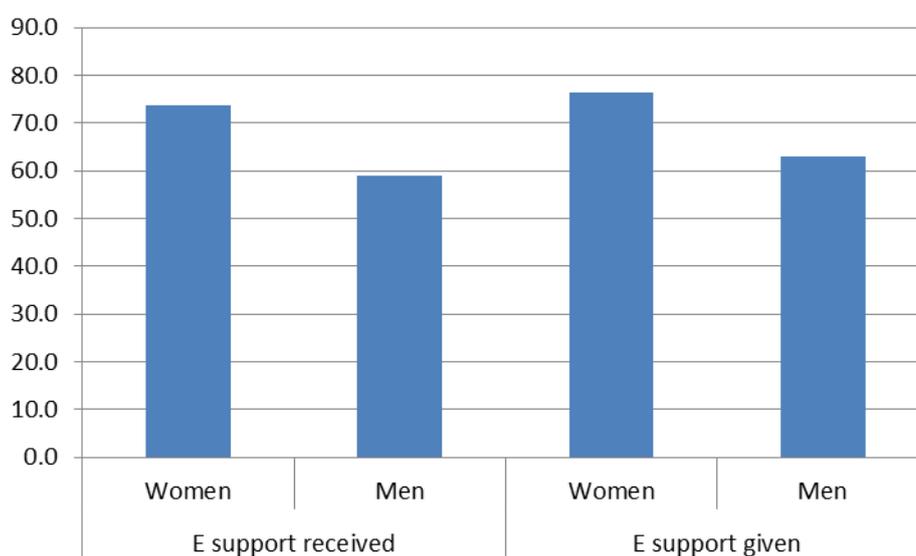
Box 2: Indicators on social support network and relationship quality

Emotional Support given and received from specific people
Financial support given and received from specific people
Personal Care given and received from specific people
Contact frequency with specific people
Relationship quality with each parent, child and step-child
Loneliness

15. This breadth of information is illustrated in Figure 5 for one specific age group and one country, focusing here on the percentage of adults age 60-69 receiving and giving emotional support. Again, the gender differences are noticeable with women receiving and giving more emotional support than men.

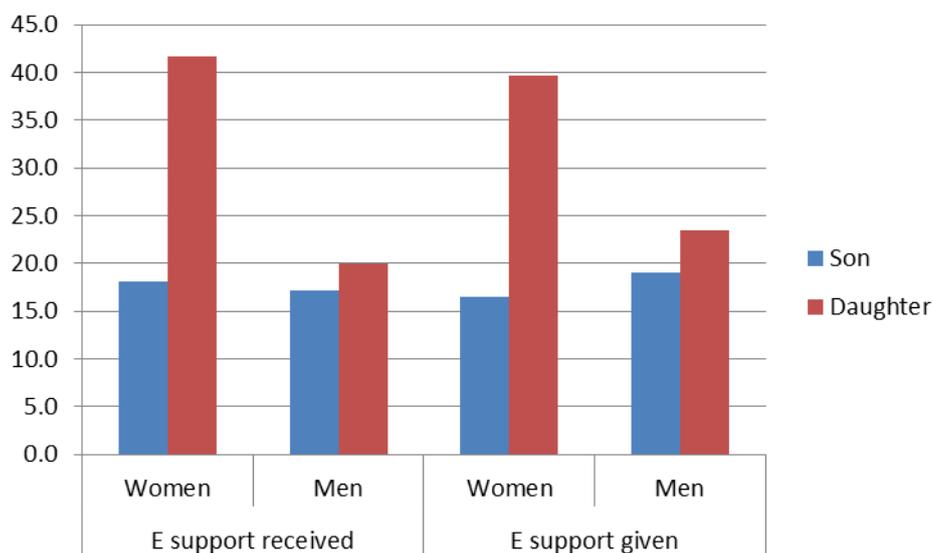
Figure 5

Percentage receiving and given emotional support among women and men age 60-69 in Russia



16. The GGP also contains information on the social network involved in giving and receiving emotional support. When it comes to women, they are much more likely to receive and give emotional support to and from their daughters than their sons. In contrast, no clear gender differences are observed for men.

Figure 6
Percentage of women and men age 60-69 receiving emotional support from their daughters or sons, and percentage giving emotional support to their daughters or sons in Russia.



Source: GGP data wave 1 (own calculation)

17. Throughout the life course, people's social support network may be a major factor in influencing their well-being (de Jong Gierveld, Dykstra, Schenk 2012). At the same time, having large caring responsibility for an elderly spouse or family member may be a major burden and source of stress. Again, a life course approach is useful in identifying linkages between family members and between generations. In turn, intergenerational support may be a determining factor in the life course of younger adults. For example, GGP data have been used to show the determining influence of the provision of childcare by grandparents on childbearing decisions among the younger generations. However, the results have also shown that the effect was larger in Mediterranean countries than in western and northern Europe, thus suggesting a complex pattern of interaction between informal care at the family level and country-level provision for childcare (Aassve, Meroni, Pronzato 2012).

V. Conclusion

18. There are three take-home messages from this paper.
19. First, the life course is an indispensable tool to understand how the life of people unfolds over time and to help identify the crucial events and crucial periods of life when major inequalities emerge. The life course approach is also needed to assess how external events (such as the recent economic crisis) can disrupt the life course of individuals and the possible protective role played by countries' policy and institutional context.
20. Second, gender inequalities are noticeable throughout the life course. They emerge in the occurrence, timing, and sequencing of life events, in the combination of work and family life, and in the relationships across generations. Moreover,

some events may further exacerbate existing inequalities, for example inequalities in the gender division of unpaid work increase after the birth of a child.

21. Third, cross-sectional data obtained through surveys, censuses, and vital registration systems provide only a snapshot of people's lives. Longitudinal data are essential to understand the dynamics of individuals' life course. There is a long tradition of such longitudinal surveys in a few countries including the UK and the USA, but the coverage of UNECE countries is still limited. The GGP is a unique source in its collection of cross-national comparable data. However, there is a need to better support such a research infrastructure in order to better respond to changes in family dynamics and in gender inequalities.

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