

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

# What **UNECE** does for you



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on the generations  
and gender programme

The Generations and Gender Programme (GGP)  
delivers cutting-edge data to inspire population and  
family policies in UNECE countries.



Across the UNECE region, family patterns have been changing; most countries have seen fertility fall below the level necessary for generation replacement. Concurrently, the populations of most countries of the region are ageing. Governments must respond to these developments and their economic and social consequences. “The Generations and Gender Programme provides the data and analyses that can advise Governments on how to address these demographic developments and their consequences”, says Andres Vikat, Chief of the UNECE Population Activities Unit. “Through the analysis of demographic trends and the factors influencing them, the knowledge base for policymaking on population and family issues can be dramatically improved”.

### **What are the objectives of GGP?**

The Programme’s main objective is to improve our understanding of demographic and social developments and of the factors that influence these developments, with particular attention given to the relationships between children and parents (generations) and between partners (gender). GGP aims to detect, analyse and explain the reasons for the current demographic developments, including those behind the current low and very low fertility levels.

### **Why is such a programme needed?**

Changing families and populations are presenting growing challenges for industrialized societies. For example, with below-replacement levels of fertility prevailing for a

long time, many countries are expected to face labour shortages simultaneously with the demand to support a rapidly increasing number of retired persons. In addressing these developments, societies need to prevent conflicts between generations, in particular between the working and the retired. Multifaceted family change requires that the State and other social partners monitor and, when necessary, step in to help families preserve and strengthen the ties that bind their members. In large parts of the UNECE region, it is now common for parents to have fewer children than they wish for, and societies face the task of how to assist individuals and couples to achieve their desired family size. To successfully meet these and many other challenges, policymakers need to be equipped with a better understanding of the causes underlying recent developments. Simple identification of demographic trends is not sufficient; deeper insights are required. GGP is making vital contributions to such advances in knowledge.

### **How does GGP work?**

GGP has two main pillars. The first is the system of national Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS), which are panel surveys of a representative sample of the 18 to 79-year-old resident population. The second is the contextual databases that provide information on macrolevel factors influencing demographic trends. By pursuing a multidisciplinary and comparative approach, GGP reveals much more about demographic behaviours and offers explanations and solutions with regard to current demographic changes.

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## What are the main topics addressed by GGP?

The UNECE region is currently facing profound transformations in when and how families are formed and to what extent couples decide to have children. For instance, fertility rates have fallen to very low levels in Southern and Eastern Europe, well below the level of generation replacement. Young people throughout the region tend to postpone marriage and parenting. Increased prevalence of consensual unions, decreasing stability of co-residential partnerships and the emergence of non-residential partnerships are other trends that can be seen in many countries. By studying relationships between parents and children and those between partners, we can glean the determinants of demographic choices at the individual level and, further, the causal mechanisms that underlie demographic change. This knowledge can in turn form the basis for policies that respond to the demographic changes and population development in the UNECE region. GGP analyses the factors that influence childbearing, partnership dynamics, leaving the parental home and retirement. A large proportion of the survey is devoted to economic activity, values and attitudes, known to be among the most important factors explaining demographic behaviour. Other domains covered include gender relationships, household composition and housing, residential mobility, public and private transfers, social networks, education, health, contraception and infertility. GGS also allows for the investigation of the demographic events' consequences on the individual's or couple's subsequent life-course situation, helping to explain phenomena such as social inclusion or exclusion and changes in quality of life, both highly relevant for policymaking.

## What's new about GGP?

Compared to its direct predecessor, the UNECE Fertility and Family Surveys programme, GGP has several important new features. Firstly, it broadens the explanatory scope of the collected data by adopting the prospective

approach of a panel study, which allows use of the rich information collected at the time of the survey to explain subsequent demographic events. Another distinguishing feature of GGP is its reliance on theories from a range of scholarly disciplines. It also explicitly takes into account the different levels on which determinants of demographic behaviour operate: the microlevels of individuals and households as well as the national and subnational macrolevels. GGP is currently the only programme collecting internationally comparable empirical data for analysing demographic behaviours in developed countries.

## How is the GGP managed?

Since the launch of GGP in 2000, a Consortium of eight institutes and statistical offices, coordinated by UNECE, has been formed to develop the Programme. The Consortium has established expert working groups to carry out specific scientific and methodological tasks. The other important part of GGP is the International Working Group, a consultative body consisting of experts from institutions implementing or promoting the Programme in the member States. Most of these experts represent national statistical offices, government research institutes and academia. Working Group meetings offer an important platform for direct interaction between the working groups developing the Programme on the one hand and the institutions responsible for its implementation on the other. One of the main goals of the International Working Group is to help countries overcome the organizational and technical challenges related to implementing GGP. UNECE receives financial support from the European Commission for the coordination of GGP.

## Which countries are participating?

Fourteen UNECE countries – Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Romania and Russian Federation – and two outside the UNECE region (Australia and Japan) are implementing the Generations and Gender Survey. Most have already provided or are now collecting their macrolevel data for the GGP contextual database. The GGP International Working Group includes representatives from more than 30 countries. Many of those not yet compiling the survey data are taking steps to raise the necessary funds to do so.

## What kind of research results can be expected?

A great virtue of GGP is that it can demonstrate with empirical data connections that may have been previously perceived but were speculative, e.g. between birth rates and economic conditions of families with children and the balancing of career and family. It is also possible to study concrete evidence of the effects of policy measures such as the



availability of paid parental leave, day-care centres, and flexible work arrangements on demographic behaviours. One example is a recent analysis on childbearing intentions based on the GGS in the Russian Federation, which found that the decision for the first child is far less influenced by economic activity of the partners than the decision for a subsequent child. In a second scenario, several studies found that women embarking on higher education postpone childbearing, yet after their first child they are more likely to have a second child, and within a shorter time span than women with intermediate and lower levels of education. Thus, challenging previous assumptions, the ultimate number of children born to women with higher education may be only marginally lower.

### What does the future hold for GGP?

Ultimately, the impact of the Programme on the lives of citizens of UNECE countries depends on whether and how the analytic outputs of the GGP are considered in policymaking. This would mainly happen on the level of individual countries. The fact that we can compare countries with different demographic regimes and different principles of welfare-state organization greatly enhances the explanatory power of the analytic outputs. The potential will improve still further when more countries start implementing the Programme. The Conference entitled "How Generations and Gender Shape Demographic Change – Towards Policies Based on Better Knowledge" (Geneva, 14-16 May 2008) has brought researchers and policymakers together to discuss the implications of the findings of the Programme for the first time. The dialogue and insights offered by the Conference are expected to encourage more countries to join the Programme in future.

For more information:  
<http://ggp.unece.org>

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