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Data Brief

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The Generations and Gender Survey: a cross-national longitudinal resource

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People's life trajectories and family dynamics have become increasingly complex, bringing shifts in fertility, gender equality, work-life balance, and economic stability. The scientific challenge is to capture these complexities and understand their causes and consequences. The Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) provides key insights into these developments, serving as a vital resource for researchers and policymakers. The GGS is a cross-national longitudinal survey collecting data on individuals aged 18 to 79 across topics such as union formation, fertility, household dynamics, work, well-being, and gender attitudes. Its key strengths include cross-national comparability, a panel design with prospective and retrospective data, large sample sizes, and multi-mode data collection. The GGS consists of two rounds: GGS-I, launched in the early 2000s in over 20 countries, established a foundation for comparative research, while GGS-II, started in 2020, builds on GGS-I with methodological innovations such as mixed-mode data collection and refreshed samples. This data brief provides an overview of the GGS, outlining its development, design, implementation, and key features. It also highlights the survey's contributions to demographic and social research, and explores the new research opportunities emerging with GGS-II.

Introduction

Demographic change is one of the mega trends confronting countries around the world (Ezeh, Bongaarts and Mberu, 2012; European Commission, 2021). Several decades of (very) low levels of fertility (Lesthaeghe, 2010), coupled with longer life expectancy, have put strains on economies and social support systems, while also raising concerns about the sustainability of infrastructures and services (European

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Commission, 2021). However, these demographic shifts also present opportunities for innovation and adaptation, highlighting the potential for demographic resilience (UNFPA, 2023). Efforts to re-frame the discourse on population changes have emphasized the potential benefits of these changes, such as the development of inclusive and flexible social policies that better reflect evolving demographic realities (United Nations, 2023). In parallel, low levels of fertility amid shifting societal norms and expectations related to gender roles and equality (England, 2010; Goldscheider, Bernhardt and Lappegård, 2015) have fundamentally transformed how women and men organize labour force participation, housework, and childcare (Fanelli and Profeta, 2021). Collectively, these trends have altered people's living conditions, experiences, and family and work arrangements, resulting in more de-standardized and complex life course and family dynamics (e.g. Billari and Liefbroer, 2010). The scientific challenge is to identify and capture these complexities and the associated demographic changes to better understand their causes and consequences. To respond to this challenge, cross-nationally comparable micro-level data are essential.

As an international research infrastructure, the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) serves as a valuable resource for researchers and policymakers by providing high-quality, freely accessible data on population and family dynamics. The GGP was initiated in 2000 by the Population Activities Unit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and has been coordinated by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI-KNAW) since 2009. The rationale behind initiating the GGP was that a coordinated, cross-nationally comparable approach was needed to accelerate knowledge on demographic change, which, in turn, would inform policy makers and assist governments in effectively addressing the challenges and opportunities linked to demographic change (Macura, 2002).

The Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) is the main product of the GGP. It is a cross-national panel survey on the life course and family dynamics of individuals aged 18–79. With its longitudinal design, including both retrospective and prospective information, the GGS tracks individuals life transitions—such as leaving the parental home, union formation and dissolution, and parenthood—as well as the opportunities and challenges they face throughout their lives. The GGS currently consists of two rounds of data collection. The first round (GGS-I) began in 2004[1] as a three-wave panel study with three-year time intervals (Fokkema *et al.*, 2016). It collected information from over 200,000 individuals aged 18 to 79 across 19 countries and contributed to the social sciences as a unique longitudinal data resource on families and life course trajectories (Gauthier, Cabaço and Emery, 2018; Fadel, Emery and Gauthier, 2020). The second round (GGS-II) officially started in 2020[2] with a revised questionnaire, enhanced survey design, and refreshed samples. As of 2025, GGS-II covers 28 countries and territories. Data collection is ongoing in several of these, with more expected to join.

This paper provides an overview of the GGS as a key resource for understanding population and family dynamics from a cross-nationally comparable perspective. It expands on previous discussions by Vikat *et al.* (2007) and Gauthier, Cabaço and Emery (2018) by covering both GGS-I and GGS-II and detailing the entire data life cycle, from questionnaire development to data collection, processing, documentation, and release. It also provides insights into the impact and research potential of using GGS data. The paper is structured as follows: after this introduction, we outline the origins of the GGS, its predecessors, and the governance and management of the infrastructure. Following that, the design elements of the GGS are discussed, including its cross-national dimension and panel structure. The subsequent section outlines the main topics and themes covered in the GGS questionnaire. The paper then turns to the implementation of data collection, including technical guidelines, survey modes, and the collaboration between the GGP Central Coordination Team (CCT) and national partners. This is followed by a discussion of data management procedures, encompassing data processing, harmonization, documentation, release, and access. The paper concludes by presenting the research potential of the GGS and its contribution to the study of population and family dynamics.

Background: the origins and organization of the GGS

The origins of the GGS

The GGS belongs to a long tradition of international demographic surveys that began with the World Fertility Survey (WFS) in the 1970s[3]. The WFS was initiated during a period of growing concerns about rapid population growth, largely driven by high fertility rates. In Europe, however, fertility rates had begun to decline in several countries, many of which had already entered the Second Demographic Transition characterized by deep demographic and attitudinal changes (Lesthaeghe, 2010). As a result, only Portugal participated in the WFS. Nevertheless, 12 other European countries conducted their own fertility surveys at the time, which became known as 'affiliated WFS surveys' (Sprehe, 1974). Although these surveys focussed on fertility, they were not designed from a cross-nationally comparable perspective and—unlike the WFS countries—were never cross-nationally harmonized.

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The situation changed in the early 1990s, when the UNECE, together with a consortium of scientists, developed and implemented the Fertility and Family Survey (FFS). This marked the first time that a common questionnaire was used across Europe. The FFS addressed the need for greater standardization in the collection of demographic data across Europe, especially regarding marriage, non-marital cohabitation, divorce, and childbearing (Festy and Prioux, 2002). This demand emerged in response to declining fertility rates and rising marital instability (Cliquet, 2000). One of the main objectives of the FFS was to enable cross-country comparative studies on fertility and family dynamics in UNECE member states. It was designed as a cross-sectional survey with retrospective information. The core survey items of the FFS focussed on fertility histories and basic demographic characteristics of individuals aged 18–49. The FFS was loosely coordinated by the UNECE and implemented by national statistical offices.

The FFS was a major success, having collected data from over 100,000 women and 50,000 men in 23 countries across the UNECE region. This extensive dataset enabled comprehensive cross-cultural studies and made the FFS one of the few truly international comparative research projects of its time (Cliquet, 2000). This pioneering work in the collection of comparative demographic data resulted in more than 300 publications on the determinants and consequences of demographic behaviour (Fadel, Emery and Gauthier, 2020). In his keynote speech at the FFS Flagship Conference, Cliquet (2000) advocated for a new round of the FFS, arguing that it is his "scientific responsibility to reiterate the need for extending the comparative study phase of the present FFS. It is from a scientific and policy point of view unacceptable that such a project stops in a stage when the most important results are still to come" (p. 10).

Some years later, and in view of continuing deep demographic change, the question arose whether to repeat the FFS, as Cliquet had proposed, or to develop a new instrument. To reflect on this, the UNECE assembled a new consortium of scientists from the leading demographic institutes. After considerable deliberation, it was decided to build on some of the key features of the FFS—including its retrospective family and partnership histories—but to substantially broaden the survey's scope. This led to the development of the GGP, with the GGS as its main survey instrument. The GGS would cover a wider age range (from 18 to 79) to better capture the life course of individuals and their intergenerational relationships. It would also adopt a panel design, with the same respondents reinterviewed every three years (United Nations, 2000). Furthermore, the survey data would be complemented by a Contextual Database, allowing users to place individual-level data within relevant institutional, social, and economic contexts.

The infrastructure development

To ensure the sustainability and long-term viability of the GGP as a research infrastructure, two pivotal projects have shaped its development. In 2009, the EU-funded *Design Study*[4] aimed to evaluate and improve the GGP's work programme, focussing particularly on methodological aspects relevant to large cross-national studies. The project sought to streamline access to GGP data, assess the quality of measurement tools, explore new research avenues and methodologies, and enhance the efficiency of data collection. During this period, the GGP's coordination transitioned from UNECE to NIDI-KNAW. This relocation and re-establishment of the infrastructure occurred at a critical juncture, when the GGP required strong strategic leadership to initiate a new round of data collection.

In 2016, the GGP secured funding under Horizon 2020 for the *Generations and Gender Programme: Evaluate, Plan and Initiate (GGP EPI)*[5] project to further consolidate its operations and management. As part of this project, GGP developed a revised set of technical guidelines for national teams and established model data agreements and service contracts to standardize national data collections. Importantly, the questionnaire was coded using the Blaise software[6], and national teams were encouraged to use the centrally coded survey instrument. The key reasons were to ensure consistent administration of the questionnaire across countries and to reduce the need for post-harmonization of the data. Moreover, greater centralization and coordination of operations were introduced to better monitor fieldwork in each country and to enable quicker and more efficient data preparation and release. This centralization process also gave the GGP CCT at NIDI-KNAW a more prominent role.

After the successful inclusion of the GGP on the *European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures* (ESFRI) Roadmap in 2021, the GGP obtained a Preparatory Phase grant for the project *GGP 5D*[6] in 2022 to enhance its long-term sustainability and the overall investment-readiness. Among its key objectives are ensuring the continuity of the GGP's technical excellence within a changing survey landscape, strengthening its compliance with FAIR principles, and improving its readiness to respond to new societal and technological developments, including emerging types of data.

GGS design features

Cross-national comparability design

Cross-national comparability is a central feature of the GGS, and the GGP actively aims to involve a wide range

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of countries. From its inception, the GGP has relied heavily on the commitment and initiative of participating institutions. This reflects a bottom-up approach where the initiative to conduct a GGS originates from national teams. These teams have undertaken major fundraising efforts to implement national data collections, with most funding provided by national governments, statistical offices and/or national science foundations.

The GGS covers a wide range of countries and territories across different regions, with a focus on medium and high-income countries. Participating countries and territories represent diverse economic, social, and political contexts (see Table 1). GGS-I includes 19 countries,

Table 1 An overview of GGS-I and GGS-II countries and territories

	GGS-I			GGS-II		
Country/ territories	**Wave 1**	**Wave 2**	**Wave 3**	**Wave 1**	**Wave 2**	**Wave 3**
Argentina (Buenos Aires)				●	~	
Australia	●	●				
Austria	●	●		●	○	
Belarus				●		
Belgium	●					
Bulgaria	●	●				
Croatia				●	○	○
Czech Republic	●	●		●	●	
Denmark				●	●	
Estonia	●			●	●	
Finland				●		
France	●	●	●	●	○	
Georgia	●	●				
Germany	●	●		●	●	
Hong Kong (SAR)				●	○	
Hungary	●	●	●	~		
Iceland				●		
Italy	●	●		●	○	
Japan	●	●				
Kazakhstan				●		
Latvia				●	○	
Lithuania	●	●		●		
Moldova				●	●	
Netherlands	●	●	●	●	○	
Norway	●			●	●	
Poland	●	●		●	○	
Romania	●			~		
Russian Federation	●	●				
South Korea				●	○	
Sweden	●	●	●	●	●	
Switzerland				●	○	
Taiwan				●		
United Kingdom				●	●	
Uruguay				●		

●Fielded or currently preparing for fieldwork.
○ Funding secured.
~ In the process of securing funding.

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primarily focussing on UNECE member states. It was later extended beyond the UNECE region to include survey data from Australia[7] and Japan[8]. As of 2025, GGS-II covers 28 countries. From the outset, it adopted a more global perspective—focussing not only on countries that participated in GGS-I, but also expanding to additional European countries (e.g. Croatia, Finland, United Kingdom) and beyond Europe to East Asia (e.g. Hong Kong SAR, South Korea, Taiwan), Central Asia (e.g. Kazakhstan), and Latin America (e.g. Argentina [Buenos Aires], Uruguay). Despite this broader coverage, some regions in Europe—particularly South and South-East Europe—remain underrepresented in the GGP. This may be due to regional priorities, funding availability, and institutional capacity. The GGP is actively working to expand the survey into these regions. Efforts include promoting the survey within the research community and among potential funders, and identifying advocates who can secure funding and assemble national teams to implement the GGS.

Panel design and retrospective data

The GGS is designed as a panel survey. After the baseline questionnaire (wave 1), the first follow-up is administered three years later (wave 2), and the second follow-up takes place after another three years (wave 3). This longitudinal design is essential for capturing how respondents' lives unfold over time and how they are affected by changes in their personal circumstances (e.g. job loss), external events (e.g. economic crises), and policy changes. The three-year interval between waves allows enough time for respondents to experience demographic events. Since these often occur during specific periods of life, the shorter design of the GGS can effectively capture these events—unlike longitudinal surveys focussed on specific trajectories (e.g. health), which often require follow-ups over much longer periods (e.g. twenty years).

Participating countries are expected to commit to at least two waves, although this is subject to funding (Gauthier *et al.*, 2024). Some countries manage to secure funding for all three waves when initially requesting funding for participating in GGS (e.g. Croatia in GGS-II), while others need to apply separately for each subsequent wave. Table 1 shows that in GGS-I, 14 countries conducted two waves and 4 countries completed all three. For GGS-II, 15 countries have funding for a second wave as of 2025, with more expected to follow depending on national funding outcomes.

In addition to its panel design, the GGS includes a retrospective dimension to capture respondents' full fertility and partnership histories. This allows for a comprehensive understanding of life course trajectories, gathering detailed information on past events and decisions that shape current and future behaviours. Originally introduced in the FFS, the retrospective component has been further developed in the GGS to better capture multi-partner fertility. It collects information on the timing and context of births, marriages, cohabitations, and separations, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of family formation and dissolution.

The GGS also follows a cyclical design: after one or two follow-up waves, the panel is paused for a few years before being restarted with new samples, as was seen between GGS-I and GGS-II. This periodic approach ensures a new round of data collection—consisting of a baseline wave and one or two follow-ups—roughly every 10 to 15 years. This strategy provides both longitudinal data and refreshed samples, preserving national representativeness and allowing for the continuous adaptation of the survey to reflect new demographic trends, policy priorities, and societal changes.

Large sample size

The GGS is designed as a large-scale survey, aiming to cover approximately 10,000 individuals aged 18–79. In countries where a separate ageing survey is available, a reduced sample of 7,000 individuals aged 18–59 is acceptable. This large sample size is crucial for researchers to study population subgroups—such as ethnic minorities or same-sex couples—that are underrepresented in smaller surveys. It also enables the GGS to capture rare demographic events and ensures that a sufficient number of key events (e.g. births, marriages, divorces) occur between waves to support robust longitudinal analysis.

Multi-mode of data collection

While GGS-I was conducted primarily through face-to-face interviews, GGS-II was designed as a multi-mode survey that includes self-administered web interviews. This major shift was motivated by two key factors. First, the survey research landscape has changed significantly since GGS-I, with many countries experiencing steep declines in response rates to traditional face-to-face surveys. This is largely due to increased difficulty in contacting and recruiting respondents (Beullens *et al.*, 2018). Second, the costs associated with face-to-face surveys have risen dramatically in recent decades (Emery *et al.*, 2019).

In response to these trends, the GGP began exploring web-based data collection as early as 2010 during the *GGP Design Study*. It was initially recommended that questions on social support networks be administered online. This was followed in 2018 by a three-country push-to-web experiment. The results showed that a self-administered web version of the GGS was feasible, despite the survey's extensive length (Emery *et al.*, 2019). However, the study also found that a web-based GGS was easier to administer when a personal sampling

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frame was available, and that the use of both unconditional and conditional financial incentives depending on survey completion was beneficial. Moreover, the response rate as well as the nonresponse bias in the push-to-web design were comparable to those observed in the face-to-face control group (Lugtig *et al.*, 2022; Piccitto, Liefbroer and Emery, 2022).

GGS questionnaire

The GGS takes a multidisciplinary approach in its questionnaire design, drawing from demography, social psychology, economics, sociology, and epidemiology (Vikat *et al.*, 2007). The questionnaire is intended to explore the complexities of family life, demographic behaviour, and the socio-economic influences on individuals, families, and households. This broad approach enables the empirical testing of theories from multiple disciplines and incorporates influences at various societal levels that shape demographic behaviour.

GGS baseline questionnaire

The GGS baseline questionnaire was first developed in 2003 by the first Questionnaire Taskforce and served as the core instrument for countries participating in GGS-I. Based on feedback and lessons learned from GGS-I, the questionnaire underwent two rounds of revisions. The first revision, carried out between 2009 and 2012, introduced some amendments to modules such as social support, wellbeing indices, life course and decision making, and psychological instruments. The updated version was piloted in Slovenia and subsequently used in Belarus, Latvia, and Kazakhstan. From 2017 to 2020, further refinements were made to adapt the questionnaire for use in Computer Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI). A new Questionnaire Task Force was established to address issues identified during the Push-to-Web Three-Country Pilot (Emery *et al.*, 2019). These updates also included the integration of innovative elements and allowed national teams to add country-specific questions. In 2020, another Questionnaire Task Force focussed specifically on reducing the length of the questionnaire to make it more suitable in CAWI. This involved shortening longer sections—such as the 'Values and Attitudes' module—and trimming sections deemed especially demanding for respondents. Despite these revisions, comparability of the key concepts and thematic areas covered in GGS-I and GGS-II has been preserved (see Table 2). The core questionnaires for both GGS-I and GGS-II are available on the GGP website.

Survey content

The GGS is grounded in the life course perspective (Elder, 1994) and its multidisciplinary extension (Bernardi, Huinink and Settersten, 2019), which aim to capture diverse life paths and the interconnected roles individuals play in various domains, such as work and family. The survey examines the complexities of family life, demographic behaviour, and socio-economic influences on individuals, families, and households. The central themes that span throughout the questionnaire are described below.

Life course

Both GGS-I and GGS-II offer a comprehensive study of the life course. Key life course transitions captured in the surveys include entering cohabitation, marriage, divorce, childbirth and grandparenthood, the death of parents, migration, changes in living arrangements, and significant professional milestones like starting or ending a job or business. As the GGS collects the month and year of key demographic events, it provides rich information about the timing and sequencing of life course transitions. In addition to dates, both GGS-I and GGS-II collect information on individuals' decision-making processes related to life course events, such as intentions to marry, have a (another) child, or move out of the parental home. In GGS-I, these questions were informed by the Theory of Planned Behavior and included perceptions of social norms. To shorten the questionnaire, these items were removed in GGS-II.

Demographic behaviour

Beyond tracking life course transitions, the GGS collects detailed data on demographic behaviour, particularly fertility. Both GGS-I and GGS-II include questions on current pregnancy status, fertility treatments, and future fertility intentions. Respondents are asked about their knowledge of their ability to conceive, their use of contraception, and their experiences with fertility treatments. They are also asked about their desire for more children within the next three years and the total number of children planned. Additionally, the GGS investigates the perceived impact of having another child on finances, employment, and relationships. Recognizing that demographic behaviour can be transmissible across generations, the GGS includes questions on the parents' age at birth of their first child, number of children, and new in GGS-II—whether the respondent's parents were married or divorced.

Social networks

A key focus of both GGS-I and GGS-II is the role of social networks and personal relationships. The surveys examine partner relationships through questions on union formation and dissolution, duration, living arrangements, and the legal status of partnerships. Subjective dimensions such as relationship satisfaction, frequency of disagreements, and household decision-making processes are also covered. For

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Table 2 Key topics in GGS-I and GGS-II

Module	GGS-I & GGS-II	GGS-I specific	GGS-II specific
Demographics			
Basic socio-demographic information	Gender, date of birth, country of birth, current residence, highest level of education and current activity		
Residential information	Information about the dwelling, satisfaction with the dwelling, future moving intentions	Destination where to move to	Internet access and use, distinction between intention to migrate within and out of country
Current (non) co-resident partner	Basic partnership information, reasons for living apart, plans to start living together, household dynamics for co-residential partners (task division, decision making), relationship dynamics (satisfaction, disagreements)	Other people's opinions on moving in with the partner	How partners have met
Life History	Previous partnership history (basic information on previous partnerships and marriages); Children, (non) co-resident and step-children (relationship and interaction frequency with non-resident children, satisfaction with relationship with non-co-resident children, childcare arrangement (household childcare tasks, external childcare support)	Detailed information on child and partner alimony	Activity status of children over age 14, improved measures on children's residential arrangements in case of divorce (i.e. how the custody of children is arranged).
Fertility	Fertility intentions, contraceptive methods, infertility issues	Opinions of partner/ spouse and others about having another child.	Ideal family size, conditions for having another child, sexual and contraceptive autonomy
Household	Socio-demographic information about all household members, health problems of household members		
Generations	Parent's socio-demographic information, contact with parents, relationship satisfaction with parents, parental home during childhood	Detailed classification of living arrangement, intention to start living with parents	Parental age at first birth
Well-being	Regular need for help with personal care, sources of help for personal care, overall satisfaction with life, general happiness level, loneliness	Emotional support, control over life	Healthcare autonomy
Work and income	Activity status, occupation, contract type, commuting time, parental leave, work organization, work-life balance, type of income, partner's work and income	More details on previous employment	More details on work organization (e.g. work from home, weekends)
Attitudes	Attitudes towards marriage, intergenerational relations, gender roles, religious denomination and attendance	Attitudes towards older people, societal responsibilities, children's qualities, work	Gender egalitarian views, ideal work hours for mothers/fathers, religiosity

non-cohabiting couples, questions about the wantedness and reasons for their living arrangement are asked. Moreover, both GGS-I and GGS-II cover intergenerational relationships, providing insights into upward and downward solidarity. This includes relationships between young adults and their parents, adult children and their own children and older parents, and older adults and their children, grandchildren, and parents. The surveys capture caregiving, financial transfers, and mental support. In GGS-II, additional elements such as shared custody, children's residence, surrogacy, and digital contact with biological parents have been added to reflect evolving family forms and modern communication modes.

Gender

In both GGS-I and GGS-II, gender is understood as referring to the socially constructed relationships

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between men and women. Both surveys address various gender-related issues, such as access to education and employment, economic independence, decision-making, and the division of roles within the household. They also examine attitudes towards gender equality in the household and workplace, capturing beliefs about the division of labour in terms of domestic responsibilities and career opportunities. In GGS-II, gender-specific attitudes towards working hours were added.

Economic situation

GGS-I and GGS-II explore respondents' economic situation, including their employment status, job characteristics, income sources, and overall economic stability. Additional items cover access to resources such as property ownership, social services, and financial support from family and friends, providing a detailed picture of the economic complexities individuals might face. GGS-II further extends this by adding questions on the employment stability, perceived financial stability, material and social deprivation, property, wealth, and subjective evaluations of financial situations.

Subjective dimensions

Both GGS-I and GGS-II capture subjective aspects of life, including personal values, beliefs, and satisfaction, as well as exploring attitudes towards family roles, gender roles, work, and societal norms. They also assess satisfaction with health, job, and financial situation, providing insights into how individuals perceive and evaluate their circumstances. GGS-II expands on these measures by adding questions on happiness, healthcare autonomy, subjective health evaluations, life satisfaction, and health diagnoses.

Country-specific questions in GGS-II

To address the different societal and funding contexts across participating countries, the decision was taken with GGS-II to allow national teams to add country-specific questions—typically placed at the end of the questionnaire. Table 3 provides an overview of these additions. Notably, some country-specific modules have been adopted by multiple countries. For example, the Nordic GGS-II countries developed a module on global uncertainties (Andersson, Dahlberg and Neyer, 2020), which has since been included in other countries as well.

Follow-up questionnaires

In GGS-I, both follow-up questionnaires—developed in 2006—followed the same format and content as the baseline questionnaire, with additional questions on changes in relationships and childbirth that occurred between waves. For GGS-II, a different approach was used. With CAWI as the dominant mode of data collection, the follow-up questionnaire needed to be shorter and simpler than the GGS-II baseline. On top of that, there was an increasing need to introduce innovations—driven both by the user community responding to emerging scientific questions, and by funders striving for innovation—along with the challenge of finding ways and space to introduce them. At the same time, it remained crucial to preserve the GGS' focus on key family- and demography-related events between waves.

The GGS-II follow-up questionnaire was therefore restructured into new thematic modules, featuring shorter, more cohesive segments consisting of 3 to 16 items each. Within each module, only central items from the GGS-II baseline are repeated, while problematic, overly complex, or less relevant items were excluded.

Table 3 Overview of country-specific questions in GGS-II

Country specific modules	Key concepts	Countries fielded
Nordic module	Global uncertainties on climate change, military conflicts, global epidemics etc.	Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom.
Miller module	Reasons for having or not having children such as parental instinct, lifelong joy, demanding for women, limits freedom etc.	Argentina, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Norway.
Washington module	Difficulty of respondent/partner/household member to see, hear, communicate, walk, remember, care for self.	Moldova, Uruguay.
COVID-19 modules	Comparing life before after COVID-19; Assessing the impact of COVID-19; Impact of COVID-19 on working life; Impact of COVID-19 on childcare.	Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Moldova, Norway, Sweden, Uruguay.
Intensive parenting module	Mental strain of having children, children's needs first, finding educational opportunities etc.	Croatia, Sweden.
Additional modules	Optimism, risk aversion; likelihood of finding a similar job, partner's likelihood to find a similar job, social media use.	Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom.

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The primary aim is to update respondents' life histories, particularly regarding family-related events such as partnership history, fertility history, and migration information. Moreover, space was allocated for several new modules proposed by the user community through an open competition for new questionnaire content. As a result, five modules were introduced in the follow-up questionnaire: *Singlehood* (Mortelmans *et al.*, 2025), *Global Uncertainties* (Andersson *et al.*, 2025), *Intensive Parenting* (Billingsley *et al.*, 2025), *Leaving and Returning to the Parental Home* (Berrington and Perelli-Harris, 2025), and *Sexual Orientation* (Rouvroye *et al.*, 2025).

GGS operations and data collection

The cross-national comparability of the data is key to the GGS. This begins with specific standards and requirements for data collection that each country must adhere to. While these standards and requirements are comparable for both GGS-I and GGS-II, the operational approaches differ.

GGS technical guidelines

For GGS-I, the requirements for the data collection are outlined in the *GGP Sample Design Guide* (Simard and Franklin, 2005). For GGS-II, the requirements are specified in the *Technical Guidelines* (Gauthier *et al.*, 2024). These requirements have been developed by the GGP and shared with the national teams of participating countries. The most important components of the design guidelines concern the target population, sampling method, and target sample size. In addition to the key fieldwork elements, the guidelines specify requirements on aspects such as the mode of data collection, use of incentives, and panel maintenance.

Target population

In both GGS-I and GGS-II, the target population is the resident, non-institutionalized population aged 18 to 79. However, if a representative survey of the older population already exists in a country, the age range may be reduced to 18 to 59. Moreover, a small proportion of the target population, particularly those in remote areas, may be excluded from the GGS for practical reasons, but this proportion shall not exceed 5 per cent of the total target population covered by the sampling frame.

Sampling method

Each participating country is required to use a probability sampling method to enable cross-country and longitudinal comparisons. In practice, national teams work together with the GGP-CCT to determine the most appropriate sample design and implementation strategy for their specific context. These discussions typically address elements such as the sample frame (individual or household), frame coverage, unit selection method, and any stratification applied.

Sample sizes

The target net sample size in the GGS baseline wave is 10,000 respondents for an age range of 18–79, and 7,000 respondents for an age range of 18–59. These thresholds are intended to ensure a sufficiently large panel and adequate representation of subgroups.

Mode of data collection

While GGS-I did not include specific requirements regarding the mode of data collection—allowing national teams to choose the approach that best suited their context—GGS-II introduced more detailed requirements. In GGS-II, it is specified that data collection be conducted in a mixed-mode, with CAWI as the primary mode and an additional mode (preferably CAPI [Computer Assisted Personal Interviews]) as a supplement. National teams may decide the proportion of respondents in each mode, but each mode should account for at least 10 per cent of the sample. However, a single mode may be used when justified by practical considerations such as internet penetration and internet speed, availability of an individual sampling frame, or budget constraints.

Incentives

The use of incentives is recommended as a means of improving response rates. Given budgetary constraints, national teams in both GGS-I and GGS-II may determine whether and how to incentivize participation. Since one of the main challenges of CAWI surveys is respondent engagement in the absence of an interviewer (Toepoel, 2012), the GGS-II *Technical Guidelines* strongly encourage offering both an unconditional and conditional incentive for online participants. When national teams have limited experience with CAWI surveys, a pilot study including incentive experiments is also recommended to assess feasibility and identify the most effective incentive scheme.

Panel maintenance

Panel maintenance is an important element in the GGS due to its longitudinal design. It is essential for national teams to plan and budget for effective panel maintenance strategies to minimize attrition, since refreshing the sample is not recommended. While panel maintenance strategies may differ between countries, the *Technical Guidelines* recommend (1) ongoing and close cooperation between the research institute, fieldwork agency, interviewers, and respondents throughout the period between waves; (2) well-written and designed invitation

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letters, websites, and other outreach channels; (3) incentives tailored to national contexts; and (4) regular contact (ideally twice per year) with respondents through letters, information brochures, requests for updated contact information, and, where feasible, the collection of annual questionnaires to keep respondents engaged.

GGS-I operations and data collection

The data collection of GGS-I was conducted primarily by national teams[9], which consisted of national statistical offices, national research institutes, or a combination of both. To facilitate country-comparability in survey content and alignment of fieldwork procedures, the GGS core questionnaire was distributed to national teams, together with the technical guidelines on fieldwork procedures. National teams were asked to field the survey as closely as possible to the core questionnaire and to follow the guidelines. However, they retained the flexibility to adapt and conduct the survey according to the specific circumstances and needs of their country.

In total, 19 countries conducted the GGS-I baseline survey (wave 1), of which 14 carried out a follow-up survey (wave 2), and 4 countries also conducted a third wave. Several studies have documented the fieldwork procedures in GGS-I and concluded that most countries adhered to the general guidelines regarding the target population, sampling method (probability sampling), and sample size (Fokkema, *et al.*, 2016; Gauthier, Cabaço and Emery, 2018). This typically resulted in large, nationally representative samples ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 respondents, although some countries opted for even larger samples than specified in the guidelines.

Table 4 summarizes the information on GGS-I fieldwork operations, with more detailed documentation provided by Fokkema *et al.* (2016). Cross-country variation is clearly visible. First, the exact age range of respondents varies across countries. However, cross-country comparability remains valid due to a substantial overlap in age ranges. Second, the fieldwork periods differ between countries, which may affect cross-country comparisons as differences observed may be partially explained by timing effects. Third, survey modes and response rates vary across countries. While most countries conducted face-to-face interviews, a few combined face-to-face interviews with self-administered paper questionnaires or telephone interviews (Australia, Estonia, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden). In Sweden, registry information was also used in combination with survey interviews to reduce questionnaire length.

GGS-II operations and ongoing fieldwork

The operations in GGS-II are more centralized than in GGS-I. The GGP CCT collaborates closely with national teams[10] throughout the entire data life cycle, from early planning and preparation to data documentation and release. Overall, compliance with the questionnaire and fieldwork design is greater in GGS-II than in GGS-I. Central coordination has helped to minimize and systematically document differences between countries during fieldwork.

Despite this centralized approach, three countries deviated from the main guidelines in recoding the questionnaire and using their own fieldwork operations: Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. This was justified by the integration of the GGS into FReDa in Germany (Hank *et al.*, 2024), the need for substantial questionnaire adaptations due to the availability of registry data to supplement survey data in Sweden (Neyer, Andersson and Dahlberg, 2024) and the juxtaposition of experimental work with the main GGS in the UK (Perelli-Harris *et al.* 2023). Despite these variations, close collaboration and communication between the national teams and the GGP CCT ensured that the data collected remained comparable with the other GGS-II datasets.

Table 5 provides additional information on the countries and territories that have conducted or will soon conduct GGS-II. This comprises net sample size, age range, response rate, data collection mode, and the time span of data collection. Two main types of sampling frames have been used in GGS-II: population registers with individual names as sampling element, and area sampling using addresses or dwellings. In countries using population registers, simple random sampling has been applied[8]. Countries using addresses as the sampling element adopted multistage sampling. Within each stage, the units were selected using probability proportional to size sampling. One respondent within each household was then randomly selected. The United Kingdom, for example, used stratified random probability sampling to select household addresses and applied the last birthday method to select the respondent.

Most GGS-II countries and territories rely on CAWI as the primary mode of data collection. In Germany and Sweden, PAPI was used in addition to CAWI as a fallback option to reduce survey non-response and potential recruitment or selection bias. In France, CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) is used alongside CAWI. Argentina (Buenos Aires), Belarus, Kazakhstan and Moldova conducted only face-to-face interviews because of low-level internet penetration and unstable internet connections.

Response rates vary across countries and territories. In general, response rates are much higher in countries using CAPI compared to those using CAWI only or mixed-modes. Among CAWI or mixed-mode countries, several factors may contribute to the variation in response rates, such as the sampling frame, number of reminders, and the incentive scheme. These patterns

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Table 4 Main fieldwork characteristics for GGS-I

Country/ territories	Data collection			Frame	Mode Wave 1	Age range Wave 1	Completed Interviews Wave 1	Response rate Wave 1 (%)	Attrition rate (%)
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3						
Australia*	Aug 2005—Mar 2006	Aug 2008—Feb 2009	-	Area	PAPI, CATI, SAPQ	18–79	12,759	78.1	10
Austria	Sep 2008—Feb 2009	Sep 2012—May 2013	-	Individual	CAPI	18–45	5,000	60.7	22
Belgium	Feb 2008—May 2010	-	-	Individual	CAPI	18–79	7,163	41.8	-
Bulgaria	Nov 2004—Jan 2005	Apr 2007—Jun 2008	-	Area	PAPI	18–79	12,858	69.2	27
Czech Republic	Feb—Sep 2005	Jan 2008—Mar 2009	-	Area	PAPI	18–79	10,006	42.0	53
Estonia	Sep 2004—Dec 2005	-	-	Individual	PAPI, SAPQ	21–80	7,855	70.2	-
France	Sep—Dec 2005	Oct—Dec 2008	Oct—Nov 2011	Individual	CAPI	18–79	10,079	56.0	39
Georgia	Mar—May 2006	Apr—Jun 2009	-	Individual	PAPI	18–74	10,000	71.4	17
Germany	Feb—May 2005	Sep 2008—Mar 2009	-	Area	CAPI	18–79	10,017	55.3	68
Germany (Turkishsub-sample)	May 2006—Dec 2006	Sep 2009—Feb 2010	-	Area, local registers	CAPI	18–79	4,045	34.1	75
Hungary	Nov 2004—Jan 2005	Nov 2008—Feb 2009	Mar—Mar 2013	Area	PAPI, CAWI	21–78	13,540	53.1	23
Italy*	Nov 2003—Jan 2004	Feb—Mar 2007	-	Individual	PAPI, SAPQ, CATI	18–79	9,570	48.0	32
Japan*	Feb—Mar 2004	Mar—Apr 2007	-	Individual	PAPI	18–69	9,074	60.5	66
Lithuania	Apr—Dec 2006	Jun—Dec 2009	-	Area	PAPI	18–79	10,036	33.6	61
Netherlands*	Oct 2002—Jan 2004	Sep 2006—Jun 2007	Apr 2010—Feb 2011	Area	CAPI, SAPQ, CATI, CAWI	18–79	8,161	37.3	27
Norway	Jan 2007—Sep 2008	-	-	Individual	CATI, SAPQ, Register	18–79	15,114	59.7	-
Poland	Oct 2010—Feb 2011	Sep 2014—Feb 2015	-	Individual	PAPI	18–79	19,987	41.6	27
Romania	Nov—Dec 2005	-	-	Area	PAPI	18–79	11,986	85.8	-
Russian Fed.	Jun—Aug 2004	Apr—Sep 2007	-	Area	PAPI	18–79	11,261	41.6	31
Sweden	Apr 2012—Apr 2013	2016	2021	Individual	CATI, SAPQ, CAWI, Register	18–79	9,688	58.8	5

Notes:.
Source: Information is taken from the GGS Study Documentation for each country available on the GGP Colectica portal (https://ggp.colectica.org/). For *Australia*, data are drawn from the *HILDA User Manual* (Release 22). GGS-I Wave 1 corresponds to HILDA Wave 5, and GGS-I Wave 2 corresponds to HILDA Wave 8. For *Japan*, the source is the *Country Progress Report on Japanese GGP* submitted to UNECE. For the *Netherlands*, information on the Wave 3 fieldwork period and sample size is taken from the *Netherlands Kinship Panel Survey* (NKPS), which serves as the Dutch contribution to the GGS.
*For these countries, data have been post-harmonized to align with the GGS framework.
Survey modes: CAPI = Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing; CATI = Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing; CAWI = Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing; PAPI = Paper-and-Pencil Personal Interviewing; SAPQ = Self-Administered Paper Questionnaire.
Response rate: The response rate is defined as the proportion of completed interviews relative to the gross sample. In countries with three waves, the attrition rate reflects the average across waves. In Waves 2 and 3, Sweden used population registers to track respondents, and emigration or death were the only causes of attrition.

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Table 5 Main fieldwork characteristics for GGS-II

Country/territories	Data Collection Wave 1	Wave 2	Frame	Mode Wave 1	Age range Wave 1	Net sample Wave 1	Completed interviews Wave 1	Share of women Wave 1(%)	Response rate Wave 1(%)
Argentina (Buenos Aires)	Aug—Dec 2022	Planned in 2025	Area	CAPI	18–79	2,393	2,294	58.3	40.0
Austria	Oct 2022—Mar 2023	Planned in 2026	Individual	CAWI	18–59	8,267	6,781	59.0	38.2
Belarus	Apr—Nov 2017	-	Area	CAPI	18–79	9,994	9,562	55.2	76.4
Croatia	May—Jul 2023	Planned in 2026	Individual	CAWI	18–54	7,487	6,894	55.7	43.9
Czechia	Oct 2020—Jul 2022	Jan—Sept 2025	Area	CAWI, CAPI	18–69	5,594	5,463	58.9	28.5
Denmark	Mar—Jun 2021	Planned in 2025	Individual	CAWI	18–49	8,269	4,986	55.8	19.6
Estonia	Mar—Jun 2021	Mar—Jun 2025	Individual	CAWI	18–59	9,257	9,257	56.9	29.1
Finland	Oct 2021—Mar 2022	-	Individual	CAWI	18–54	3,388	2,954	57.8	17.2
France	Jan—July 2024	*Pending*	Individual	CAWI, CATI	18–79	14,285	13,316	54.6	29.8
Germany	Aug 2021—Jan 2022	Apr 2024—Jan 2025	Individual	CAWI, SAPQ	18–59	22,048	18,400	55.5	24.9
Hungary	Planned in 2025	*Pending*	Individual	CAWI, CAPI	18–59	-	-	-	-
Hong Kong (SAR)	Feb—Apr 2023	*Pending*	Area	CAWI	18–59	4,551	4,236	55.8	28.3
Iceland	Aug– Nov 2025	-	Individual	CAWI	18–79	-	-	-	-
Italy	Jun– Dec 2025	*Pending*	Individual	CAWI, CAPI	18–79	-	-	-	-
Kazakhstan	Apr—Oct 2018	-	Area	CAPI	18–79	14,857	14,039	60.9	99.8
Latvia	Sep– Jan 2025	Planned in 2028	Individual	CAWI, CAPI	18–59	-	-	-	-
Lithuania	Planned in 2025	-	Individual	CAPI	18–79	-	-	-	-
Moldova	Jan—Dec 2020	Nov 2024—Feb 2025	Area	CAPI	18–79	10,074	9,894	61.9	50.6
Netherlands	Nov 2022—Nov 2023	Planned in 2026	Individual	CAWI	18–59	8,078	7,355	59.5	32.1
Norway	Nov—Dec 2020	Apr—May 2024	Individual	CAWI	18–54	5,374	4,571	56.0	36.2
Poland	Sep—Dec 2025	Planned in 2028	Individual	CAWI, CAPI	18–59	-	-	-	-
Romania	Planned in 2026	-	Individual	CAWI	18–59	-	-	-	-
South Korea	Oct 2024—Mar 2025	*Pending*	Area	CAWI	19–59	-	-	-	-
Sweden	Mar—Aug 2021	Planned in 2025	Individual	CAWI, SAPQ	18–59	8,082	8,013	55.2	27.7
Switzerland	Planned in 2026	Planned in 2029	Individual	CAWI, CAPI	18–79	-	-	-	-
Taiwan	Jan 2024—Feb 2025	-	Area	CAWI, CAPI	18–79	7,761*	7,594*	54.63*	15.0*
United Kingdom	Aug 2022—Jan 2023	Planned in 2025	Area	CAWI	18–59	7,875	7,214	63.0	-
Uruguay	Oct 2021—Oct 2022	-	Area	CAPI, CAWI	18–79	7,192	7,101	63.6	30.0

Notes:.
*Estimates based on the latest data export; data collection is still ongoing.
Countries in preparation have secured funding and are planning fieldwork for either Wave 1 or Wave 2. Countries pending for Wave 2 are in the process of securing funding.
Survey modes: CAPI = Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing; CATI = Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing; CAWI = Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing; SAPQ = Self-Administered Paper Questionnaire.
Sample size: The net sample size includes respondents who completed at least the first two modules on Demographics and Life Histories. Completed interviews refer to respondents who completed the entire survey. The response rate is calculated as the proportion of the net sample size relative to the gross sample.
In Sweden, the follow-up will be conducted using population register data. In Germany and South Korea, GGS-II is integrated into existing panel surveys (FreDA in Germany and KLoWF in South Korea).

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have become even more pronounced in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the shift toward CAWI data collection and introduced new challenges in reaching respondents. As a result, response rates in recent years are generally lower than in previous rounds. Nevertheless, the data remain robust and representative.

Several GGS-II countries conducted fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have affected data collection and cross-country comparability. Yet, in countries with web-based data collection, the COVID-19 situation, such as lockdowns, had no direct impact on the practical aspects of fieldwork (Dommermuth and Lappegård, 2021; Hägglund, et al, 2024). In Sweden, GGS-II was conducted in two self-administered modes (CAWI and PAPI) by design. Although fieldwork in Sweden could be carried out without practical constraints, the national team took into account the potential impact of the pandemic on survey responses when planning the data collection period. The COVID-19 situation had a greater impact on fieldwork design in Germany and the Czech Republic. The German GGS-II was originally designed as a mixed-mode survey, with half of the interviews conducted in CAPI mode and the other half in CAWI. Due to the strict lockdowns, CAWI became the primary mode, with PAPI offered as a backup. In the Czech Republic, the fieldwork period lasted longer than expected—from 2020 to 2022—largely due to the pandemic, requiring the use of different ways to reach respondents.

Beyond its impact on fieldwork, the GGP CCT was also responsive to the research opportunities presented by the pandemic, particularly its effect on individual life courses. A question on how the pandemic may have affected various aspects of well-being, such as quality of life, mental and physical health and partner relationship was offered to countries (for a technical memo on the COVID-19 question in GGS-II, see Rijken, Emery and Gauthier, 2020).

Data processing and management

Once the data have been collected, they enter a series of key operations including data processing, harmonization, quality checks, documentation, and eventually release to users. Regarding the first step, the aim of the processing and harmonization procedures is to ensure that the data from different countries are coded in exactly the same way, with country-specific variables and response categories clearly indicated. However, the extent of the necessary data harmonization procedures differs between GGS-I and GGS-II. For GGS-I, national teams were responsible for pre-harmonizing the data to a common standard. The final part of the harmonization procedure was carried out by the GGP CCT to ensure that national teams adhered to the guidelines and that the data are comparable across countries. This process also included checking the questionnaire routing and consistently coding different types of missing data. Moreover, it encompassed sorting grids and event histories, and constructing variables that contain basic socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent.

For GGS-II, the need for data harmonization is less extensive than in GGS-I because the questionnaire was coded centrally, ensuring the data arrive at the GGP CCT in a uniform format. However, some steps are still necessary to improve comparability and user-friendliness, such as consistently coding missing values, formatting date variables, and removing all personal identifiers. Overall, only the most necessary edits are made to the data to preserve the original quality and content of the data. Moreover, the GGP CCT centrally produces the GGS-II weights based on the most recent and reliable information on population figures provided by the national teams for five variables: age, gender, region, level of education, and marital status. The weights are included in the released datasets.

Once the data have been harmonized, they are then documented using the standards of the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) Lifecycle, which is a structured metadata framework for describing longitudinal social science data. Users can access the GGS documentation through the GGP Colectica Portal. This portal allows potential users to browse the GGS data online before requesting access to the microdata. It also enables users to view the questionnaire in the national language and provides a list of all variables in the dataset. For each variable, the question text, response options, missing value codes, filter conditions, and descriptive statistics are displayed. Additionally, all relevant metadata at the study level, including details about the fieldwork in each country, such as gross sample size, sampling frame, mode of data collection, and period of data collection is available.

The final step is the release of the microdata to users. The GGP CCT releases the data as soon as possible after the fieldwork has ended. The microdata are available free of charge to approved users from the GGP Research Community through the GGP website. To become an approved user, applicants need to register on the website and accept the "Terms of acceptable usage". This ensures that the GGS data are used only for scientific and non-commercial purposes. After the request is verified and accepted, the applicant gains access to the de-personalized microdata through the user account and can download the files in Stata, SPSS, and CSV format. Access to GGS-I Norway and GGS-I Australia requires a special access procedure: in addition to the signed forms, users need to provide an abstract outlining their research plans with the data.

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The released data are prepared in such a way that they are harmonized with the other datasets from the same round of data collection, reducing the need for users to post-harmonize the data within rounds. However, due to substantial changes in the questionnaires between GGS-I and GGS-II, the data from the two rounds are not directly comparable, and harmonization is therefore necessary. This has not (yet) been carried out, but it is technically feasible and would require taking into account the design features and questionnaire structure of both rounds. Notably, the partnership and fertility histories of both rounds have been harmonized in the framework of the project 'Harmonized Histories'.[11]

Impact and research potential

Since its launch, the GGS data have had a significant scientific and societal impact. This is evident in the many academic publications and government reports that have used the data to inform policy and advance research in demography, population studies, and family dynamics (for more discussion on the impact of GGS-I, see Gauthier, Cabaço and Emery, 2018). Given that the GGS is a survey focussed on life course and family dynamics, it is unsurprising that topics such as fertility decisions, union formation and dissolution, intergenerational relationships, and gender roles have been prominent in studies using GGS data.

Cross-country comparative analyses

The cross-national comparability of GGS data provides unique research opportunities, setting the GGS apart from single-country data collections such as the *German Socio-Economic Panel* (Goebel *et al.*, 2018) or *Understanding Society* (Buck and McFall, 2012). The broad geographical coverage of the GGS has enabled researchers to study cross-country differences in life course events (Vikat *et al.*, 2007; Zimmermann and Konietzka, 2018; Schwanitz, Rampazzo and Vitali, 2021) or fertility intentions (Dantis, Rizzi and Baudin, 2023; Barker and Buber-Ennser, 2024). Recent research has highlighted, though, that classic theories like gender equity theory (McDonald, 2000) and gender revolution theories (Esping-Andersen, 2009; England, 2010; Goldscheider, Bernhardt and Lappegård, 2015) may not fully explain these phenomena in non-Western societies (Kan *et al.*, 2022). GGS-II expanded the geographical scope to Latin America and East Asia, thereby allowing global comparisons of family dynamics, population trends, and gender equality.

In addition to comparing and describing cross-national differences in various aspects of family life, GGS data have also enabled researchers to examine the impact of the broader social contexts on individual life courses and well-being. These macro-micro relationships have been a central focus since the start of the GGS (Vikat *et al.*, 2007), resulting in research about how institutional, economic, social, and political setups influence individuals' lives. This includes examining the effects of different welfare systems, levels of welfare support and generosity, economic prosperity, religiosity, and demographic profiles of countries (e.g. Hofäcker, Stoilova and Riebling, 2013; Fernández Soto, Fostik and Laplante, 2020). For example, Bein, Gauthier and Mynarska (2021) demonstrate that the influence of religiosity on fertility intentions differs widely across countries, being more pronounced in those with traditional gender norms.

Longitudinal study using GGS data

The longitudinal design of the GGS has significantly advanced the understanding of life course transitions and their implications. GGS data have been instrumental in studying changing life course patterns, particularly the transition into adulthood. By providing detailed retrospective information on key demographic events such as leaving the parental home, marriage, divorce, and childbirth, GGS data allow researchers to analyse how these events occur and in what sequence. Research using GGS-I data has revealed significant shifts in the timing and order of these events, highlighting that different pathways into adulthood in Europe have evolved. For example, Schwanitz (2017) finds that young adults in Western Europe leave home later and cohabit longer, while those in Eastern Europe show more traditional patterns. Moreover, studies using GGS-I data have pointed to social stratification in the transition to adulthood (Billari, Hiekel and Liefbroer, 2019) and found that returning to the parental home is prevalent among single mothers as a source of kin support (Hogendoorn and Härkönen, 2023). GGS data have also been used to shed new light on people's evolving understanding of cohabitation (Hiekel, Liefbroer and Poortman, 2014), the impact of education on family formation (Martín-García, Seiz and Castro-Martín, 2017), the gendered relation between family formation and moving (Deimantas, 2023), and the impact of labour force participation on childbirth (Tomatis and Impicciatore, 2023).

Another core strength of GGS lies in its prospective panel design. One key application is the study of the realization of intentions. By linking intentions with actual outcomes observed in the follow-up wave, researchers have investigated the factors that facilitate or hinder the realization of these intentions. For example, following the Theory of Planned Behavior, studies have examined the impact of attitudes towards having a child, subjective norms for having a child, and perceived behavioural constraints for having a child on (the realization of) fertility behaviour (Ajzen and

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Klobas, 2013; Dommermuth, Klobas and Lappegård, 2015). Additionally, the prospective design allows researchers to observe the impact of earlier life events and decisions on subsequent outcomes, such as changes in family circumstances, economic status, living conditions, and family support networks.

By covering a large age range, GGS data also allow researchers to study changes across cohorts, including changes in life course trajectories over time. For example, studies have shown that more recent cohorts have been delaying the transition into adulthood (Schwanitz, 2017) and that the partnership status at the birth of the first child has changed across cohorts, with the most recent cohorts more likely to have a child within a non-marital cohabiting relationship than in the past (Koops, Liefbroer and Gauthier, 2017). Moreover, in countries where both GGS-I and GGS-II were fielded, it is possible to extend the analyses of the changes to the most recent cohorts. This is particularly important in view of the increasing complexity and diversity of family dynamics. These cohort comparisons have also been central to examine inequalities across population subgroups, including patterns of disadvantage (Perelli-Harris and Amos, 2015).

New research avenues

As the GGS-II progresses and data from additional countries are gathered, new research opportunities will emerge. Here, we outline several of these potential avenues. However, it is important to note that this landscape is constantly evolving, particularly with the integration of new user-suggested modules.

Life course and family dynamics

With the persistence of (very) low levels of fertility, questions about the determinants of fertility continue to deserve considerable attention. For example, the recent decline in fertility in the Scandinavian countries suggests that even a particularly supportive family policy and gender equality may not be sufficient to maintain fertility at higher levels (Neyer, Andersson and Dahlberg, 2024). New GGS-II data will make it possible to investigate the role of uncertainty in fertility decision and to expand the scope of analysis to non-European countries with different institutional contexts. In addition, newly introduced survey items derived from the 'Traits-Desires-Intentions-Behaviour (TDIB) framework' developed by Miller (1994; 1995) will enable researchers to assess the extent to which specific motivational traits and desires are associated with fertility intentions and their realization (Mynarska and Raybould, 2020). Finally, the new module on intensive parenting (Billingsley *et al.*, 2025) opens up important research opportunities to explore the role of normative standards of parenting in fertility decision-making. The concept itself is not new, but it has rarely been included in large-scale surveys, and even less so in large-scale cross-nationally comparative surveys (Gauthier and de Jong, 2021). The new data, therefore, provides a unique opportunity to examine how widespread these standards of parenthood are and how they relate to fertility decisions.

Another avenue of research concerns the growing complexity of family life, including how couples meet and the custodial arrangements after union dissolution. The inclusion of the question on how partners met, with 'online' as one of the answer categories, captures the rise of online dating, a phenomenon that has fundamentally changed the way potential partners first interact. It will be particularly interesting to examine whether unions formed online experience higher dissolution rates than those formed through other means.

The increase of singlehood represents one of the most notable demographic shifts in recent years, yet it has received far less attention than other relationship forms. Although research has increasingly focussed on diverse relationship arrangements that deviate from the traditional married or cohabitational norms (e.g. Living Apart Together), singlehood remains underexplored, in part due to the lack of cross-nationally comparative data (Liefbroer, 2025). Singlehood is a complex and multifaceted experience that can vary widely across cultural, social, and economic contexts. New survey items on the experience of singlehood will create opportunities to study this life stage across different countries and phases of the life course (Mortelmans *et al.*, 2025). This line of research is crucial, as it provides insights into evolving social structures, individual well-being, and the changing dynamics of familial and social support systems.

Mixed mode and survey methodology

The transition of GGS-II to a multi-mode data collection approach—and to web-only in many countries—has opened several new research avenues, relevant not only for survey methodologists but also for researchers in other disciplines. This includes examining the extent to which different modes of data collection—and the devices used to answer the survey (e.g. phone, tablet, computer)—affect survey completion, data quality (e.g. missing values), and the responses themselves. For example, recent studies revealed notable differences in responses to subjective survey items across modes (Piccitto, Liefbroer and Emery, 2022; Schumann and Lück, 2023). In contrast, responses to more objective survey items—such as fertility and partnership histories—appear to be largely consistent across modes (Leocádio *et al.*, 2023). As more GGS-II data becomes available, these types of analyses will be crucial for understanding both mode effects and the potential selectivity into different modes of participation.

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Conclusion

The GGS and its parent organization, the GGP, are celebrating their 25th anniversary in 2025—marking twenty-five years of collecting data to understand both the slow and the fast changes in individual life courses, as well as in in population and family dynamics (Billari, 2022). It also marks twenty-five years of developing a survey instrument capable of capturing the relevant dimensions of people's lives and addressing key scientific challenges related to population change. Today, as was the case twenty-five years ago, the importance of cross-nationally comparable data remains. Low fertility, population ageing, changing gender roles, work-family balance, the fragility and complexity of families, and the uncertainty among young adults all demand high quality data to understand their causes, consequences, dynamics, and inequalities.

Looking back, the success of the GGS as a cross-national longitudinal resource can be attributed to three key factors. First, the strong engagement of the scientific community—particularly the collective commitment to developing and sustaining an open-access resource. From the outset, the GGS and GGP have benefited enormously from the time and expertise of scientists. This includes their involvement in governance structures and working groups, their roles in national data collection teams, and their contributions as active users of the data. It is this community that has continually developed, used, and critically reassessed the data. Second, the Central Coordination Team has played a crucial role. Its efforts in developing fieldwork guidelines and collaborating closely with national teams have been essential to ensuring cross-national comparability and maintaining high data quality. Finally, dissemination and engagement activities have been key to promoting the use of the data—not only within the scientific community but also among policymakers and other stakeholders involved in public debate.

Looking ahead, the GGP aims to establish itself as a permanent research infrastructure, providing ongoing access to cross-nationally comparable data on population and family dynamics. Achieving this goal will require not only concrete funding commitments from participating countries, but also the flexibility to adapt to emerging scientific and societal challenges—as well as to developments in survey research and evolving data ecosystems.

Ultimately, it is the users of the data who will drive the future development of the GGP. They will challenge existing theories of family and demographic change, generate policy-relevant empirical evidence, and highlight areas where new data are needed. As the saying goes, data is the new gold—and the GGS stands as one of the key large-scale databases that help us better understand the world we live in.

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Data Availability

The data underlying this article are available in the GGP Data Portal.

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1 Some of the data included in GGS-I predate 2004, as they were originally collected through other surveys and later post-harmonised into the GGS framework.
2 Kazakhstan and Belarus started GGS-II data collection already in 2017/2018 but used an early version of the GGS-II questionnaire. Latvia followed in 2018 with a small-scale survey, also based on this transitional version.
3 We omit here the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) developed in the 1990s and the more recent Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of the 2000s as these were mostly targeted at low- and medium-level income surveys, and less so at countries facing low fertility. In fact, in recent years, some countries that have carried out a DHS and/or MICS surveys in the past, have now carried out a GGS.
4 Funded under the EU Seventh Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 212749
5 Funded under the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, Grant Agreement No. 739511
6 Blaise is a software system developed by Statistics Netherlands for designing and implementing complex survey instruments. It is widely used in official statistics and academic research for its flexibility and support of both interviewer-led and self-administered surveys.
7 The GGS in Australia was integrated with the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey.
8 Data from Japan was never harmonized with GGS-I but is disseminated through the GGP Data Portal and comparable with other GGS-I countries.
9 For information on the members and the affiliations of the national teams, please see the GGP Colectica.
10 For information on the members and the affiliations of the national teams, please see the GGP Colectica.
11 The 'Harmonized Histories' dataset is designed for cross-national and longitudinal research on partnership and fertility histories (Perelli-Harris, Kreyenfeld, and Kubisch, 2010). It standardizes data from both rounds of the GGS as well as similar surveys (e.g. the Spanish Fertility Survey 'Encuesta de Fecundidad'), including detailed information on partnership formations, dissolutions, and fertility behaviours. Researchers can access this data by registering and agreeing to the terms of use through the GGP data portal.

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