

# GGP RESEARCH NOTE

## The GGP in Eastern Europe: Insights into demographic change

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The past 25 years have seen considerable change in Eastern European societies following the transition to post-socialist economies. These social and economic changes have had considerable effects on the demography of these countries and form the basis of many of the challenges that these nations face today. Ageing societies, low fertility and changing families pose questions for policy makers and social researchers regarding the future of this region. In order to answer these questions it is vital that policy makers and social researchers have access to high quality data that enable insightful research and evidence based policy. Here we give examples of how the GGP has helped develop our understanding of some of the developments in this region.

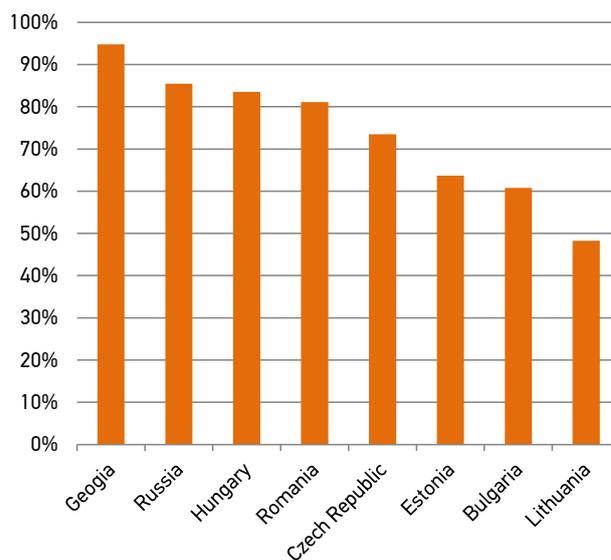
### What is behind Eastern Europe's Low Fertility?

Data from the GGP shows that in most Eastern European countries the majority of women perceive having children as necessary for fulfilment in life. This suggests that women still attach a great deal of value to parenthood. Nevertheless, the birth rate declined rapidly following the dramatic economic and social changes of the early 1990's. Fertility has shown some signs of recovery since then but remains well below levels witnessed prior to 1989, despite the persistent value attached to parenthood. Rather than being driven by changing values, it would appear that economic stability is at the root of much of Eastern Europe's fertility change. The decision to have a child is obviously related to the ability to provide for a family financially but research using GGP data has given key insights into how exactly the economic instability affected different sub-groups within society. For example, research using the GGP has shown that much of the decline in fertility in Russia after 1991 was due to a dramatic fall in the number of second and third children (Billingsley, 2011).

What is more these effects were pervasive across society affecting professional, skilled and unskilled workers alike. Such insights are crucial for designing and implementing effective policy solutions to demographic challenges that are sensitive to the reality faced by families and households.

### Motherhood and Employment

Eastern European societies are in transition. While family has always been of high importance, the economic reality leads to more and more women leaving the home and pursuing paid jobs. In most countries, the majority of women combine work and childcare and only very few stay at home to solely care for their children. As all over Europe,



**Figure 1 - Percent of people who think it is necessary for a woman to have children in order to be fulfilled**

*Source: Generations and Gender Programme, Wave 1*

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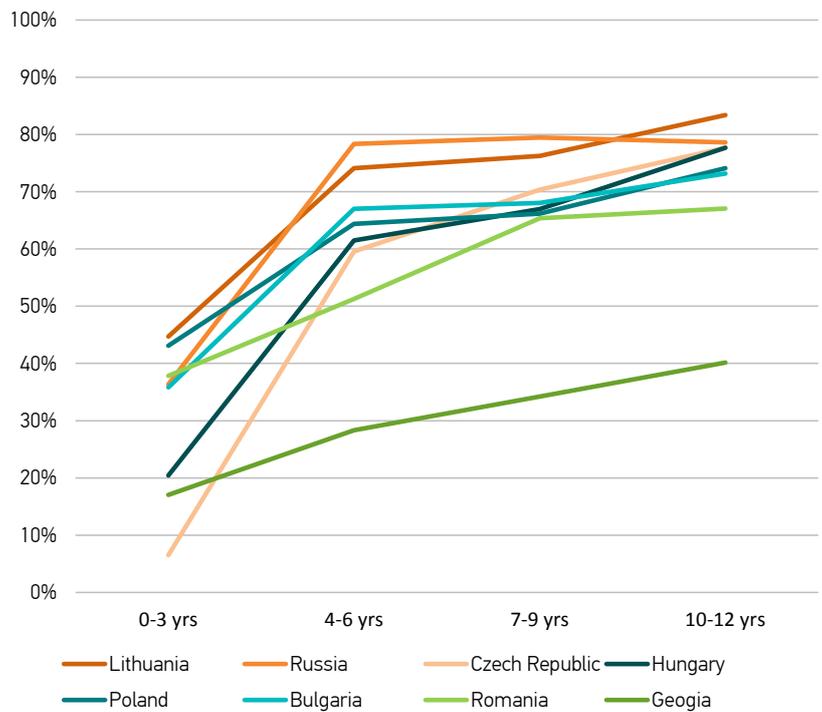
mothers increasingly pursue paid jobs as their children become older so that by the time their youngest child is 12 years old, the vast majority of mothers are back in employment. Georgia is a big exception: here most mothers stay at home even if their youngest child is above the age of 18. Being a longitudinal survey, the GGP allows researchers to follow these women over time and whether they are able to re-enter the labour market. Research using GGP data suggests that considerable structural constraints in Eastern Europe prevent women from re-entering the labour market and that motherhood has long term implications for a woman's career when compared to women in Western European countries (Gauthier, 2012).

**Attitudes towards gender roles and actual household distribution**

It is commonly assumed that couples in Eastern European countries have more traditional gender perspectives than couples in Western European countries, and also adjust their lifestyle according to it. While it is still true that the large majority of Eastern European couples still believe in traditional gender roles (on average 95%), many couples do not live according to this role distribution anymore. In most couples, men now participate in household tasks such as cleaning and cooking on a regular basis. Yet the extent to which this is true varies from country to country. In Georgia, the percentage of couples distributing their household tasks according to traditional gender roles is still high at 74%. Yet, in countries such as Russia, the majority of couples do not share household tasks along traditional gender lines, even though they still believe in them. These shifts in the distribution of household work are thought to be brought about by increased female employment. Traditional gender roles are still prevalent in Eastern Europe suggesting that value systems only change very slowly when compared to the rapid socio-economic change in the region over the past 25 years. The GGP allows us to see how people break with traditions due to economic circumstances while they continue upholding their traditional beliefs as well as the consequences of this dissonance between values and circumstance (Spéder & Kapitány, 2013).

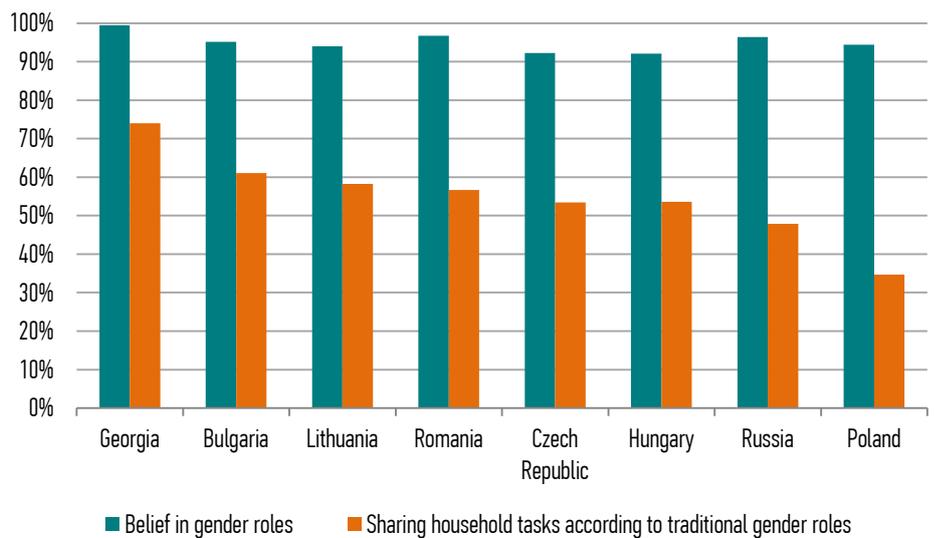
**Intergenerational Contact and Loneliness**

The European population is aging and taking care of the elderly is a considerable challenge facing Eastern European countries in particular. The need for children to care and support their elderly



**Figure 2 - The employment rate of mothers by age of their youngest child**

Source: Generations and Gender Programme, Wave 1



**Figure 3 - Percentage of couples believing in traditional gender roles and sharing their household chores according to traditional gender roles**

Source: Generations and Gender Programme, Wave 1

parents has risen and can be expected to rise even more in the years to come. On average the contact between young and old is considerable, with the average adult child making from five to eight visits per month to their ageing parents, with Russia and Bulgaria the countries where contact is most frequent. However older generations are significantly more likely to suffer from loneliness. 44% of the Russian population aged 60-79 years feels lonely regularly and the percentage is even higher in Georgia. These figures are much higher than in Western Europe and this is

primarily due to socio-economic deprivation. Yet survey data from the GGP allows us to show how contact with their adult children can help older generations combat loneliness and other indicators of well-being. So whilst loneliness is more common in Eastern Europe, it appears that the importance of strong intergenerational relations is universal (De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2010). For Eastern European countries looking to tackle many of the challenges that come with an ageing society, an understanding of the role of intergenerational relations is therefore essential.

### The future of the GGP in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

The Generations and Gender Programme is enormously proud of its coverage of Eastern Europe and is the only cross-national data source on demographic change in the region that covers the entire adult lifecourse. Given the continuing developments within the region and the challenges it faces over the coming decades, it is vital that policy makers and social researchers have access to comprehensive and high quality data. This data shines a light on how families are adapting and developing within the context of their ever changing environments and is thus invaluable for understanding the causes and consequences of these societal changes for Eastern Europe and beyond. To achieve this, the GGP aims to continue collecting data throughout the region through the support of its partners and stakeholders.

### For further reading...

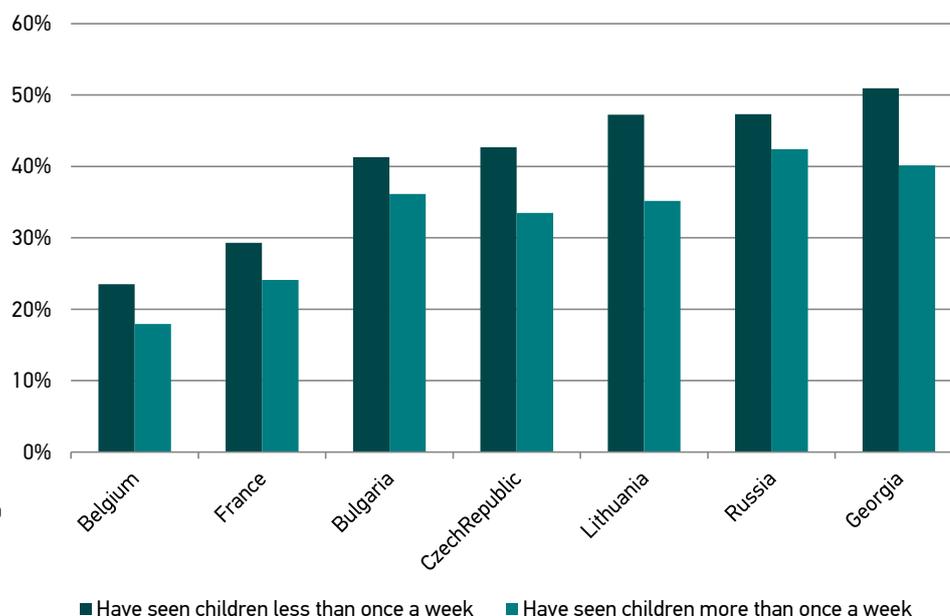
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Gierveld, Jenny De Jong, and Theo Van Tilburg. "The De Jong Gierveld short scales for emotional and social loneliness: tested on data from 7 countries in the UN generations and gender surveys." *European Journal of Ageing* 7.2 (2010): 121-130.

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**Figure 4 - Percent of 60-79 year olds who felt lonely very often**

Source: *Generations and Gender Programme, Wave 1*

## What is the Generations and Gender Programme?

Family relationships have changed a lot over the past few decades. Today's families differ considerably from the 1950s where a male breadwinner was supported by his dotting housewife. Families have become less stable, more complex and highly diversified. The rapid ageing of European populations has also contributed to this rapid pace of change and new types of families have emerged alongside new relationships between generations and between genders. Understanding these changes will help us meet many of the challenges that societies face today such as: How do we support and care for older people? How is disadvantage inherited? Why are women having fewer children? Answering such questions is the primary aim of the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP).

The GGP was launched in 2001 and now covers 19 advanced industrialized countries. It improves our understanding of how various factors affect family life by collecting high quality individual-level survey data on topics such as partnership formation & dissolution, fertility and intergenerational solidarity. Respondents are interviewed every 3 years and changes in the family life are recorded. Importantly, the GGP covers the whole adult life-course, between the age of 18 and 79, and is therefore the only dataset dedicated to the longitudinal and cross-national study of family life and generational relationships from early adulthood to older ages. Over time, the GGP follows respondents through relationships, marriages, parenthood, divorces, deaths and many of the trials and tribulations that people meet with, tracking the impact and consequences of these events at an individual and societal level. This survey data is complemented with indicators at the regional and national level through a contextual database and help us understand what part policy and other contextual factors play in family life.



### Generations & Gender Programme

For more information, visit our website: <http://www.ggp-i.org>  
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