Compliance and Usage in International Comparative Surveys: The Case of the Second Round of the Generations and Gender Programme

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Short Abstract

International surveys implement methodologies aimed at achieving comparable data across countries. These methodologies encompass the same questionnaires across countries and guidelines about data collection operations. National teams may adapt the questionnaires and guidelines to the national context. After fieldwork, data processing and documentation take into account these adaptations. However, differences across countries may remain. This paper examines the compliance to the baseline questionnaire in the second round of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-II) and whether it has improved compared to the first round of the data collection. The first round of the GGS (GGS-I) was run in 20 countries (Europe and beyond) and based on *post hoc* data harmonization, meaning that comparability mainly depended on data processing after fieldwork. With the start of the second round in 2020 (8 countries available as of November 2023), the GGP Central Coordination Office is directly involved in the preparation of national fieldwork and monitors survey operations. We examine compliance by analysing the extent to which the baseline questionnaire was fielded within each country. We then analyse whether compliance affects usage. This is captured through the number of times each country dataset is downloaded and used in publications. Finally, we compare the results with the compliance and usage in GGS-I, as it was analysed in a previous work. We expect that compliance will be greater in the second round and that it will affect usage. We conclude with recommendations for the management of international comparative surveys.

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Long Abstract

1. Introduction: comparability in international survey programmes

International survey infrastructures implement methodologies aimed at achieving comparable data. These methodologies include using the same questionnaires across countries fielding the survey, guidelines about questionnaire translations, sampling strategies, as well as data collection modes. National teams often have to adapt the questionnaires and guidelines to the different national contexts. These national differences are then dealt with during data processing and data documentation. This is paramount to achieve comparability and inform data users about implemented methods.

While most of the international survey projects are "deliberately designed comparative surveys" (Harkness et al. 2010:4), differences may be observed between projects in the details of the guidelines provided and in the extent to which these guidelines are compulsory for national teams. In general, such factors depend on the level of centralization of survey management. For example, surveys based on a centralized management model (e.g., European Social Survey) are more heavily involved in the implementation and enforcement of fieldwork guidelines.

2. The case of the Generations and Gender Survey

The Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) is a longitudinal comparative survey of 18-79 years old in Europe and beyond. It allows to study a variety of topics including partnerships, fertility, work-life balance, transition to adulthood, intergenerational exchanges and later life (Vikat et al. 2007; Gauther et al. 2018, Gauthier et al. forthcoming).

The first round of the GGS (GGS-I) was run in 20 countries and based on a relatively decentralized management model. It relied on considerable *post hoc* harmonization of data. The survey instruments and guidelines were either adapted to the different national contexts or partly incorporated into existing surveys (such as in the case of Italy and Hungary). With the start of the second round of the GGS (GGS-II) in 2020, the survey management became more centralised, with the GGP Central Coordination Office directly involved in the preparation of national fieldworks (e.g., translation of the questionnaire, definition of the target sample) and in the monitoring of survey operations. Any country deviation should be now discussed and approved by the Central Coordination Office before the fieldwork starts (GGP 2023).

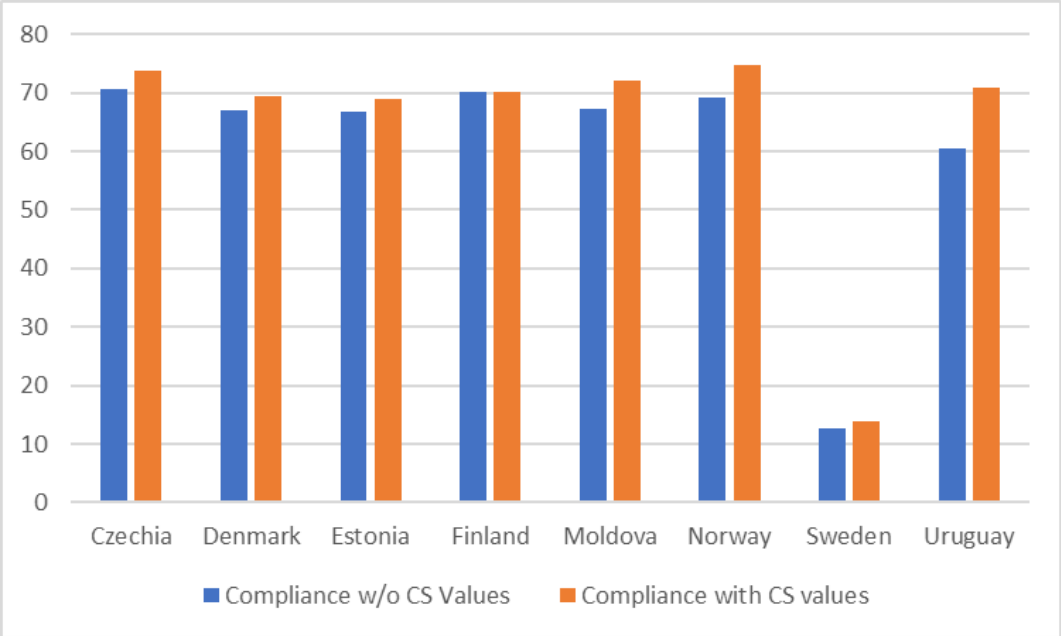
After four years of implementation, it is time to evaluate whether the new centralised management design has achieved greater compliance to the questionnaire and whether this has impacts on data usage. The aim of this paper is to reproduce for GGS-II the analysis of compliance and usage done by Emery & Caporali (2019) for GGS-I.

3. Data and Method

We focus on the analysis of compliance and usage with reference to the datasets available at the time of writing and that were released after 2020 (8 as of November 2023) for the Wave 1 of the survey. As already done by Emery & Caporali (2019), we consider the total number of variables in the pooled dataset as the total number of variables of the baseline questionnaire. We calculate the compliance as the percentage of variables included in each country dataset. We distinguish between two types of compliance: a) compliance that includes all variables even those having country-specific response categories (in orange in Figure 1), and b) compliance that excludes variables having country-specific response categories (in blue in

Figure 1). In both types of compliance, we do not consider the variables that were asked only in specific countries (i.e., the country-specific variables).

***Figure 1*: Overview of compliance (%) to the baseline questionnaire in the second round of the GGP data collection**



We then analyse whether and how compliance affects usage. We capture usage with the number of times each country dataset has been downloaded from the GGP data platform, and with the number of times it was used in peer-reviewed publications (i.e., journal articles and book chapters) recorded via the GGP website and other websites recording academic works. We run linear regressions to assess the effect of compliance on downloads and on the number of comparative publications. We use as controlling variables some contextual information such as, the number of months the country datasets have been available, and the strength of the academic community potentially interested in GGP in each country (e.g., number of members of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population). Finally, we compare the results with those obtained with reference to the first round by Emery & Caporali (2019).

3. Preliminary results

On average across countries, 64% of the baseline questionnaire was captured. This ranges from 14% (Sweden) to 75% (Norway). The countries with the highest compliance are those that followed most closely the guidelines prepared by the Central Coordination Office[2]. Compared to the first round of data collection, compliance is about the same (it was 66% on average at the first round). If we exclude Sweden from the analysis, which represents an exception (see note 2), however, the average compliance is higher than at the first round (72%).

We still have to complement the analysis with the data on usage. The analysis run with reference to GGS-I (Emery & Caporali, 2019) revealed that compliance does not affect number of downloads of each dataset from the GGP data platform, while it has a positive and

[2] Sweden followed a specific protocol as the dataset resulted from a combination of register data and self-administrated questionnaire.

significant effect on the number of comparative publications. We expect a similar output from the analysis of GGS-II.

In the future we will continue to update our analysis with the inclusion of additional available datasets, data on new downloads and new publications. We believe that such analysis is a key element to assess the success of deliberately designed comparative surveys, such as the GGP.

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