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# Households and families: Stability and fast development go hand in hand

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GGP BELGIUM PAPER SERIES – No. 6

Households and families:  
Stability and fast development  
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Documents in the GGP Belgium Paper Series receive only limited review. The views and opinions expressed in these papers are attributable to the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Statistics Belgium.

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## Introduction

This paper on households and families is a first descriptive analysis of the results of a large-scale survey which was organised in our country between 2008 and 2010. The Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) is part of a research project organised by the United Nations (UNECE) and aiming at following up and better understanding the developments of the relationships between men and women as well as between generations. Tens of thousands of people have been surveyed worldwide within the framework of this international survey. Relationships between generations and genders are the core of this research but, obviously, such issues cannot be thoroughly addressed without situating them within a broader context. 7,163 validated surveys have been collected in Belgium during the first survey wave. These surveys cover a wide range of issues such as relationships and households, children and parents, housing and work, incomes and transfers, health and well-being

This paper presents some results on the household composition and the partner relationships. We first check to what extent the data that were collected through the sample survey are representative for the whole population. The results of the sample are therefore thoroughly compared to administrative data about the whole Belgian population. This validation is quite technical but allows assessing the reliability of the survey data. It is an essential step in the research process. After the validation of the results, several issues on household formation, such as the relation with income and education level or the correspondence between household formation and religious beliefs and values, can be analysed. In this paper, we only validate and discuss the general results on households. In the last paragraph, we illustrate, using the LAT relationships, new information that, thanks to GGS, can be studied for Belgium for the first time.

## 1 Why should data on households be collected?

The last decades have seen major changes in the way family life is organised in all European countries. In the past, people more often lived a standard life course: people left the parental home to get married and have children. Parents who experienced the home-leaving of their children entered an ‘empty nest’ phase of life. Becoming widowed was the most important reason for partnership dissolution and marked, especially for older women, the beginning of a period of solitary life. Things changed gradually and the timing of all these events shifted to older ages. Moreover, more and more women worked outside the house. More and more partnerships were dissolved because of a separation or a divorce. The standard life course became a multiple-choice life course. Nowadays, leaving the parental home is no longer necessarily associated with going to live with a partner. People postpone marriage and childbearing or decide not to get married or to have children at all. People also live with a partner or have children outside marriage. People no longer live together “till death us do part”. At the same time, values and standards are changing. Gender relationships are subject to other requirements and the relationships between parents and children are modifying. The population is aging. The international migration is increasing. Mobility is increasing as a result of the changing labour market.

All those changes affect the size and composition of the households. The number of households increases as the size of households diminishes. Stem families (households made up of several families with blood ties) are becoming rare and the traditional core families (married couples with children) are more and more replaced by other kinds of households such as one-person households, non-marital cohabitation, with or without children, single-parenthood, stepfamilies and blended families, “Living Apart Together” (LAT) and “Living Apart Together At Parents home” (LATAP) relationships. The classical administrative statistics provide insufficient information about this kind of households. Such information can only be obtained through large-scale surveys such as the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS).

People more and more often belong to more than one household at the same time. Children of separated parents can either live exclusively with their mother/father or live alternately with their mother and their father. Some young adults live at the parental home during the weekend and somewhere else on weekdays. People with a LAT-relationship live together some days and nights but still have two addresses. Partners can live partially apart because of working conditions for example or a prolonged stay in an institution. People who cannot live independently can move from one household of family members to another. Identifying people with multiple places of residence becomes more and more important to describe the living arrangements of children and adults (Toulemon, 2008). The GGS survey allows identifying the people belonging to several households.

GGs also addresses two other important aspects of the household: the interactions between household members and the networks of household members with people from outside the household. Support and exchange of goods can also occur to a large extent between people who do not belong to the same household. In case of separation for example, parents can both partially care for the children. Or, children can provide informal care to their elderly parents without living at the same address. Classical statistics provide only little information on such networks.

Studies on changes in number, size and composition of households and the subsequent changes in living arrangements of specific population sub-groups are not only important in purely demographic terms. Policymakers and researchers need knowledge about households and information on living arrangements.

A policy on accommodation, for example, requires knowledge about the evolution of households (Vanneste e.a., 2007) rather than about the changes in population numbers. Taxes, household refuse collection, electricity grid connections, gas supply and other public utilities are arranged at household level. The household, rather than the individual, is often the basic unit for numerous important economic flows. The income is earned by individuals but the joint income determines the spending capacity of a household. Reduction in size of the households has a negative effect on their prosperity (Netherlands Institute for Social Research). The increasing number of households has a negative impact on environment: increasing greenhouse gas emissions, more domestic waste, heavier burden on surface water, higher water and energy consumption and more space utilised (Mira-T, 2006). An increase in the built-up area leads to a further soil sealing which can have a negative impact on hydrological regime and microclimate (Mira-T, 2007). More and smaller households also generate more mobility problems because of the lower occupancy of the private cars.

It is well known that the persons' living arrangements is a determinant of their well-being. Cohabitation protects against poverty (Cantillon, e.a., 2004; Geurts, 2006), loneliness (Vanderleyden & Heylen, 2007) and social exclusion (Pauwels & Pickery, 2007). The health of someone is influenced by his/her living arrangements (Corijn, 2009; Deboosere e.a., 2006). Child development can be partially determined by the kind of household in which they grow (Van Peer, 2007). The extent to which the elderly population uses home care or residential care depends among others on whether they live with others, like a partner or a child, or not (De Koker, 2006; Lodewijckx, 2006). Persons who live together in a household – certainly in case of partnership and parent-child relationship – can offer each other emotional, physical or financial support.

## 2 Definition of a household, household types and household position

The GGS survey applies a broad definition of the household. The respondent is asked to list all members of his/her household. If the respondent hesitates about whether to include a certain person among the household members or not, the following definition is read out: A household consists of persons who live in the same dwelling-unit for at least four days in a normal week. In addition to them, there are also:

1. Dependent children with joint custody, even if they are domiciliated at the other parent's home;
2. Others who mainly live in the same dwelling-unit, but study or work at non-daily commuting distances;
3. Others who are temporarily in hospital or jail.

Visitors whose main place of residence is somewhere else do not belong to the household.

The relationship of each household member with the respondent is asked. Household members should not be relatives. For example, three individuals who live together but are no relatives form a household but cannot be considered as a family.

At international level, households are classified in eight types:

1. Woman living alone
2. Man living alone
3. No family, co-resident persons
4. One nuclear family, couple without children
5. One nuclear family, couple with child(ren)
6. One nuclear family, single mother
7. One nuclear family, single father
8. More than one nuclear family (stemfamily)<sup>1</sup>.

A *nuclear family* is made up a couple with or without children or of a single parent with one or several children. If there are children, they should still belong to the household. Other persons (family members and/or non-relatives) can live together with the nuclear family.

However, they never include parents, children-in-law or grandchildren of the couple or of the single parent. In that case, the family is no longer considered as one nuclear family (*stem family*). A stem family is therefore made up of at least two families of different generations and related to each other by kinship. Cohabiting family members who have no partner or parent-child relationship, like two brothers living together, are considered as "*no family*"<sup>2</sup>. We also consider cohabiting non-relatives as no family. The GGS sample does not include collective households as it is drawn from the persons belonging to private households.

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<sup>1</sup> In the HDF-table, stem families are further broken down on the basis of the youngest family. In Belgium, a further breakdown does not make sense given the small absolute number of stem families.

<sup>2</sup> We classify a household which is made up of "1 or more grandchildren and 1 grandparent" as "no family". In the HDF table this household is considered as a stem family.

Each respondent takes up a specific position within the household. 8 household positions<sup>3</sup> are distinguished at international level:

1. The respondent lives with two parents  
He/she lives with his/her (step)parents and doesn't live with a partner. He/she *may* have children of his/her own. In addition to the parents, other family members or one non-relative may also belong to the household.
2. The respondent lives with a single parent.  
He/she lives with a single parent and doesn't live with a partner. He/she *may* have children of his/her own. In addition to the parent, other family members or one non-relative may also belong to the household.
3. The respondent lives with a partner, without children.  
He/she lives exclusively with the partner. Nobody else belongs to the household.
4. The respondent lives with a partner and children.  
He/she lives exclusively with the partner and the child(ren). Nobody else belongs to the household.
5. The respondent lives with other persons, without children.  
He/she doesn't live with children. He/she *may* be living together with a partner. Other family members (can be the parents if the respondent lives with a partner) and/or maximum one non-relative belong to the household.
6. The respondent lives together with others adults and children.  
He/she lives with children. He/she *may* be living together with a partner. Other family members (can be the parents if the respondent lives with a partner) and/or maximum one non-relative belong to the household.
7. The respondent is a single parent.  
He/she lives exclusively with children.
8. The respondent lives alone.

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, the HDF table distinguishes nine types. Household position 9 is "lives differently" and means that the respondent lives together with at least two non-relatives. However, he/she can live together with a partner, children or other family members. There are three cases in the Belgian GGS. In the household positions 1, 2, 5 and 6 we widened the criterion of one non-relative so that these three cases could be added to household positions 1, 2, 5 or 6.



Defined this way, the household position is not always related to the household type. Table 1 shows the possible household positions for every household type.

*Table 1 : Relation between household type and household position of the respondent.*

<i>Household type</i>	<i>Household position</i>
Woman living alone (type 1)	Lives alone (type 8)
Man living alone (type 2)	Lives alone (type 8)
No family, cohabiting persons (type 3)	Lives with other adults, without children (type 5)
One nuclear family, couple without child(ren) (type 4)	Lives with partner, without children (type 3) Lives with other adults, without children (type 5)
One nuclear family, couple with child(ren) (type 5)	Lives with partner and children (type 4) Lives with other adults and children (type 6)
One nuclear family, single mother (type 6)	Lives with both parents (type 1) Is a single parent (type 7) Lives with other adults and children (type 6)
One nuclear family, single father (type 7)	Lives with one parent (type 2) Is a single parent (type 7) Lives with other adults and children (type 6)
Stem family (type 8)	Lives with one parent (type 2) Lives with other adults, without children (type 5) Lives with other adults and children (type 6) Lives with both parents (type 1) Lives with one parent (type 2)

### 3 Comparison of GGS and National Register

The Belgian statistics on households and families (<http://statbel.fgov.be>) as well as the recent large-scale studies on the changing composition of households (Deboosere e.a., 2009; Lodewijckx, 2008) use the National Register as data source. The National Register data on households can be compared with the GGS results but the following aspects need then to be taken into account:

- The delineation of a household is different in the national register. It is based on the registration at the same main place of residence. The National Register describes the *de jure* situation. Classifying the households on the basis of the information from the

National Register has a strong administrative base. Some young people, for example, live alone or live with a partner without being married but are still domiciliated at the parental home for fiscal or administrative reasons. Decisions of public authorities can oblige household to declare an administrative composition that differs from the actual. Waiting registers in which the persons are not immediately registered in the population register, can generate people living alone or one-parent families while the cohabiting partner is in fact waiting for an administrative regularisation.

- In its questions on the household composition the GGS survey asks for the *de facto* situation. However, survey data also have their limitations. Survey data sometimes give a picture that can differ from reality as it is based on a sample and every sample is liable to random fluctuations. Even a large enough sample in which also unusual households types are represented, can be distorted because some respondents do not want to disclose their actual living arrangements. And, because of selective non-response (the selected person refuses to participate to the survey or can not be contacted) some household types can be over- or underrepresented in the survey.
- In the National Register, every household has a reference person and the bonds of filiation of every household member with this reference person are known. The GGS survey asks the bonds of filiation of the household members with the surveyed person who is not necessarily the reference person of the household. In some cases this can lead to another classification of the household and to assigning another household position to the respondent (for more technical details, see Lodewijckx & Deboosere, 2008). The data of both GGS and National Register have been processed in order to maximize the comparability of these two data sources.
- The National Register data describe the situation on 1 January 2008, i.e. about 2 years before the field work of GGS.
- We select from the National Register database all persons between the ages 18 and 79 who live in private households. This is the population subgroup from which the GGS sample is drawn.

In figure 1 we compare household position by 10-year age groups and for men and women separately, as it has been calculated in both data sources<sup>4</sup>. The pattern by age is similar for both men and women. The differences in household position are very small between the two data sources.

The main differences relate to living alone and co-habiting with a partner, with or without children. In particular, the GGS survey has a smaller share of men and women living alone in the age-range 18 - 49 than the National Register (graphs 1E and 1K). The difference between

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<sup>4</sup>The “Studiedienst van de Vlaamse Regering” applies the LIPRO typology to the annual files from the National Register which are delivered by Statistics Belgium. For this contribution, the LIBRO household positions are recoded. If there are other persons living in the household, all are given the position “other (co-resident)”. In GGS, household positions 5 (lives with other adults, without children) and 6 (lives with other adults and children) are gathered under the category “cohabiting with others”.

both data sources is greater for men than for women (except in the youngest age group). On the other hand, men aged 18 to 29 live more often with a partner (graph 1B) and men aged 30 to 46 (graph 1C) and women aged 18 to 49 (graph 1I) have more often a partner and children in the household according to the GGS data than in the National Register.

These observations are in line with expectations.

- First, young people living alone - especially men - have a smaller probability of being included in the GGS dataset because it is usually more difficult to contact them than persons who cohabit with a partner, with or without children.
- Secondly, the group of people living alone is possibly over-estimated in the National Register.
  - In the census 2001, precisely this group appeared to be the one which most often left the country (temporarily or not) without leaving an address. Some of them stay temporarily abroad for entertainment, their studies or their job. From a legal point of view, they live in Belgium but, actually, they are abroad for sometimes very long periods (several months to several years).
  - This is also the group (without ties) with the highest probability of migrating. Given deregistration from the National Register is not compulsory, this group has the highest probability of still being temporarily (wrongfully) registered in the National Register.
  - Finally, we can also assume that a part of the unmarried persons living alone according the National Register are in fact unmarried co-habiting persons who still have a separate place of residence.

In all age groups, except the youngest one, the proportion of men and women who live with other persons (with or without a partner and/or children) is lower in the GGS data than in the National Register (graphs 1F and 1L). However, it should be noted that the proportion of persons with that household position is in any case very small. A lot of the persons 'living differently' belong to a stem family, a household type that is less frequent in the GGS data than in the National Register (table 2). Two explanations are possible.

- The share of foreigners is somewhat underestimated in the GGS. We know that stem families are proportionally more common among foreigners than among Belgians (Lodewijckx, 2007).
- The share of the stem families may also be overestimated in the National Register. In the National Register, families which live in the same house that it has been divided into flats are sometimes registered as one household especially if there are family ties. There also exist some intermediate forms such as the kangaroo housing.

For the other household positions, the differences between the data sources are generally very small. We identified two patterns.

- First, the share of single fathers – especially fathers in the age group 40 - 49 – is somewhat higher in the GGS data than in the National Register. These fathers probably have children in joint custody and declare themselves as single father in the survey. In general, in case of divorce or separation involving children, the mother has official custody of the children. The mother is then registered in the National Register as a single mother and the father – even in case of joint custody - as a man living alone.
- Secondly, some people, especially women, stay slightly less long at the parental home according to the GGS data than according to the National Register. The difference between the official place of residence and the sociological reality is due to the fact that a lot of young men and women share their life between their original household and their new living arrangements.

Figure 1 : Household position of men and women, by age group, Belgium. Comparison of the GGS data with the National Register.



Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium

Table 2 compares the household type to which 18-79 year-olds belong<sup>5</sup> in the GGS data and in the National Register. A (very) similar picture emerges from both data sources. The differences found are rather related to earlier explained and discussed differences in the household positions. In GGS there are especially less men and women living alone and more couples with or without children. There are fewer stem families in the GGS than in the National Register.

With the last column in table 2 we want to highlight that GGS deals with the households to which 18-79 olds belong. The distribution is indeed different if we take all households of the National Register into consideration and if we break them down by household type. According to the National Register, 34% of all households are made up of one person whereas 17% of the 18-79 olds live alone (14% according to GGS).

*Table 2 : Household type of the people aged 18 to 79 in Belgium. Comparison of the GGS data with the National Register (NR).*

	<i>GGS</i>	<i>NR</i>			<i>NR</i>
	18-79 olds living in a private household	18-79 olds living in a private household	NR- GGS	NR/GG S	all private households
<i>Household type:</i>					
Woman living alone	7.0%	8.2%	-1.2%	0.85	17.8%
Man living alone	6.7%	8.5%	-1.8%	0.78	15.7%
No family, co-resident persons	1.2%	1.3%	-0.1%	0.90	1.3%
1 nuclear family, couple without children	29.2%	27.7%	1.5%	1.05	25.4%
1 nuclear family, couple with children	45.7%	42.4%	3.3%	1.08	28.7%
1 nuclear family, single mother	6.4%	7.2%	-0.8%	0.89	7.9%
1 nuclear family, single father	1.8%	1.5%	0.2%	1.14	1.5%
>1 nuclear family, stem family	2.1%	3.2%	-1.1%	0.66	1.7%
Number of persons (=100%)	7,121	7,917,191			
Number of households (=100%)					4,577,415

Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium

<sup>5</sup>The household types in the National Register database (classified according to LIPRO typology) are recoded to stem family if there are co-resident parents (in-law), children-in-law and grandchildren. It is impossible in the National Register to distinguish whether a child (of a couple or of a single parent) has a co-resident partner with who he/she is not married. It is in fact a stem family that is classified as a 1-nuclear family.

Finally table 3 compares the household size to which 18-79 year olds belong in the GGS data and the National Register. The greatest differences between the two data sources are observed in one-person households and in households with more than four members. The higher proportion of persons living with a partner and (frequently two) children results in a higher proportion of 4-person households in GGS. Additionally, there are in the GGS fewer very large households, to which stem families belong.

*Table 3 : Household size of the 18-79 olds in Belgium. Comparison of the GGS survey with the National Register (NR).*

	<i>GGG</i>	<i>NR</i>			<i>NR</i>
	18-79 olds living in a private household	18-79 olds living in a private household	NR- GGG	NR/GGS	<i>all private households</i>
<i>Household size:</i>					
1	13.7%	16.7%	-3.0%	0.82	33.7%
2	34.2%	32.9%	1.3%	1.04	31.7%
3	20.3%	20.5%	-0.1%	0.99	15.3%
4	20.4%	18.5%	1.9%	1.10	12.7%
5	7.9%	7.4%	0.5%	1.06	4.6%
>5 persons	3.4%	4.0%	-0.6%	0.86	2.1%
Number of persons (=100%)	7,121	7,917,191			
Number of households (=100%)					4,577,415

Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium

## 4 Household types according to housing characteristics

The most frequent household type to which the surveyed 18-79 olds belong is the “couple with children” (45%), followed by the “couple without children” (29%) (table 4). About 14% of the GGS respondents live alone and 8% are single parents.

Some household types are in a less favourable socio-economic and financial situation. As a result, they end up or remain more often than the standard household in a negative housing situation. The GGS corroborates the findings of the Socio-economic survey 2001<sup>6</sup>.

The single-family dwelling is by far the most common type of dwelling in Belgium. Especially couples with children live in single-family dwellings. Men and women living alone live much less frequently in this kind of dwelling. They live much more often in apartment than the other household types (table 4).

<sup>6</sup>The figures obtained in the GGS are close to the values of the socio-economic survey 2001. Since the household types in the two data sources have not exactly the same definitions, the figures of the census monograph (Vanneste e.a., 2007) are not fully comparable with the figures of table 4.

Table 4 : Household types according to dwelling characteristics. Belgium

	<i>All households</i>	<i>Woman living alone</i>	<i>Man living alone</i>	<i>No family, co-resident persons</i>	<i>1 nuclear family, couple without children</i>	<i>1 nuclear family, couple with children</i>	<i>1 nuclear family, single mother</i>	<i>1 nuclear family, single father</i>	<i>&gt; 1 nuclear family, stem family</i>
Number of respondents	7,162	509	478	84	2,107	3,253	456	125	150
	100.0 %	7.1%	6.7%	1.2%	29.4%	45.4%	6.4%	1.7%	2.1%
<i>Type of dwelling:</i>									
Single-family dwelling	81.7%	59.3 %	57.3%	79.8%	81.9%	89.3%	78.3 %	76.0%	84.0 %
Apartment	15.4%	37.3 %	37.4%	16.7%	15.7%	7.9%	19.7 %	19.2%	12.7 %
Others	1.5%	1.0%	2.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.7%	1.1%	2.4%	2.0%
Missing	1.4%	2.4%	3.1%	2.4%	1.2%	1.1%	0.9%	2.4%	1.3%
<i>Dwelling owner:</i>	74.9%	51.9 %	48.4%	57.1%	80.2%	82.8%	53.3 %	68.8%	69.3 %
<i>Number of rooms:</i>									
Average	4.8	3.7	3.6	4.6	4.5	5.3	4.7	4.7	5.5
25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	4	3	2	3	3	4	4	4	4
Median	5	3	3	5	4	5	4	4	5
75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	6	4	5	5	5	6	5	5	6
<i>Average number of persons per room</i>	0.64	0.32	0.36	0.6	0.51	0.8	0.62	0.61	0.94

Source: Generations and Gender Survey

As regards the occupant title, three quarters of the households are owner of the dwelling. There are however marked differences between the household types. The highest proportion of owners of their dwelling is observed among couples with or without children in the household and the lowest among single mothers (table 4). The share of owners among people living alone and single parents increases with age. So, among persons living alone, 24% of the 18-34 olds are owner of their dwelling as opposed to 49% of 35-64 olds and 66% of the people aged 65 and over. Among single parents, the proportion of owners increases with age and ranges from 50% to 59% and 73% for people aged 65 and over.



If we determine the size of the dwelling according to the number of rooms<sup>7</sup>, the people living alone appear to live in the smallest dwellings. Couples with children and stem families live in the biggest dwellings.

The occupancy, expressed as the number of persons per room, shows the opposite situation. Stem families and couples with children live in “over-occupied” dwellings; their average number of persons per room is higher than the average of all households. Among people living alone, the dwellings are “under-occupied”. Couples without children also have lower figures than average (0.51 person per room against 0.64 on average). Couples without children often have a double income. They need to a lesser extent a large living space – these are two-person households – but they generally can afford it. Early childbearing and being in the ‘empty nest’ phase of life can also explain why they live in a large dwelling (Vanneste e.a., 2007).

## 5 The position within the household

The household position reflects the living arrangements of a person as well as his/her situation in the life course cyclus. The large majority of children live with mother and/or father and possibly with brothers and sisters (this is not reflected in table 5 since this age group has not been surveyed in GGS). Half of all young adults (18 – 29 olds) in Belgium (still) live *at parental home*. The majority of the other young adults live with a partner without children or already with children. In the 30-39 age group, 65% of the Belgians live together *with a partner and children*. People live together with a partner and children for about 20 years. Then, a new phase of life begins during which children leave the parental home and people live exclusively with their partner (the ‘empty nest’ family). In the 50-59 age group, 37% of the Belgians live together with a partner, without children in the household. This share increases up to 62% among the 60-69 year-olds and it is also the most common living arrangement among the 70-79 year-olds.

Living alone becomes more and more common in old age. 29% of the people live alone in their 70s. This proportion further increases in the 80-89 age group (Deboosere e.a., 2009; Lodewijckx, 2008). The oldest of the elderly often live in a home for the elderly or a nursing home (table 5 does not show it since this age group has not been surveyed in the GGS; moreover, the sample excludes persons living in collective household).

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<sup>7</sup>Number of rooms excluding kitchen, bathroom(s) and toilets. Rooms for exclusively professional use, hallways and utility rooms are also not taken into account.

Table 5: Respondents according to their household position, by age and sex. Belgium

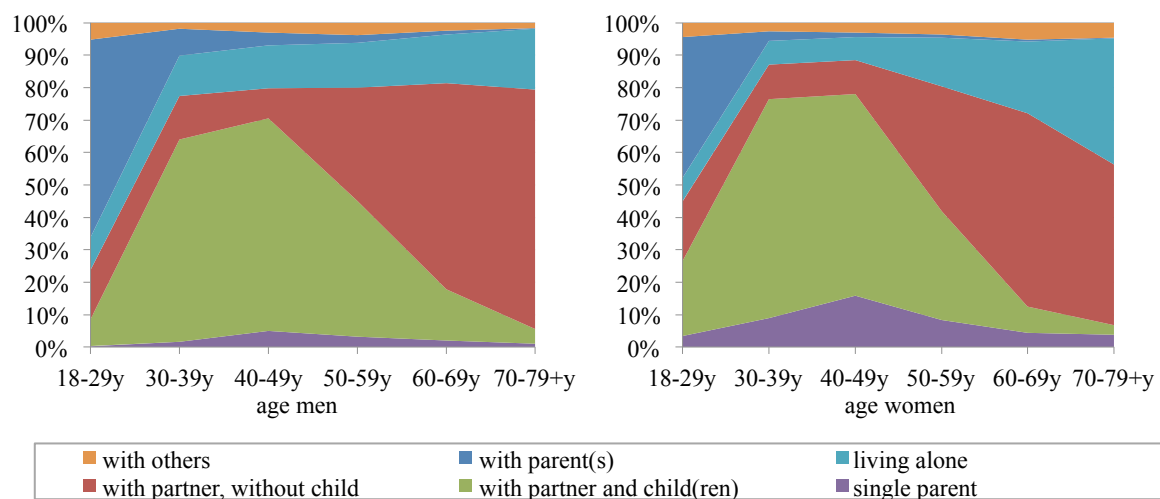
	<i>all</i>	<i>18-29</i> <i>year old</i>	<i>30-39</i> <i>year old</i>	<i>40-49</i> <i>year old</i>	<i>50-59</i> <i>year old</i>	<i>60-69</i> <i>year old</i>	<i>70-79+</i> <i>year old</i>
<i>Men + women:</i>							
<i>Number of respondents</i>	7,164	1,247	1,247	1,548	1,356	1,029	737
Lives with both parents	8.3%	41.3%	4.1%	1.5%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Lives with single parent	2.8%	10.9%	1.8%	1.2%	1.2%	0.8%	0.3%
Lives with partner, without children	29.3%	16.8%	12.0%	9.9%	36.7%	61.6%	61.5%
Lives with partner and child(ren)	37.0%	15.6%	65.0%	63.7%	37.8%	11.9%	3.7%
Lives with other adults, without children	1.7%	3.7%	0.8%	0.6%	1.5%	2.5%	1.9%
Lives with other adults and child(ren)	1.7%	1.1%	1.4%	2.4%	2.4%	1.4%	1.2%
Is single parent	5.3%	1.8%	5.1%	10.7%	5.7%	3.2%	2.4%
Lives alone	13.8%	8.7%	9.9%	10.1%	14.3%	18.7%	29.0%
<i>Men:</i>							
<i>Number of respondents</i>	3,558	627	649	743	676	500	363
Lives with both parents	10.1%	47.7%	6.2%	2.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Lives with single parent	3.7%	13.2%	2.2%	2.0%	1.8%	1.2%	0.3%
Lives with partner, without children	30.2%	15.2%	13.4%	9.3%	34.9%	63.6%	73.8%
Lives with partner and child(ren)	37.2%	8.3%	62.6%	65.5%	42.0%	15.8%	4.4%
Lives with other adults, without children	1.9%	4.5%	1.1%	0.9%	1.9%	2.0%	0.8%
Lives with other adults and child(ren)	1.2%	0.8%	0.8%	2.0%	1.9%	0.4%	0.8%
Is single parent	2.4%	0.3%	1.5%	5.0%	3.1%	2.0%	1.1%
Lives alone	13.4%	10.0%	12.3%	13.2%	13.8%	15.0%	18.7%
<i>Women:</i>							
<i>Number of respondents</i>	3,605	621	599	803	680	529	373
Lives with both parents	6.6%	34.8%	1.8%	1.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Lives with single parent	2.0%	8.5%	1.2%	0.4%	0.6%	0.6%	0.3%
Lives with partner, without children	28.4%	18.5%	10.7%	10.5%	38.5%	59.5%	49.6%
Lives with partner and child(ren)	36.9%	23.0%	67.4%	62.1%	33.7%	8.1%	2.9%
Lives with other adults, without children	1.6%	2.9%	0.7%	0.2%	1.0%	3.0%	2.9%
Lives with other adults and child(ren)	2.2%	1.6%	2.0%	2.7%	2.6%	2.3%	1.6%
Is single parent	8.2%	3.4%	9.0%	15.8%	8.2%	4.3%	3.8%
Lives alone	14.1%	7.2%	7.2%	7.2%	14.9%	22.1%	38.9%

Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium

Of course individual life course can diverge significantly from this dominant life course profile. Not everyone experiences all mentioned transitions while others experience some of them several times. Table 5 shows that there are also alternative life arrangements besides the dominant one. For example, two kinds of life arrangements are clearly identifiable for people aged 30 to 39. On the one hand, there is the couple household: 12% of the Belgian 30-39 olds live exclusively with a partner. On the other hand, there are the people living alone. One out of ten 30-39 olds lives alone. 25% of the 40-49 olds do not live together with children. However, 11% of them live *without partner, with (a) child(ren)*. A minority of Belgians live *with other persons*. This proportion does not change much with age.

The living arrangements of men and women may be strongly different (figure 2; table 5). The greatest differences are observed at the end of life.

Figure 2 : Household position of men and women, by age group. Belgium



Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium

Men live longer *at the parental home* than women: 61% of young adult men and 43% of young adult women live at the parental home. Long studying is one reason to continue living at the parental home. Often there are also financial reasons. Because of the expensive housing market going to live apart mostly means a decrease in the standard of living. Moreover, the mother continues to do a large part of the household work ('Hotel Mummy'). Small families and large houses contribute to living longer at the parental home. Only few life style standards are imposed; parents have a more tolerant attitude toward their children and vice versa. Therefore, the wish for autonomy no longer conflicts with living at the parental home (Elchardus e.a., 2007).

Young adult women more often live together *with a partner*. They also more often have a child or children in their household. The women aged 30 to 39 also more often live together *with a partner and children* than men of the same age. Family formation and childbearing also occurs at younger age for women. Given the age difference between the partners, men start a family with a two to three year gap (Lodewijckx, 2008). Men live more often with a partner than women in the 40-49 and 50-59 age groups. 77% of the men aged 50 to 59 live in

a household with a partner, against 72% of the women. After divorce or separation men more often remarry or go to live with a new partner than women (Corijn, 2005).

Non-marital cohabitation has become more and more popular in the past decades. For many Belgians marriage is no longer a prerequisite to having children (Lodewijckx, 2008; Deboosere e.a., 2009). Table 5 does not distinguish “marital” and “non-marital” cohabitation but GGS allows further investigating it.

A striking difference between men and women in middle age is the share of single parents. There are more single mothers than single fathers. 16% of the women aged 40 to 49 are single mothers whereas 5% of the men of the same age are single fathers. Divorce and separation as well as (official) custody of the children to the mother are the main explanations for this difference between men and women. GGS allows studying shared parenting.

Separation and divorce often go hand in hand with temporarily *living alone* and when children are involved in the separation, it is mostly the father who lives alone. About 13% of men aged 30 to 49 live alone against 7% of women. Young adult men also live more often alone than women of the same age. Divorce or separation can also be an explanation but we know that in 1990 young Flemish men started to live alone proportionally more often than women after leaving the parental home (Corijn, 1995). GGS can show whether this behaviour amplifies with time and whether this pattern occurs in the three regions. In old age, the death of the partner is the main cause for living alone. This factor is much more important for women than for men because men live on average shorter than women and because men are on average a few years older than their partner. Moreover, old women remarry less often than old men do (Corijn, 2005). 15% of the men aged 60 to 69 live alone against 22% of the women. Among 70-79 year-olds, the difference between both sexes is even greater: 20% of the men and 39% of the women live alone.

Old men live more often *with their partner* than women of the same age. So, 79% of the men aged 60 to 69 in Belgium have a partner against 68% of the women of the same age. In the 70-79 age group the difference between both sexes is even greater (78% and 53%). Many men remain indeed married until death.

In old age, a part of the population live *with one or more (adult) children* (8% of the women and 6% of the men aged 70 to 79). GGS allows investigating why those elderly people live together with their children. Do those elderly people need care?

## 6 Household size

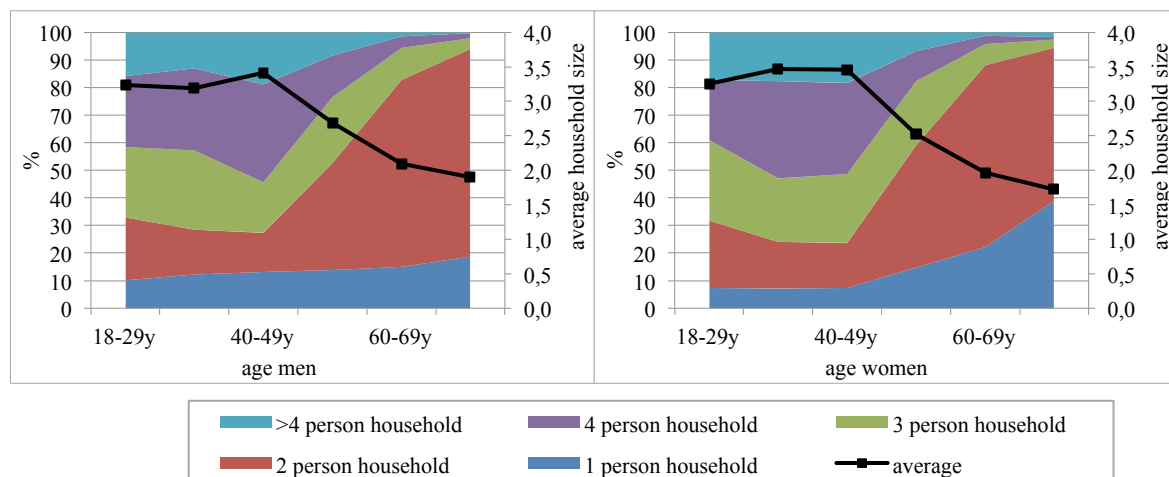
The 40-49 olds live on average in the largest households: 3.44 persons per household (table 6; figure 3). The average number of persons per household strongly declines among older age groups. The decrease is greater for women than for men: from 3.5 persons per household on average for women aged 40 to 49 to 1.7 person per household for women aged 70 to 79 versus from 3.4 to 1.9 for men.

The differences in household size according to sex and age are indeed related to the differences in living arrangements that we just discussed. Among young adults, differences in household size between sexes are not really significant. An equal household size may however be associated with different living arrangements. About four young adult men and women out of ten live in a household of at least four persons. They are for the most part young people who are still living at the parental home. 26% of the men and 29% of the women aged 18 to 29 live in a three-person household. Most of these men still live at the parental home. But about half of the young adult women who live in a three-person household live together with a partner and a child. Nearly a quarter of the young adult men and women live in a two-person household. The majority of those young adults live together with a partner, but there are here also differences between the sexes as regards living at the parental home: 24% of the young adult men in a two-person household live with a single parent whereas this share amounts to 12% among women. As previously stated, 10% of the young adult men and 7% of the young adult women live in a one-person household.

Because of the birth of one or more children, the proportion of people living in a two-person household declines from the age of 30 and is compensated by a higher proportion of people living in larger households. Moreover, this decline is also caused by people who divorce and go to live alone. From the 50-59 age group the proportion of people living in a two-person household is on the rise again because more and more persons in middle age enter the 'empty nest' period. From the age of 50, the proportion of people living in a four-or-more-person household declines. This is the consequence of either a son or a daughter leaving the parental home which turns a four-person household into a three-person household or of divorce or separation which generates a one-parent family to which two children belong. Men and women aged 30 to 59 follow a quite similar pattern but changes in living arrangements and household size occur at a little earlier age among women.

Proportionally few elderly people live in large households because children have left home and because elderly people living at a son's or daughter's home is not common in Belgium (Lodewijckx, 2004). The large majority of the elderly people live with their partner in a two-person household. Among men this proportion increases until the age of 70 and over but decreases among women after the age of 60 to 69. The proportion of people living alone increases among the elderly people, mostly because of the death of the partner. At the age of 70 and over, the proportion of women living in a one-person household is twice as high as that of men living in households of the same size.

Figure 3: Household size of men and women, by age group (% and average household size). Belgium



Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium

Table 6: Household size of the respondents, by age and sex. Belgium

	<i>all</i>	<i>18-29 years old</i>	<i>30-39 years old</i>	<i>40-49 years old</i>	<i>50-59 years old</i>	<i>60-69 years old</i>	<i>70-79+ year old</i>
<i>Men + women :</i>							
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	7,163	1,248	1,247	1,548	1,356	1,028	737
<i>Number of persons per household:</i>							
Average	2.86	3.25	3.32	3.44	2.61	2.03	1.81
median	3	3	3	4	2	2	2
<i>% living in a:</i>							
1-person household	13.8%	8.6%	9.9%	10.1%	14.3%	18.7%	29.0%
2-person household	34.4%	23.6%	16.4%	15.4%	41.5%	66.7%	65.1%
3-person household	20.2%	27.4%	26.1%	21.8%	23.5%	9.7%	3.4%
4-person household	20.3%	23.8%	32.4%	34.1%	13.1%	3.6%	1.5%
5-person household	7.9%	11.1%	11.2%	12.6%	5.7%	0.8%	0.5%
6-person household	2.2%	3.0%	2.7%	4.1%	1.3%	0.3%	0.1%
>6-person household	1.2%	2.4%	1.3%	1.9%	0.7%	0.2%	0.3%
<i>Men:</i>							
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	3,558	627	649	744	675	499	363
<i>Number of persons per household:</i>							
Average	2.87	3.23	3.19	3.41	2.69	2.10	1.90
median	3	3	3	4	2	2	2
<i>% living in a:</i>							
1-person household	13.4%	10.0%	12.3%	13.2%	13.8%	15.1%	18.7%
2-person household	34.4%	22.8%	16.0%	14.2%	38.8%	67.7%	75.2%
3-person household	20.2%	25.6%	29.0%	18.3%	23.9%	11.6%	3.9%
4-person household	21.0%	25.8%	29.6%	35.4%	15.1%	4.2%	1.9%
5-person household	7.7%	11.0%	10.3%	12.5%	6.1%	1.0%	0.0%
6-person household	1.9%	2.2%	1.7%	4.3%	1.3%	0.4%	0.0%
>6-person household	1.3%	2.5%	1.1%	2.1%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%
<i>Women:</i>							
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	3,605	621	598	803	681	528	374
<i>Number of persons per household:</i>							
Average	2.85	3.26	3.46	3.46	2.52	1.97	1.72
median	3	3	4	4	2	2	2
<i>% living in a:</i>							
1-person household	14.1%	7.2%	7.2%	7.2%	14.8%	22.2%	38.9%
2-person household	34.4%	24.5%	16.9%	16.5%	44.2%	65.9%	55.5%
3-person household	20.3%	29.3%	23.0%	25.1%	23.2%	7.8%	2.9%
4-person household	19.6%	21.7%	35.2%	32.9%	11.0%	3.0%	1.1%
5-person household	8.0%	11.4%	12.2%	12.7%	5.3%	0.6%	1.1%
6-person household	2.4%	3.7%	4.0%	3.9%	1.2%	0.2%	0.3%
>6-person household	1.1%	2.1%	1.5%	1.7%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%

Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium

## 7 Survey data supplement administrative data

Administrative data are deficient once relations between persons can no longer be identified through administratively relevant categories. It has long time been the case for non-marital cohabitation. By matching civil status and actual place of residence it was however possible to make a partial assessment of non-marital cohabitation on the basis of administrative data. But the comparison between survey data and reprocessed administrative data has shown that non-marital cohabitation has been under-estimated until the 90s when only the official address was taken into account. Young people were often still registered as living at the parental home while they had actually already moved in with a partner who was registered as living alone. Older cohabiting partners often kept two addresses for several reasons. According to GGS one out of five (19%) couple is unmarried among cohabiting partners. There are however significant differences according to age. Table 7 shows the percent distribution by partner status within each age group for all respondents broken down by sex. If we limit ourselves to the first two rows, the married and unmarried cohabiting partners, we can see that among the persons in their twenties, two thirds of the men and half of the women are not married with the partners with whom they are living. This proportion still amounts to more than 30% of people in their thirties. Among people in their forties, those figures are down to 17% of the cohabiting women and 15% of the cohabiting men.

At least equally interesting are the LAT relationships. ‘LAT relationships’, an acronym for “Living apart together”, was used for the first time in the late 1970s, probably in an article of a Dutch newspaper (Haskey, 2005). Meanwhile the term has gained notoriety among the general public and the phenomenon has already been thoroughly studied in several countries, especially in North Western Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world (Strohm e.a., 2009). GGS shows that not less than 9.6% of the respondents have a LAT relationship. If we limit ourselves to the persons having a partner relationship, this figure goes up to 12%.

*Table 7: Percent distribution of partner relationship status, among 18-79 olds in Belgium*

		18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
Men	married	8%	53%	66%	71%	77%	75%
	cohabiting	18%	24%	11%	8%	5%	4%
	LAT	30%	6%	7%	8%	4%	4%
	Living alone	44%	18%	16%	13%	15%	18%
Women	married	20%	54%	61%	66%	65%	52%
	cohabiting	24%	27%	13%	7%	4%	2%
	LAT	27%	6%	8%	5%	3%	2%
	Living alone	29%	14%	18%	22%	28%	44%

Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium



All authors agree that the term LAT relationships, also called “non-residential partnership” (Castro-Martin e.a., 2008) can cover relationships of very different nature according to the phase within the dating process and the motives behind them. Among young people, it is often an intermediate stage until their financial and material means allow them to live together. In budding relationships, it is often a stage during which one of both partners adopts a wait-and-see attitude before making a definitive commitment and deciding to cohabit (Régnier-Loilier e.a., 2009). The number of LAT relationships, especially at older ages, indicates however that a new kind of common life is arising which holds a special place in life course and which is consciously chosen. Two conditions must be met for people to engage increasingly in LAT relationships: a sufficiently high prosperity level so that people can afford to keep two houses for a long time (at least for people who do not live at the parental home) and a change in family values so that new kinds of relationships become socially accepted.

Several measurement points over a certain period of time will be necessary before concluding that there is an increase in Belgium. 2,462 parents living at home have been surveyed for the LOVO study<sup>8</sup> (2001-2002). LAT relationships were one of the items. However, LOVO was limited to people aged 55 and over and who lived in Flanders. The LOVO study shows that 11% of the men and 3% of the women who do not live with a partner have a LAT relationship (Jacobs e.a., 2004). The approach here is similar to that of de Jong Gierveld in a paper of 2004 on repartnering among seniors (de Jong Gierveld, 2004). If we take a comparable numerator and denominator for the GSS data, the figures appear to have risen substantially among elderly persons over the last decade. In table 8 we compare the number of LAT relationships with all persons who do not live together with a partner. In this table, we provide, for every region and age group, the percentage of LAT relationships among the total number of persons of the same region and age group who do not live together with a partner. 25% of the men in their thirties living in Brussels have a LAT relationship against 20% in Flanders and 31% in Wallonia. Given the sample variation, the percentages between regions are very comparable. The percentage LAT relationships among women in their thirties is significantly lower in Brussels. Figures are also very comparable between regions and sexes for people in their forties. Above the age of 50, several significant differences emerge between men and women. This is also related to differences in mortality rates between men and women which make that there are much less men available than women as the age rises while, on the contrary, the number of widows, and therefore the number women living alone, increases much stronger than the number of widowers. At older ages, LAT relationships are more popular among people living alone in Flanders than in the other two regions. We must however be cautious in interpretation given the smaller numbers and the great volatility of the percentages.

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<sup>8</sup><http://aps.vlaanderen.be/cbgs/>

*Table 8: % LAT relationships among people who do not live together with a partner.*

		18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
Men:	Brussels	26	25	33	<i>40</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>14</i>
	Flanders	46	20	25	37	20	23
	Wallonia	39	31	35	38	17	12
Women:	Brussels	44	14	34	9	12	0
	Flanders	50	29	30	15	15	8
	Wallonia	45	35	29	22	5	0

Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium - Italics: Cells with less than 20 observations

As Régnier-Loilier and colleagues state, we can look at LAT relationships from the point of view of either singles or partner relationships. For singles, regardless of whether they have been married before or they have been widowed or are separated, the LAT relationship is considered as a transition to a new relationship or as a specific choice to enter a relationship as a single.

Table 9, which shows the number of LAT relationships compared to the total number of partner relationships, gives a somewhat different picture. For some age groups the percentages between regions tend to be more variable. In Flanders, only 5% of the men who have a partner have a LAT relationship. This figure amounts to 11% in Wallonia and 14% in Brussels. In general, Brussels and Wallonia account for higher percentages than Flanders. Obviously, the proportions of single persons or cohabiting partners in every region also partly explain these differences.

*Table 9: % LAT relationships in the total number of persons having a partner relationship*

		18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
Men:	Brussels	41	9	14	15	9	<i>6</i>
	Flanders	56	5	5	8	4	5
	Wallonia	55	11	11	10	5	4
	Brussels	33	6	18	6	10	<i>0</i>
Women:	Flanders	40	5	7	4	5	5
	Wallonia	35	10	11	9	2	0

Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium - Italics: Cells with less than 20 observations

The data collected through the Generations and Gender Surveys are also a rich source of new material to better understand the development of LAT relationships (Vikat e.a., 2007). The GGS questions allow identifying the underlying motivations and wishes and comparing the evolution in Belgium with that in neighbouring countries. The wealth of collected data makes it possible to conduct much new research. We limit ourselves here to some general figures.

To the question whether they do not live together with their partner by deliberate choice or because of the circumstances 39% of the respondents answer that it is a deliberate choice and 46% that both partners live at their own place of residence because of the circumstances. Table 10 shows the reasons why people choose a LAT relationship, broken down by region, sex and age group.

*Table 10: Reasons to have a LAT relationship, by age group, sex and region (%)*

		Men		Women	
		18-39	40-79	18-39	40-79
Brussels	I want to live apart	10	22	0	33
	My partner and I want to live apart	25	39	20	20
	My partner wants to live apart	5	0	0	0
	Circumstances oblige us	45	28	65	47
	Other reason	15	11	15	0
		100	100	100	100
Flanders	I want to live apart	10	21	25	41
	My partner and I want to live apart	10	17	19	11
	My partner wants to live apart	1	2	0	3
	Circumstances oblige us	57	48	35	39
	Other reason	21	13	21	5
		100	100	100	100
Wallonia	I want to live apart	8	24	20	33
	My partner and I want to live apart	11	25	18	26
	My partner wants to live apart	0	4	2	3
	Circumstances oblige us	64	40	48	33
	Other reason	18	7	12	5
		100	100	100	100

Source: Generations and Gender Survey Belgium

The breakdown by age shows that above the age of 40, deliberate choice is the main reason to develop a LAT relationship, for both men and women and in the three regions. What is striking is that, in general, this choice is quite rarely made by the partner. People answer nearly in the same proportion that it is their own choice or a choice made in consultation with their partner. It is not clear to what extent self-persuasion, social acceptance and other motivations have an influence here. The outcome would be perhaps different if we interviewed the partner. The high percentage of people “choosing” a LAT relationship must be nuanced. When we further investigate the motivations of this deliberate choice, it appears that one third of the respondents declare that they choose this pattern because they or their partner wanted to keep their freedom. They also often declare that it is a common choice. A second group, which represents about two thirds of the persons who have chosen to have a LAT relationship, declare that they did so because “they did not feel ready yet to live together”. A last group has made this choice for another reason, mostly because of the children or for financial reasons. Further investigation on the basis of the GGS data would certainly be useful. The motivations to develop a LAT relationship and the characteristics of those couples would indeed help analysing whether this kind of common life will become

more widespread. Consequences are not negligible for the housing market or the mobility for example.

What is at least as interesting is to investigate what is the life plan of single persons who live alone and have no partner relationship. A large group, especially old respondents, declares that they have no intention to live together with a partner in the future. Is it a sign of withdrawal into oneself or a more complex phenomenon? To what extent are family bonds (with children and grandchildren for example) created? Is there an isolation problem? Do some elderly people prefer engaging in a LAT relationship to cohabitating again because LAT relationships are socially accepted and generally adopted? What are the consequences of those choices on well-being of these people? What is the impact on society in the context of the ageing of the population?

The material that has been collected during the first wave of the *Generations and Gender Programme* opens many opportunities to further investigate the above mentioned issues. A comparison with foreign countries can be very interesting. Using standardized questionnaires for this international project allows carrying out comparative studies which can help us getting a better understanding of these issues. The fact that GGP is constructed as a panel study is even more important. Interviewing the same persons within three year can shed completely new light on the evolution of the facts and on the motivations and consequences of the choices that are made.

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