

## Family Research and Demographic Analysis – New Insights from the German Family Demography Panel Study (FReDA)\*

Martin Bujard, Karsten Hank, Reinhard Pollak

On May 31, 2023, the Family Demography Panel Study FReDA published its first complete wave – including three subwaves – as well as comprehensive documentation at the GESIS data service tool (Bujard *et al.* 2023). The recruitment wave was published one year earlier, on May 31, 2022. This special issue contains some of the first analyses with FReDA data. Getting FReDA (logo: see Fig. 1) to this point took a long time – nearly a decade – with important milestones in Berlin, Bonn, Cologne, Mannheim, Paris, The Hague, and Wiesbaden.

Fig. 1: FReDA logo



In August 2014, two Co-PIs of the German Family Panel (pairfam; see *Huinink et al.* 2011), Karsten Hank and Bernhard Nauck, met with representatives of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) in Bonn. This was the first meeting to discuss the possibility of continuing pairfam's funding through the BMBF beyond 2022, the year pairfam's long-term project funding by the German Research Foundation (DFG) was set to expire. Even though (or rather: because) the 14 waves of data scheduled to be collected by then would already constitute an unprecedented wealth of longitudinal data on intimate relationships and family dynamics in Germany, pairfam's discontinuation would have entailed a severe loss for the scientific community, as well as for the politicians and practitioners who depend on evidence-based advice. While the BMBF acknowledged in principle the importance of maintaining a high-quality data infrastructure such as that provided by pairfam, it was also suggested that its funding would only be considered if the

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family survey were enhanced by taking a European perspective. This was a welcome proposal, since pairfam had always been seeking to contribute to cross-national comparative research, especially in conjunction with the *Generations and Gender Surveys* (GGS; see for example *Groepler et al. 2021*; *Perelli-Harris et al. 2012*).

Meanwhile, the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP), a unique and innovative data infrastructure (*Vikat et al. 2007*) initiated in 2000 under the aegis of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), was at a crossroads, too. While the GGS had a broad scientific impact in European family demography with data collections in 18 countries, most of them (except France, Hungary and Netherlands) had been completed by then (see *Gauthier et al. forthcoming*). Central questions for the continuation of the GGS concerned its funding, the number of participating countries, and the governance structure, mode, and questionnaire. Efforts were initiated by the GGP consortium board – and in particular by the director, Anne Gauthier – the GGP-Steering Committee, and the GGP-Central-Hub team to establish the GGS on the roadmap of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) and to prepare new data collection in the long term. The German GGS-I had been completed after only two waves (2005, 2008/09). On the one hand, the international comparison with rich data for understanding fertility and family dynamics within the life course was also needed in the future, while on the other hand, the Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB) was reluctant given the previous longitudinal design with only two waves in a three-year period, and preferred a more frequent mode.

Aiming to join forces with the GGS, the pairfam consortium with Karsten Hank and Johannes Huinink turned to the BiB and its Director at that time, Norbert F. Schneider, as well as Martin Bujard, the German representative on the Generations and Gender Programme's (GGP) consortium board. Several issues quickly became clear in these early discussions: The new data infrastructure should (1) have a clear family-demographic focus, (2) consist of a newly drawn GGS sample in addition to the established pairfam sample, and (3) meet the highest survey-methodological standards. To this end, the GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences was invited to become the third partner in this enterprise, and its President, Christof Wolf, soon came up with a name for the new "baby": *Family Research and Demographic Analysis* (FReDA). The dyadic design, with partner interviews as a central part of FReDA, was strongly supported by Norbert F. Schneider and fitted well with pairfam's previous experiences.

The German plans for FReDA – although still without secure funding, but with no lack of optimism – helped to give the GGP momentum, and vice versa. Based on a GGP proposal mainly developed by Anne Gauthier and Tom Emery and supported by the GGP consortium board, the European Commission gave the GGP the status of an "Emerging Project" and granted funding for the "Evaluate, Plan and Initiate" (EPI) stage, in order to prepare the GGP for the ESFRI Roadmap and to make it a permanent institution. The BiB participated in the EPI, in particular in the mode experiment for Germany, Croatia and Portugal in 2018. This paved the way for web-based interviews using the 50-60 minutes GGS questionnaire (*Lugtig et al. 2022*) and allowed a better understanding of its break-offs (*Emery et al. 2023*) – and the

demand for web-based interviews soon accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, a questionnaire task force made up of *Martin Bujard*, *Anne Gauthier*, *Peter Lugtig*, and *Melinda Mills* extensively revamped the questionnaire, with the approval of the consortium board. In the process, they cut out nearly one-quarter of the questions, added recent innovations in family demography, yet kept the unique, theoretically based items originally developed for GGS by a distinguished generation of social scientists and family demographers (see *Gauthier et al.* 2022). This renewed questionnaire, GGS-II, is the main basis of FReDA wave 1.

The initiators of FReDA had several meetings with the BMBF, and the BiB with the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), where the FReDA plans were promoted – and at the same time critically discussed and developed further with valuable feedback from both ministries. The BMBF eventually invited the trio of BiB, GESIS, and pairfam to present its vision of FReDA as the *German Family Demography Panel Study* at a meeting held in Berlin in April 2018, attended by stakeholders in the scientific community and representatives of several ministries. During that meeting – in a move that surprised most participants – the BMI expressed its willingness to take long-term financial responsibility for FReDA after a positive evaluation of FReDA’s work-up phase, which was expected to be funded by the BMBF. After the Berlin meeting, the decisive political process involving the various ministries and both FReDA-PIs from BiB continued and was supported by the scientific community, including for example the scientific board of the family ministry.

After a positive response and an invitation from the BMBF, the FReDA partners started to work on a formal grant proposal, which was submitted to the BMBF (or more specifically, its project management agency DLR) in February 2019. After a thorough peer-review process, the requested funds for four main waves of data collection by the end of the year 2024 were granted in November 2019. Both ministries, BMBF and BMI, signed an agreement for common but sequential funding of FReDA. Finally, the six founding PIs of FReDA, Martin Bujard, Tobias Gummer, Karsten Hank, Franz Neyer, Norbert F. Schneider and Christof Wolf, had reached their goal. In January 2020 they received the official documents from BMBF State Secretary Michael Meister during a ceremony in Mannheim (Fig. 2) kicking off the new data infrastructure. At last, FReDA was ready to go! Two months later, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out.

Fortunately, FReDA was able to turn this challenge into an opportunity (see *Gummer et al.* 2020). Instead of the initially planned face-to-face survey, FReDA became a self-administered mixed-mode survey (*Wolf et al.* 2021), including a push-to-web design. The recruitment wave (W1R) of the new FReDA-GGS sample, conducted from April through June 2021, collected data from more than 37,777 primary respondents aged 18-49 and was released in May 2022 (*Bujard et al.* 2022). The subsequent subwaves (W1A and W1B) of FReDA’s baseline, which also covered anchor respondents’ partners, were collected from July 2021 through September 2021<sup>1</sup> and from November 2021 through January 2022, respectively. These were

<sup>1</sup> In October 2021 Norbert F. Schneider retired and C. Katharina Spieß succeeded him as BiB director and thus joined the FReDA-PI team.

**Fig. 2:** Official kick-off of FReDA, January 2020

L-R: Christof Wolf (FReDA-PI, GESIS president), Michael Meister (BMBF State Secretary), Martin Bujard (FReDA-PI, FReDA consortium coordinator, BiB), Karsten Hank (FReDA-PI, pairfam-PI, Cologne University).

made available for public use in May 2023 (*Bujard et al. 2023*; see *Hank et al. forthcoming* for a detailed data brief).

FReDA consists of two samples: (1) The new FReDA-GGS sample started in 2021 and is comparable to at least 20 countries or territories (*Gauthier et al. forthcoming*). (2) FReDA-pairfam is the continuation of pairfam's first 14 waves: its 15th wave was collected together with FReDA-GGS wave 2. Table 1 gives an overview of both samples and respondents:

**Tab. 1:** Both FReDA samples and netto-panelists in the first 2 waves

	W1R	W1A	W1B	W2A	W2B
FReDA-GGS anchor	37,777	22,048	20,220	19,024*	18,102*
FReDA-GGS partner	-	7,339	-	6,566*	6,195*
FReDA-pairfam anchor				4,457	4,322
FReDA-pairfam partner				1,443	1,387
Total		29,387		31,490*	30,006*

\* Preliminary data.

Source: own design

FReDA content has four different sources (for details see: *Hank et al. 2023*; *Schneider et al. 2021*):

- Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-II) is the main component of FReDA waves 1, 4, 7, etc. (*Gauthier et al. 2022*), corresponding to the international data collection in GGS every three years. Waves 2, 3, 5, 6, etc. contain 50 percent of the GGS questions in order to allow longitudinal analyses.
- German Family Panel (pairfam) complements GGS: After harmonisation by the FReDA team, it has a broad overlap with nearly half of the GGS questions. In addition, many psychological scales and other variables of pairfam were introduced in FReDA; in particular in waves 2, 3, 5, 6, etc.
- New modules developed by the FReDA team and pretested in the GESIS pre-test laboratory. These focus on societal changes, crises such as COVID-19, and innovations from promising scientific advances.
- New modules from the scientific community based on an open and multidisciplinary “call for modules” which takes place every year, starting with five (out of 27) chosen contributions for wave 2.

Following up on CPoS’ Special Issue “Empirical Analyses based on the German Family Panel (pairfam)” a decade ago (see *Huinink 2012*) and the original introduction to FReDA published in this journal (see *Schneider et al. 2021*), we are proud to present initial insights from FReDA’s baseline wave in this new Special Issue.

The set of five articles presented here provides an impression of some of the research potential that FReDA provides now; that is, before its longitudinal dimension has evolved. One advantage of FReDA is its large sample size, which allows researchers to assess heterogeneities in the population in relatively great detail. Germany’s population, for example, has become very diverse in terms of people’s regional, cultural, and ethnic origins, whereby individuals’ family-related attitudes (e.g. towards maternal employment; see *Gambaro et al. 2023*) and actual behaviours (e.g. couples’ division of housework; see *Nutz et al. 2023*) may vary considerably. Another aspect of diversity that has received growing public and scientific interest is individuals’ sexual orientation and its impact on people’s lives. Subjective well-being disparities in sexual minority populations, for example, may have changed over time – and merging pairfam’s and FReDA’s baseline waves allows us to monitor such dynamics (see *Hank et al. 2023*). Importantly, FReDA is compatible not only with pairfam, but can also be merged with data from other countries that contribute to the GGS, allowing cross-national comparative analyses (assessing, for example, differences in individuals’ fertility intentions across countries; see *Krapf et al. 2023*). Finally, FReDA is a multi-actor survey interviewing primary respondents and their partners. This brings about great opportunities for dyadic analyses – as well as obvious methodological challenges. The experiences gained in FReDA’s baseline wave can be used, for example, to improve our understanding of the conditions under which anchors are more willing to give consent to conducting an interview with their partner (see *Gummer et al. 2023*).

Obviously, these studies are only the beginning of what we hope will become a new wave of family research and demographic analysis. A growing number of countries has started to collect new rounds of GGS data (and the GGP is on its way

to becoming a European Research Infrastructure Consortium). The German Family Panel has now been fully integrated into the German Family Demography Panel Study (from wave 2 onwards). FReDA is expected to prosper beyond its current funding period, providing a sound longitudinal database for the next generation(s) of family demographers in Germany and beyond.

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Prof. Dr. Martin Bujard (✉). Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB). Wiesbaden, Germany. Heidelberg University, Institute of Medical Psychology, Medical Faculty. Heidelberg, Germany. E-mail: [martin.bujard@bib.bund.de](mailto:martin.bujard@bib.bund.de)  
URL: <https://www.bib.bund.de/EN/Institute/Staff/Bujard/Bujard.html>

Prof. Dr. Karsten Hank. University of Cologne. Institute of Sociology and Social Psychology (ISS). Cologne, Germany. E-mail: [hank@wiso.uni-koeln.de](mailto:hank@wiso.uni-koeln.de)  
URL: <https://iss-wiso.uni-koeln.de/en/institute/staff/h/prof-dr-karsten-hank>

Prof. Dr. Reinhard Pollak. GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. Cologne/Mannheim, Germany. E-mail: [reinhard.pollak@gesis.org](mailto:reinhard.pollak@gesis.org)  
URL: <https://www.gesis.org/en/institute/staff/person/reinhard.pollak>

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