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# Policy perspectives of grandparenting in Europe

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## *Abstract*

Large variation exists in the frequency of informal childcare provided by grandparents across Europe. At the same time, a wide North-South divide characterizes European social policies. Do welfare policy arrangements shape the role of grandparents? If yes, to what extent do grandparenting depend on the availability of public services offered for child care, parental leave regulation and legal obligations of family support? Combining micro-data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe and macro-indicators from the Multilinks database, this study aims to answer these questions and to further clarify the link between welfare provision and use of grandparents' resources for working mothers. By implementing country-specific regression models, we find a clear association between the policy context of the country of residence and (daily) grandparenting.

## *Keywords*

Grandparental childcare, intergenerational relationships, policies, multilinks database

# 1. Introduction

In contemporary European societies, characterized by healthy ageing and increasing longevity, family members now share a longer period of life together (Lauterbach, 2002). At the same time, horizontal family structures are loosing importance in favour of vertical relationships between family members. In the so-called 'beanpole families' (Bengtson, Rosenthal, and Burton, 1990), grandparents are engaging more actively as intergenerational resources for their families (Hoff, 2007; Silverstein, Giarrusso, and Bengtson, 2003), often satisfying the demand for childcare. In Europe, 58 per cent of grandmothers and 50 per cent of grandfathers provide regular or occasional care to their grandchildren. In the USA, 43 per cent of grandmothers say they provide regular childcare (see Glaser *et al*., 2010 for a review of surveys on grandparents providing childcare).

Whereas the family has changed, it still maintains an important support role for its members crossing generations all over Europe (e.g. Blome, Keck, and Alber, 2009; Fokkema, ter Bekke, and Dykstra, 2008). Despite the apparent common trend of grandparenting, however, striking differences across European countries emerge when considering the extent to which grandparents actively engage in care for their grandchildren. In Italy, Spain and Switzerland, for example, 40 per cent of grandparents provide regular childcare for their grandchildren, compared with 20 per cent of grandparents in Sweden, France, the Netherlands and Denmark. Yet, more North Europeans do active grandparenting compared to the grandparent counterparts in Mediterranean countries (Hank and Buber, 2009), possibly reflecting higher maternal employment rates and grandparents providing occasional help to working mothers in those contexts. Grandparents across Europe play consequently very different roles. Previous studies have shown that for about one in two pre-teens in Italy, grandparents are perceived as the main providers of care (after the parents) (Keck and Saraceno, 2008). These patterns have given rise to the argument that in Southern European countries, grandparents are an important source of support for the children. In contrast, grandparents in North of Europe are often looked upon as a "reserve army" for the parents, stepping in much more rarely, but acting nevertheless as an important source of support for the family members (Hagestad, 2006) when in need.

In light of these patterns, it is of interest to note that across Europe, policies regarding childcare also vary dramatically. The aim of this paper is to assess how existing policies (broadly defined), relate to the observed patterns of grandparents providing childcare. We do so by using the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), which

includes rich information about social transfers, and in particular, the extent to which grandparents provide downward transfers to their (grand)children. These patterns are held against information about country-specific policy characteristics, drawn from the Multilinks database (Multilinks, 2011). This comprehensive data source, which resulted from the Multilinks project on demographic change and intergenerational solidarity, well-being and social integration, outlines how the state, in form of public policies and legal norms, defines and regulates intergenerational relationships within the family. Entailing over 70 indicators on social policy rights, legal obligations to support, and care service usage, the Multilinks database is the only collection of consistent and comparable measures of intergenerational support established through existing policies.

## 2. Background

There is an increasing interest in the potential role of grandparents and its effect on parents' behaviour across different welfare settings (e.g. Albertini, Kohli, and Vogel (2007); Hank and Buber, 2009). The basic argument is straightforward. In those countries where state welfare is weak, the family becomes the key welfare provider. In other countries, where family activities are largely outsourced to external institutions, such as the Nordic countries, grandparents play a less critical role. The extent of grandparenting is important for several domains of individuals' lives and for the different generations within families. For instance, grandparenting may have an impact on both their own and their children's labour force participation. On one hand, grandparents involved in care for grandchildren, will themselves be less able to participate in the labour force, a feature perhaps reflected in the very low participation rates among the older generation in Mediterranean countries. On the other hand, grandparenting may facilitate labour force participation among their children, especially among daughters. Research on downward transfers of care between grandparents and grandchildren, that has focused on mothers' labour force participation, confirms this hypothesis. (Aassve, Arpino, and Goisis 2011; Arpino, Pronzato, and Tavares 2010; and Gray 2005). At the macro-level, political decision-making has also recognized childcare as a means to enable or facilitate women's participation in the labour market (Wheelock and Jones, 2002; see also European Council, 2002).

Given differences across European countries, and especially the North-South divide in patterns of grandparenting, it becomes clear that welfare and its embedded policies are potentially important (Hughes *et al.* 2007). On one hand, the welfare system benefits from

grandparents' informal, unpaid care to children, but at the same time an extensive welfare system may facilitate contact between generations. To this end, the literature postulates two opposite scenarios. Assuming that family solidarity is only provided if such a demand is not satisfied by formal services (Künemund and Vogel, 2006), Cox and Jakubson (1995) suggest that a strong welfare arrangement may *replace* family services and thus "crowd out" intergenerational solidarity. However, family ties are not solely based upon functional necessities, but also driven by reciprocity (Kohli *et al.*, 2005) and "exchange expectations" (Künemund and Rein, 1999). Expansion of welfare services may instead stimulate intergenerational solidarity more than displacing it (see Daatland and Herlofson, 2003; Daatland and Löwenstein, 2005; Künemund and Rein, 1999). The more recently suggested concept of "mixed responsibilities" reconciles these two hypotheses, showing that the functions provided by the family and state interact (Attias-Donfut and Wolff, 2000; Brandt, Haberkern, and Szydlik, 2009; Motel-Klingebiel, Tesch-Römer, and von Kondratowitz, 2005).

One useful approach to understand the role of policies for grandparenting, is to adopt the classification of Saraceno and Keck (2010), in which state provisions to families in terms of policies are measured from defamilialistic, where care services are shifted from family responsibility to the state, to familialistic, where parents are encouraged to provide the relevant service. For instance, policies geared towards expanding state coverage in public childcare would be of a defamiliastic type. In contrast,paid parental leave policies are considered as familialistic measures, as they encourage parents to stay at home and take care of their children (Leitner, 2003). Based on the way the responsibilities for intergenerational support are allocated between the state and the family (and through the latter also to the market), Keck and colleagues (Keck, Hessel, and Saraceno, 2009; Saraceno and Keck, 2010) identify three dimensions of policies that shape the institutional context in which families negotiate the division of responsibilities:

1) *Defamilisation* - policies partially relieve the family of their duties to provide hands-on care or financial support. The expression of these policies is the publicly funded provision of collective services.

2) *Supported familialism*, in so far policies, usually through financial transfers (including taxation and paid leaves), support families in keeping up their financial and caring responsibilities towards the younger and older generations.

3) *Familialism by default*, or unsupported familialism, refers to the absence of policy support and therefore is defined as a rather residual indicator – "everything which is left to the responsibility of the individual or family[1].

Drawing on this theoretical framework, we can also gain insight into the role of grandparental childcare in European countries. By using micro-data from 12 countries included in the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) complemented by policy indicators drawn from the Multilinks database, shed light on the influence of policies at country-level on the role of grandparents. Our analysis complements that of Igel and Szydlik (2011) who investigate grandchild care across Europe. They examine the influence of public expenditures in family services on grandparents' decisions to engage in intergenerational support. From their study, it emerges that public expenditures for families 'crowd in' the occurrence of grandchild care and 'crowd out' its intensity, supporting the complementary thesis by Attias-Donfut and Wolff (2000). The analysis presented here differs in the sense that we provide a richer and more detailed measure of the social policies characterising the countries analysed. First, we introduce a measure of legal obligations between generations, which naturally falls into the category of familialism. Based on the literature discussed above, we expect that in countries where the state provides considerable welfare services to the families (i.e. high degree of defamilialisation and supported familalism), grandparents will be more likely to look after their grandchildren. Moreover, the grandparents providing grandchild care in countries characterized by poor services will be more intensively engaged in such an intergenerational form of support towards the younger generations. Furthermore, comprehensive obligations assigned to families are likely to generate a higher degree of unsupported familialism. Second, we consider the heterogeneity of the effects of policy for different types of users of grandparental childcare. In particular, we focus on the dichotomy working vs not working mothers. The complexity of intergenerational solidarity patterns invites to exploring how childcare policies interact with labour market conditions. We expect the impact of policies to be stronger for working mothers that have to balance a working career and family, especially in countries with a weak welfare system oriented to childcare and the family.

[1] "The exceptions are legal obligations to support" (Keck *et al.*, 2009: p.8), which are in part deciding who is responsible for whom and what within families and kinship.

The remaining of the paper is organized as follows. Section 3 and section 4 present, respectively, the data used and the methodological approach. The results are shown in section 5, and section 6 discusses the outcomes of our analyses and their implications.

## 3. Data and sample selection

Our analysis is primarily based on the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). SHARE is a cross-national panel survey collecting micro-data on health, socioeconomic status, social and family networks of the non-institutionalized population aged 50 and older (Boersch-Supan and Juerges, 2005). Two rounds were implemented so far: data were collected for the first time in 2004 in 12 countries; the second round, in 2006, has re-contacted respondents from the first wave and drawn a "refresher" sample. Where available, we use data from the first wave and the refresher sample from the second wave. For the countries that entered the survey in a second stage, namely Czech Republic and Poland, we use the 2006 sample. Each respondent is considered only once.

In SHARE, the grandparent "family respondent" gives information on childcare provided to the children of each child (Boersch-Supan and Juerges, 2005). Given the selection of the computer-assisted personal instrument (CAPI) used for interviews, we consider only respondents with 1 to 4 children. Within the sample of respondents with at least one child, only less than 8% has more than four children. Since we are interested in studying the probability to receive help in childcare from grandparents, our unit of analysis is the middle generation, men and women with at least one child still in need of care (i.e., the youngest child is below the age of 16 years old). The resulting sample of micro-data includes 6,471 interviewed grandparents and their 10,779 adult children (the middle generation) with at least one own child (see Table 1 for the descriptive statistics of the sample used).

As we aim to understand how policies at the country-level can influence the role of grandparents, micro-data from SHARE are complemented by policy indicators drawn from the Multilinks database. Multilinks is a database on intergenerational policies built by Saraceno and Keck (2009) in the framework of an EU-funded FP7 project[2]. The goal of this database is to provide a set of indicators to quantitatively describe social policies and legal frameworks in the 27 European Union member states as well as in Georgia and Russia around the year 2004, which coincides with the year of the first SHARE round. The data for the indicators were collected through a variety of comparative and national sources, in many

[2] Further details on this project can be found on the dedicated website http://www.multilinks-project.eu/.

cases also with the help of national informants (for the conceptualisation of the indicators, see Saraceno and Keck (2009); for the methodology employed in constructing them and the sources used, see Keck *et al.* (2009)). Our analysis focuses on the 12 countries that are included in both SHARE and Multilinks databases: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and Sweden [3].

[3] Ireland is not included in our analyses because of the small sample size.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for the independent variables used in the regression analyses.

| | | SE | DK | NL | BL | FR | DE | AT | IT | ES | GR | CZ | PL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Grandparent* | Gender (% female) | 59.4 | 60.3 | 56.8 | 50.0 | 57.5 | 56.0 | 55.5 | 64.0 | 61.6 | 61.5 | 66.1 | 63.0 |
| | Age (mean) | 64.3 | 63.1 | 63.6 | 63.0 | 62.9 | 63.6 | 63.9 | 65.1 | 66.2 | 65.0 | 60.9 | 60.4 |
| | No partner (%) | 19.6 | 31.6 | 15.0 | 26.5 | 29.1 | 16.9 | 38.4 | 20.1 | 17.2 | 30.7 | 35.8 | 24.9 |
| | Education low (%) | 53.1 | 21.1 | 59.1 | 46.1 | 45.5 | 16.9 | 34.1 | 80.3 | 90.3 | 75.8 | 51.8 | 42.6 |
| | Education middle (%) | 27.0 | 45.0 | 23.9 | 25.2 | 35.3 | 60.2 | 48.6 | 16.3 | 4.2 | 19.8 | 38.6 | 50.3 |
| | Education high (%) | 19.9 | 33.9 | 17.1 | 28.7 | 19.3 | 22.8 | 17.3 | 3.4 | 5.5 | 4.4 | 9.6 | 7.1 |
| | Not working (%) | 61.4 | 58.8 | 74.3 | 77.2 | 75.8 | 72.4 | 83.9 | 89.4 | 82.8 | 86.5 | 73.4 | 72.5 |
| | Working (%) | 36.7 | 36.7 | 17.9 | 20.2 | 22.3 | 24.8 | 15.0 | 9.9 | 13.5 | 12.2 | 23.6 | 15.4 |
| | Disable (%) | 2.0 | 4.5 | 7.7 | 2.5 | 1.9 | 2.8 | 1.1 | 0.7 | 3.8 | 1.4 | 3.0 | 12.1 |
| *Children* | Gender (% female) | 50.5 | 51.6 | 52.9 | 55.8 | 51.8 | 51.5 | 54.1 | 58.0 | 53.2 | 53.2 | 44.4 | 52.6 |
| | No partner (%) | 12.4 | 32.8 | 10.9 | 13.6 | 24.6 | 20.9 | 22.3 | 6.1 | 8.4 | 5.6 | 21.4 | 13.9 |
| | Not working (%) | 8.1 | 8.3 | 13.1 | 8.7 | 9.6 | 19.3 | 11.1 | 18.7 | 18.5 | 19.1 | 5.6 | 18.2 |
| | Siblings near parents (mean) | 0.9 | 0.9 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.4 |
| *Grandchildren* | Age of the youngest (mean) | 6.2 | 5.5 | 4.7 | 5.3 | 5.2 | 6.6 | 7.8 | 5.4 | 5.9 | 5.9 | 7.0 | 6.0 |
| N children | | 1,121 | 976 | 1,126 | 1,142 | 924 | 714 | 440 | 705 | 453 | 592 | 593 | 779 |

*Source*: own elaboration on SHARE data.

### *3.1 Variables and descriptive statistics*

We draw information on grandparenting from two SHARE questions. The first is posed as: "*during the last twelve months, have you regularly or occasionally looked after [your grandchild/your grandchildren] without the presence of the parents?*" Respondents may either answer "Yes" or "No". Those answering positively are then asked: "*during the last twelve months, on average, how often did you look after the child(ren) of {child name}, without the presence of the parents?*" The possible answers are: "Almost daily", "Almost every week", "Almost every month", "Less often". Based on the answers provided to these two questions, we have constructed an ordinal dependent variable measuring the frequency level of grandparental care with the following categories: "Never" (if answering "No" to the first question), "Less often than weekly" (we collapsed the categories "Almost every month" and "Less often" of the second question), "Almost weekly" and "Almost daily".

By adopting the middle generation's point of view, we observe how often each adult does receive help by his/her own parents in caring for the children. As Figure 1 shows, in all the considered countries only between 20 to 30% of parents did not recur at all to the grandparents to care for the own children in the year before the survey (the black part at the top of the bars). On the contrary, huge differences across European countries appear when looking at the white part of the bars: while daily grandparenting in Denmark, Sweden and The Netherlands is observed only in about 2% of the cases; about 35% of Italians engage grandparents for grandchild care on a daily basis. A clear European North-South divide emerges, with Czech Republic behaving similarly to Central European countries and Poland clustering in the Mediterranean group.

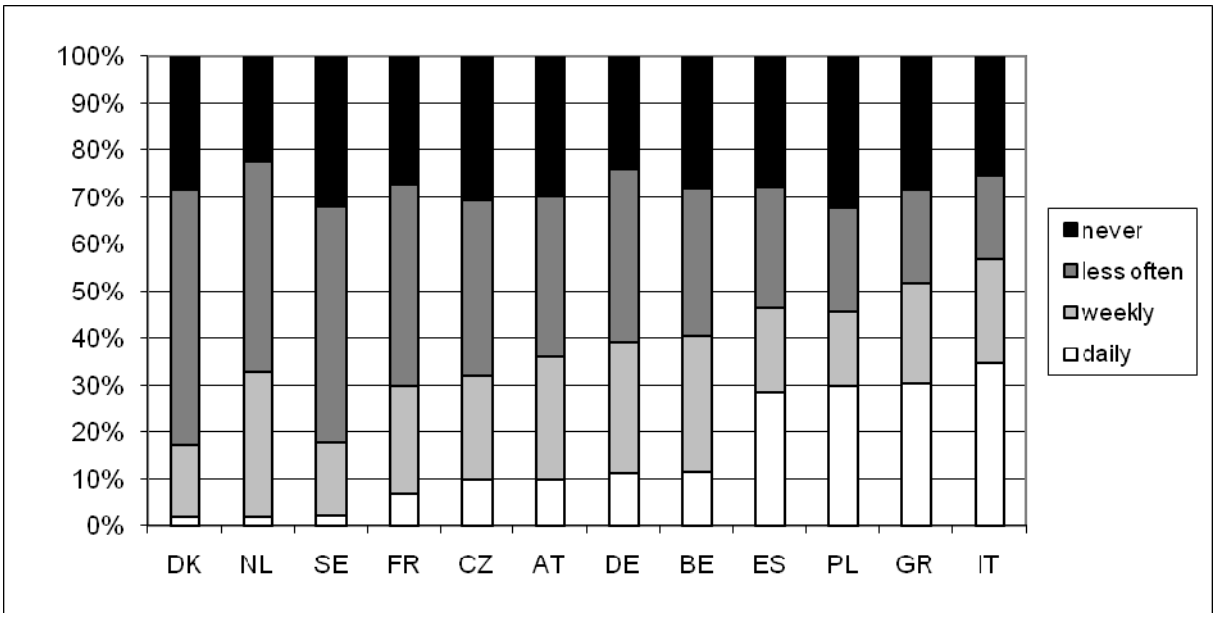


**Figure 1.** Percentage of parents receiving help from their own parents in childcare, by frequency level of grandparenting and country. Countries are ranked by frequency of daily grandparenting care. *Source*: own elaboration on SHARE data.

In the following analysis, we take into account several demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the three generations involved in grandparenting. Concerning grandparents, the independent variables relate to age, gender, marital status, education and employment status. The latter also considers whether the grandparent is in a state of disability (which would prevent the person from working and also, in our specific case, from looking after a grandchild without the presence of the grandchild´s parents). Furthermore, in order to account for the fact that more children and grandchildren in need may limit the time available to support a (grand)child, we consider the number of children (with own children) living sufficiently close to the grandparent (within 25 km) to allow them to potentially ask for childcare support. The characteristics considered for the middle generation are gender, marital status and employment status. Employment status is expected to be particularly relevant for women. In fact, as discussed in Section 2, there is evidence (e.g. Aassve *et al.*, 2011; Arpino *et al.*, 2010) of a strong association between women labour force participation and help received in childcare activities by grandparents. As for grandchildren, unfortunately, the available information is quite limited in SHARE. However, we are able to control for the age of the youngest child for each middle generation person. Given that the need for care is more important in the first years of life, the age of the youngest grandchild is expected to be a driving factor of the probability to receive help in childcare from grandparents.

Based on the three modes of policy operation considered by Saraceno and Keck (2010), we select from the Multilinks database one indicator to represent each of the society-level domains: services (public services offered for child care) for defamilisation, parental leave for supported familialism, and legal obligations of family support for familialism by default. Figure 2 shows, by country, the number of weeks covered by a leave compensated at the level of the average wage (black bars) and the number of weeks covered by childcare services (for children up to 2 years old[4], white bars). An estimate of the "gap" left to families (grey bars) shows a larger burden for Mediterranean and Polish families (right side of the figure) as compared to their Scandinavian counterparts (left side of the figure, with Denmark even registering an overlap of services and effective leave).

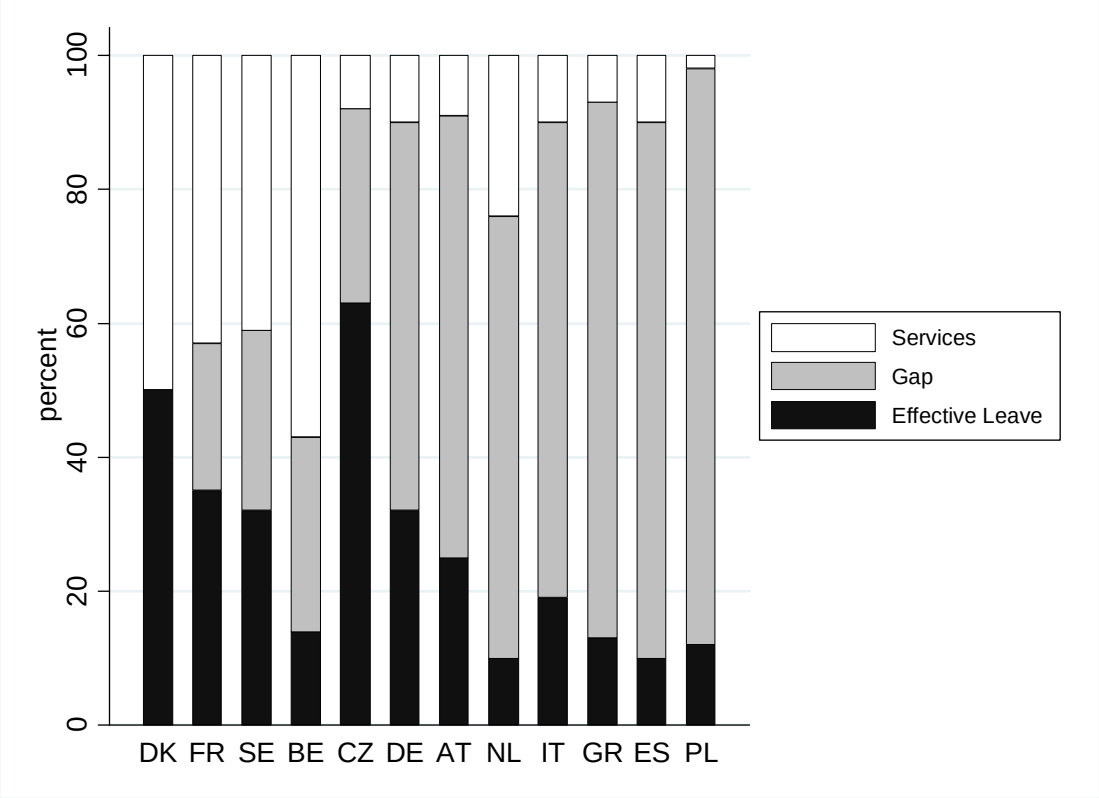


**Figure 2.** Distribution of caring responsibilities towards children, by country. Effective leave is calculated as the number of weeks paid at the average level; service coverage is calculated as the number of weeks per child available on the total number of children 0-2. Countries are ordered in ascending order according to the "gap" left to families. *Source*: own elaboration on Multilinks data.

[4] We do not consider services for children aged over three, because cross-country differences in this field are less relevant (Saraceno and Keck, 2010).

The measure of legal obligations used in the following analyses refers to (financial) support towards the children (see Table 2). However, in most of the countries where obligations to support the youngest generation are extensive, legal obligations to support parents in need are also at work. This suggests a sort of intergenerational pact, where parents help their children and grandchildren in exchange of assistance when needed. At the one extreme, there is Denmark, with legal obligations of financial support only downwards (towards children) and limited to adulthood. Going through several combinations of how the state defines the duties of kin members and delineates the range and duration of intergenerational responsibilities within families, at the other extreme we find Italy, Greece, Poland and Germany. In these countries, legal obligations are regulated downwards without any age limit and upwards (to parents), sometimes even extended to second degree relatives (Keck *et al.*, 2009).

**Table 2.** Legal obligations to financially support children.

| **Country** | **Support to children** |
|---|---|
| DK | Until Adulthood[1] |
| CZ | Adulthood and Education |
| NL | No age limit |
| SE | Adulthood and Education |
| AT | No age limit |
| BE | No age limit |
| ES | No age limit |
| FR | Adulthood and Education |
| DE | No age limit |
| PL | No age limit |
| GR | No age limit |
| IT | No age limit |

Note: 1. Adulthood refers to age 18. Source: own elaboration on Multilinks data.

## 4. Multivariate analysis

Given the ordinal nature of the outcome variable, we use ordinal logistic regression (see e.g., Dobson, 2002) to estimate the probability to receive help in childcare from grandparents with different level of frequency. In particular, our model can be written as follows:

$$logit(Y \leq j) = \alpha_j + \beta_1 X_1 + \ldots + \beta_k X_k$$

where $j$ = 1, ..., 4 indicates the frequency levels of grandparenting – ranging from "Never" ($Y$ = 1) to "Almost daily" ($Y$ = 4), through "Less often than weekly" (Y =2) and "Almost weekly" (Y = 3).

Our methodological approach implements separate country-specific regression models. Instead, a multilevel regression approach might lead to biased estimates of both fixed and random effects (see e.g., Moineddin, Matheson, and Glazier, 2007) because of the limited number of second-level units (i.e., 12 countries). In this way, it is also easier to assess substantial differences in the effects of covariates by country. This is important because the "model" of grandparenting provision could be different for each country. In a multilevel framework, this consideration would call for the inclusion of random slopes for each covariate. Again the limited number of countries would prevent reliable estimation of these models. Furthermore, to assess the role of country-level policies in shaping grandparents role, we calculate predicted probabilities and estimate their association with policy indexes from the Multilinks database.

Grandparents who declared to have provided childcare in the 12 months before the survey are also asked to quantify their help. Using this information one could build a continuous indicator of childcare help. In other words, it could be possible to use a linear model where the dependent variable is the (estimated) average number of hours per week spent grandparenting. However, we prefer an ordinal approach for two reasons, one theoretical and one empirical. First, an ordinal dependent variable reflects the theoretical framework of a dichotomy between grandparents helping on a daily base and those acting as a reserve army. Second, empirically what makes a difference is the frequency level of help rather than the number of helping-hours provided (which can be also affected by a higher measurement error).

## 5. Results

Figure 3 presents the estimated frequency[5] of recurring to grandparental help for selected countries by age of the grandparent, which is a very important predictor of the frequency level of grandparenting both because grandparents are more likely to have health problems as they grow old and because age of the grandparents is correlated with the age of their children and grandchildren. We choose, from North to South, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, and

[5] All the estimates presented in this section have been obtained adjusting for correlation among children of the same grandparents. Moreover, the parallel line assumption has not been rejected in any of the considered models.

Italy as they represent the variety of welfare models in (Western) Europe. At relatively young ages of grandparents, say around age 50, the four country profiles are very different. In Sweden and the Netherlands, the probability of having a grandparent looking after the own children on a daily basis is very low (5%), while in Italy the percentage is as high as 50%. Germany is located between these two extremes. As expected, in all the countries the probability of using grandparents as resources for childcare decreases with the age of the grandparent and the country profiles become more similar. At very late ages, say for grandparents above 80 years old, the probability of providing childcare on a daily or weekly basis tends to be very small in all the countries. On the contrary, the probability of never grandparenting tends to increase with age similarly in all four countries. The trend in the probability of recurring to grandparents less often than weekly remains quite stable over age, at lower levels the Southern the country is.

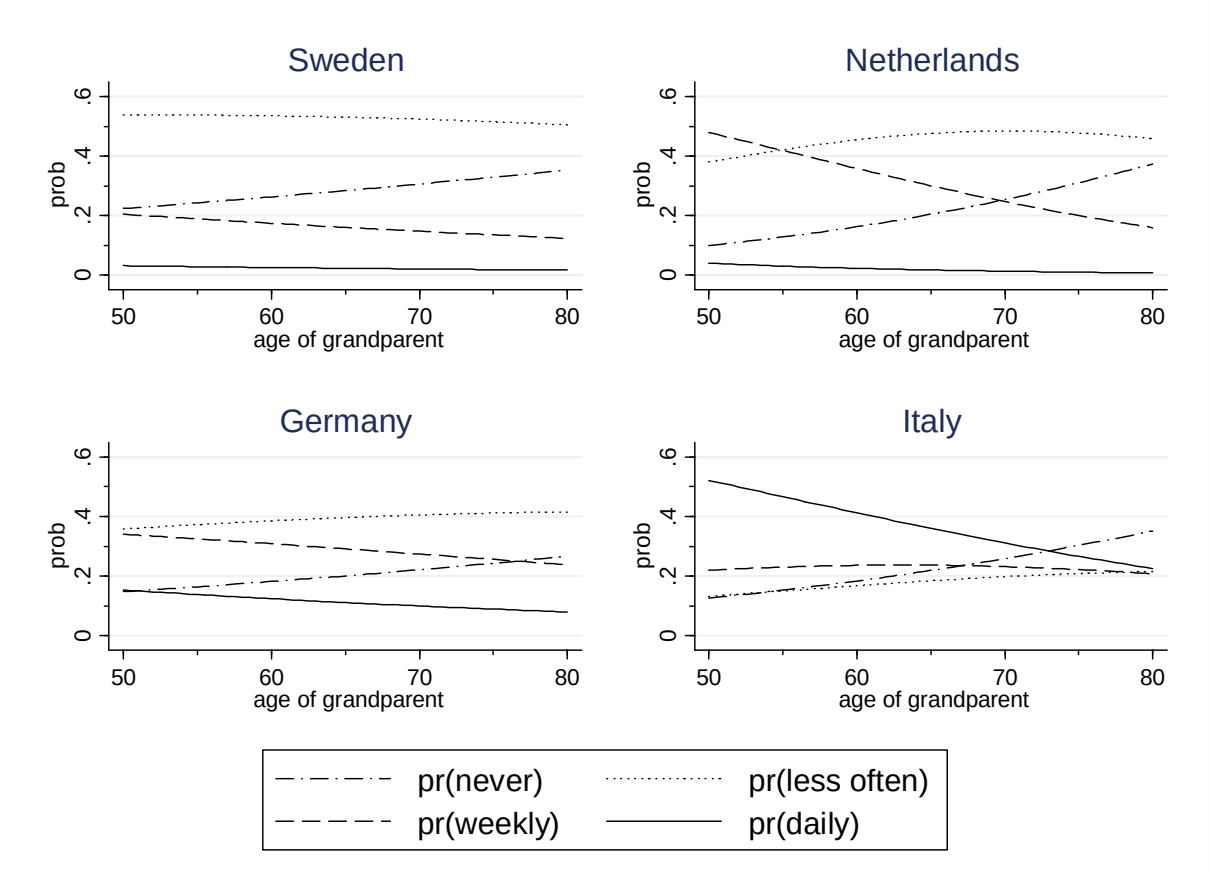


**Figure 3.** Estimated frequency of grandparenting by age for 4 selected countries.

In the estimates of the country-specific ordinal logistic regressions (Table 3), three sets of covariates represent the characteristics of the three generations involved in grandparenting (see Section 3.1). The ordinal outcome variable measures the frequency level of grandparenting. Thus, variables with a positive coefficient tend to increase the probability of more frequent support from grandparents to (grand)children or, said in other words, the positive coefficients suggest that the middle generation turns more often to the own parents in order to get care for the own child(ren).

In most countries, grandparents not living with a partner are less likely to provide childcare frequently, but the estimated coefficient is significant only in Belgium. The education level of grandparents seems not to be an important predictor of grandparenting. Working grandparents in Italy, Denmark and Czech Republic show significantly lower propensity to provide childcare frequently. As expected, the coefficient of the disability status, when significant, is negative.

As for middle generation characteristics, we confirm a well established result in the literature that females tend to receive more functional support from their parents (the positive association is significant in all countries but Czech Republic). Also not living with a partner increases the probability to receive frequent support in childcare from the grandparents. Working significantly increases the probability of turning to the grandparents on a daily basis for childcare in almost all the countries considered. This result is further explored in the following analyses. We also find that as the number of siblings living in close proximity to the grandparents increases the probability to receive frequent support decreases.

Finally, as expected, we find that the lower the age of the youngest grandchild, the more frequently parents tend to turn to grandparents for childcare support.

**Table 3.** Ordinal logistic regression estimates by country.

| Variables | SE | DK | NL | BL | FR | DE | AT | IT | ES | GR | CZ | PL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Grandparent:* | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| female (Ref.: male) | 0.22 | 0.25 | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0.25 | -0.05 | 0.38 | -0.20 | -0.14 | -0.02 | 0.32 | 0.22 |
| age | 0.01 | -0.31* | 0.04 | 0.15 | -0.11 | -0.20 | 0.16 | -0.42* | -0.01 | -0.04 | -0.51* | -0.15 |
| age^2 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00* | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00* | 0.00 |
| no partner (Ref.: living with partner) | -0.03 | -0.04 | 0.21 | -0.34* | -0.16 | -0.30 | -0.08 | -0.01 | 0.30 | -0.30 | 0.04 | 0.08 |
| Education | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| medium (Ref.: low) | -0.02 | 0.19 | -0.02 | -0.08 | 0.24 | -0.37 | -0.14 | -0.17 | -0.14 | 0.22 | 0.00 | 0.13 |
| high (Ref.: low) | -0.01 | 0.29 | -0.30* | -0.15 | 0.03 | -0.27 | -0.20 | 0.14 | 0.77* | -0.28 | 0.20 | -0.23 |
| working (Ref.: not working) | 0.06 | -0.31 | -0.23 | -0.24 | 0.32 | -0.46* | -0.09 | -0.83** | -0.34 | -0.27 | -0.47* | 0.03 |
| disable (Ref.: not working) | -0.30 | -0.04 | 0.02 | 0.18 | 0.73 | -0.53 | -1.36*** | 0.47 | -0.93* | -0.63 | -0.44 | 0.26 |
| *Children:* | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| female (Ref.: male) | 0.35** | 0.33* | 0.89*** | 0.42*** | 0.76*** | 0.35* | 0.45* | 0.84*** | 1.20*** | 0.81*** | 0.27 | 0.62*** |
| no partner (Ref.: living with partner) | 0.15 | -0.20 | 0.65** | 0.24 | 0.03 | 0.19 | 0.49* | 0.82** | 0.26 | 0.47 | -0.14 | 0.21 |
| not working (Ref.: working) | 0.10 | -0.03 | -1.01*** | -0.87*** | -1.01*** | -0.30 | -0.53 | -0.81*** | -0.71** | -0.79*** | 0.06 | -0.24 |
| n. siblings near parent | -0.29 | -0.28*** | -0.28*** | -0.39*** | -0.29*** | -0.36*** | -0.84*** | -0.47*** | -0.28** | -0.39*** | -0.30** | -0.47*** |
| *Grandchildren:* | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| age youngest 3-5 (Ref.: 0-2) | -0.12 | 0.18 | 0.05 | 0.19 | 0.21 | 0.18 | 0.79* | 0.13 | 0.48* | 0.03 | -0.33 | -0.03 |
| age youngest 5-16 (Ref.: 0-2) | -0.50 | -0.43* | -0.80*** | -0.51*** | -0.29 | -0.30 | 0.49 | -0.23 | -0.07 | -0.45* | -0.63** | -0.83*** |
| N | 1,121 | 976 | 1,126 | 1,142 | 924 | 714 | 440 | 705 | 453 | 592 | 593 | 779 |

Note: * pvalue<0.05; ** pvalue<0.01; *** pvalue<0.001. The outcome variable, measuring the frequency level of grandparenting, is ordinal with 4 categories: "Never" = 1; "Less often than weekly" =2; "Almost weekly" = 3 and "Almost daily" = 4. Standard errors have been clusterised at the grandparent level. *Source*: own elaboration on SHARE data.

To better illustrate our results, we used the regression estimates to obtain predicted probabilities of benefiting from grandparental childcare at different frequency levels for different "typical individuals". In particular, in the following we calculate and compare predicted probabilities by the working status of the middle generation parent. All the other variables are held constant: we consider a grandmother (gender = 1), aged 64 (age = 64, age^2 = 4069), living with a partner (no partner = 0), not working (working = disable = 0), with low education (education – medium = education – high =0) and with the youngest grandchild aged 0-2 years. Moreover, as a reference child we consider a woman (gender = 1), living with a partner (no partner = 0) and with 1 sibling living near her parents (n. siblings near parent = 1).

Figure 4, shows how the predicated probability of grandparenting on a daily basis is associated with the three policy indicators we focus on. In the figure, countries are located by their level of services (y-axis) and effective leave (x-axis). As we move from the bottom to the top of the graph, the coverage level increases. As we move from the left to the right, the level of effective leave increases. Predicted probabilities of benefiting from daily grandparenting are proportional to the areas of circles: the larger the area the higher the probability. In the bottom-left corner we find a cluster of countries with poor coverage, both in terms of services and leaves: Mediterranean countries and Poland. On the other extreme we find Denmark, France and Sweden. The first cluster of countries is also characterised by the presence of a legal obligation to financially support children without any age limit (black dot as country-marker). The second cluster is characterised by a limit to such obligation, as illustrated in Table 2 (grey dot as country-marker).

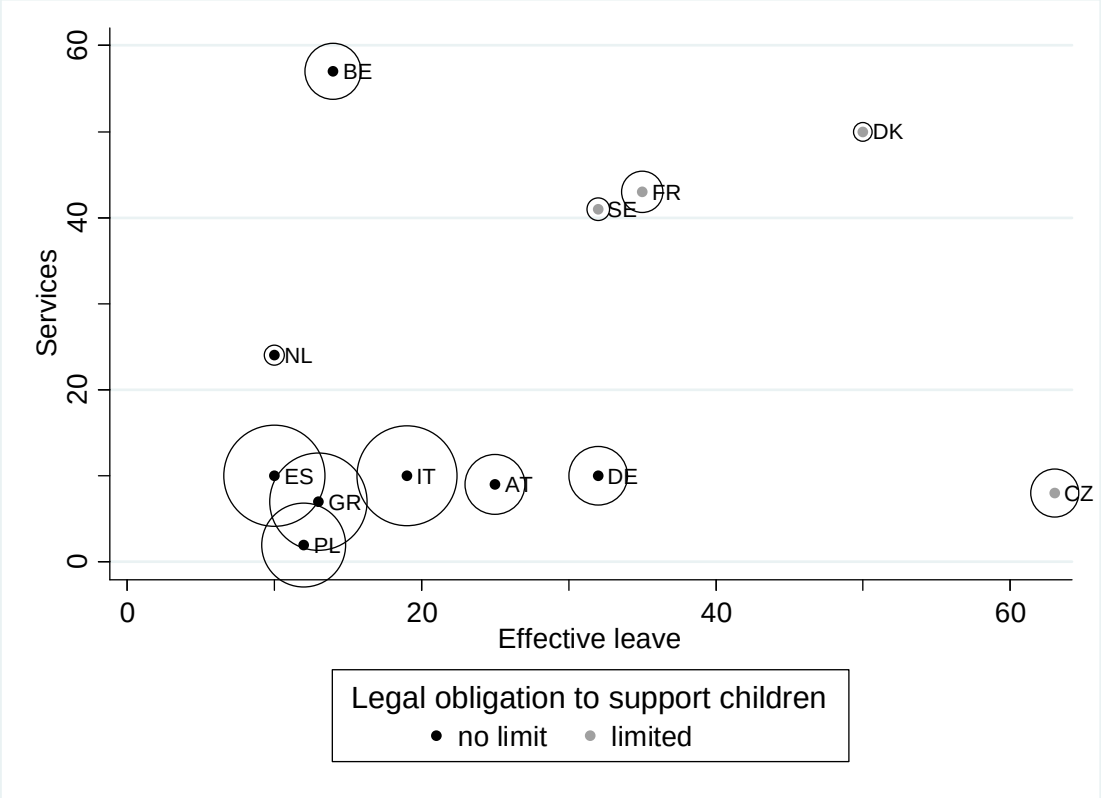


**Figure 4.** Selected countries by three policy indicators: services (y-axis), effective leave (x-axis) and legal obligation to support children (labels). The size of the circles is proportional to the predicted probability of undertaking grandparenting on a daily basis. The reference individual is a working woman with the youngest child aged 0-2. All the other variables are held constant as explained in the text.

A clear association between grandparenting and the policy context emerges from Figure 4: in countries with low state support (bottom-left corner) the predicted probability of grandparenting on a daily basis is the highest (big circles); in countries with high state support (upper-right corner) the predicted probabilities are much lower (small circles). Also legal obligations are associated with grandparenting: in countries where legal obligations are characterized by no age limit, the predicted probability tends to be higher.

Similarly, in figure 5 we reproduce the same graph but now the circles are proportional to the cumulative probability of daily or weekly support. The figure shows a much less pronounced heterogeneity in circles sizes, meaning that predicted probabilities vary less in this case. This is consistent with the idea that the policy context matters especially in influencing the role of grandparents as daily supporters.

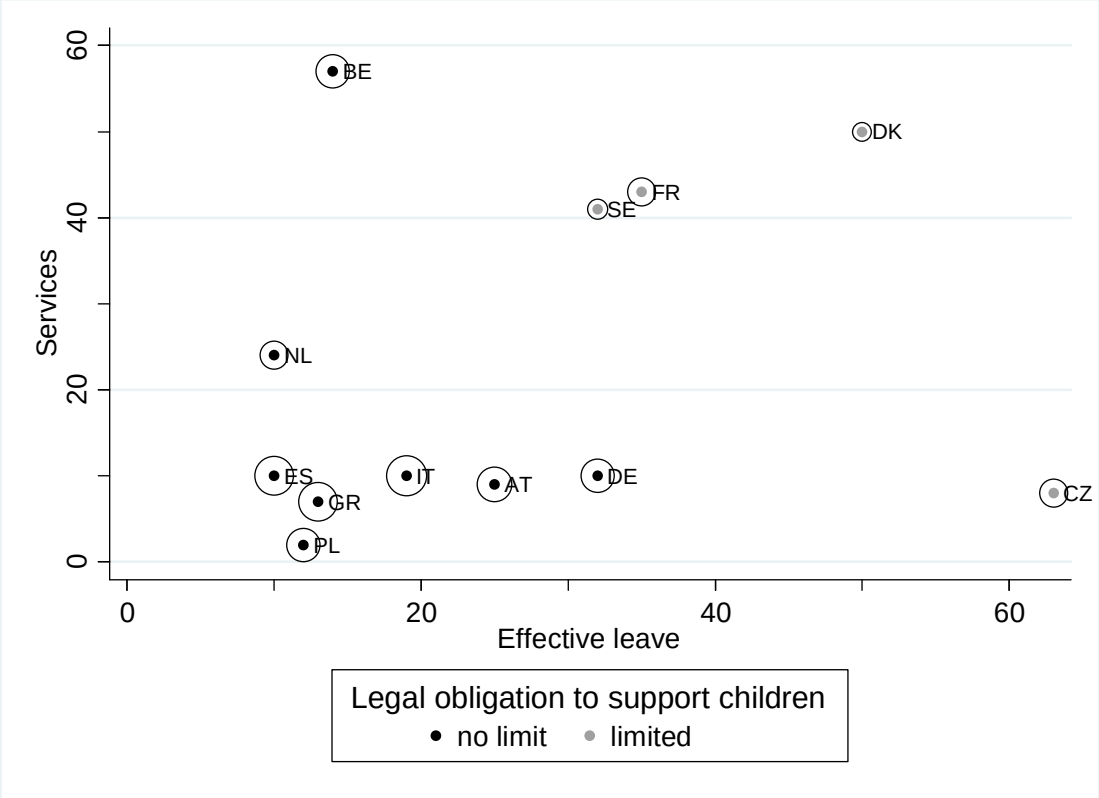


**Figure 5.** Selected countries by three policy indicators: services (y-axis), effective leave (x-axis) and legal obligation to support children (labels). Circles are proportional to the predicted probability of providing grandparenting on a daily or weekly basis. The reference individual is a working woman with the youngest child aged 0-2. All the other variables are held constant as explained in the text.

As we argued in section 2, the impact of the policy context on grandparenting might be stronger if we consider working mothers that have to balance a working career and family life. Figure 6 gives a clear empirical confirmation of this hypothesis. In the cluster of countries with low services, low leaves and with unlimited legal obligations toward children (i.e. mainly Mediterranean countries), the gap in the probability of using grandparental childcare between working and non-working mothers is particularly strong, especially in Italy. However, if we consider the probability of turning to grandparents for grandchild care on either daily or weekly basis (figure 7), both the heterogeneity between and within countries decrease.

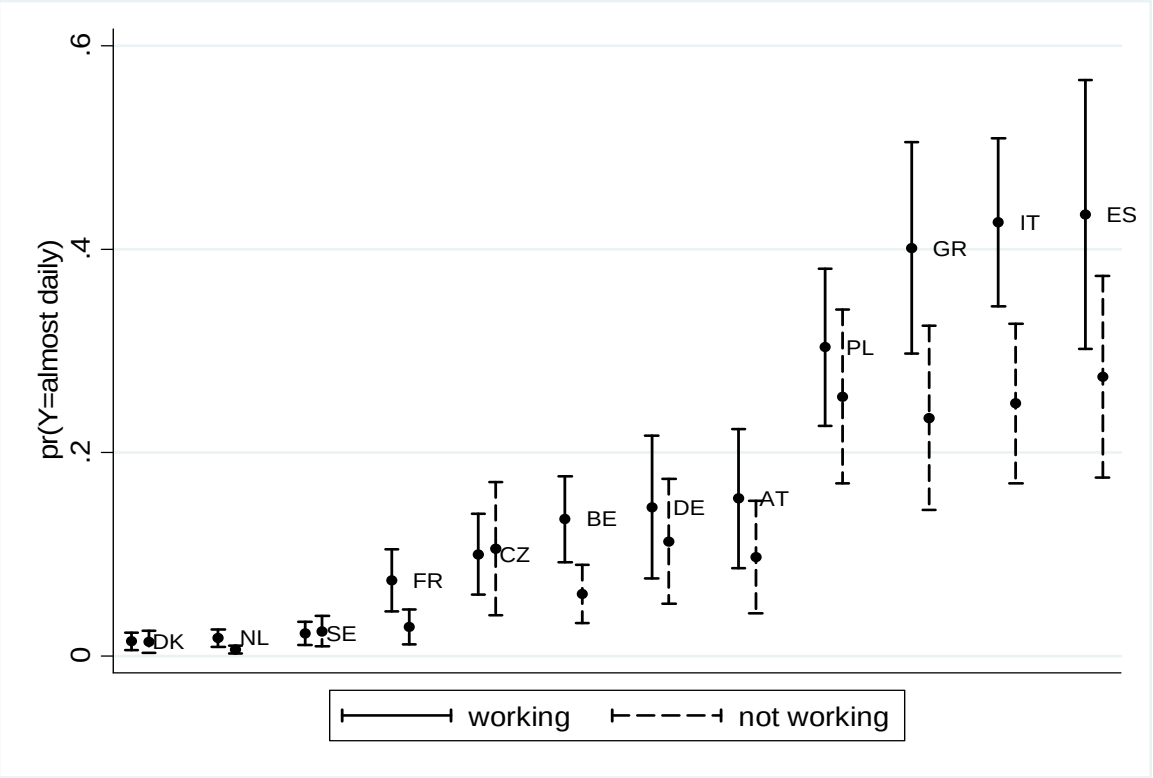


**Figure 6.** Predicted probability of grandparenting on a daily basis by working status and country. All the other variables are held constant as explained in the text.

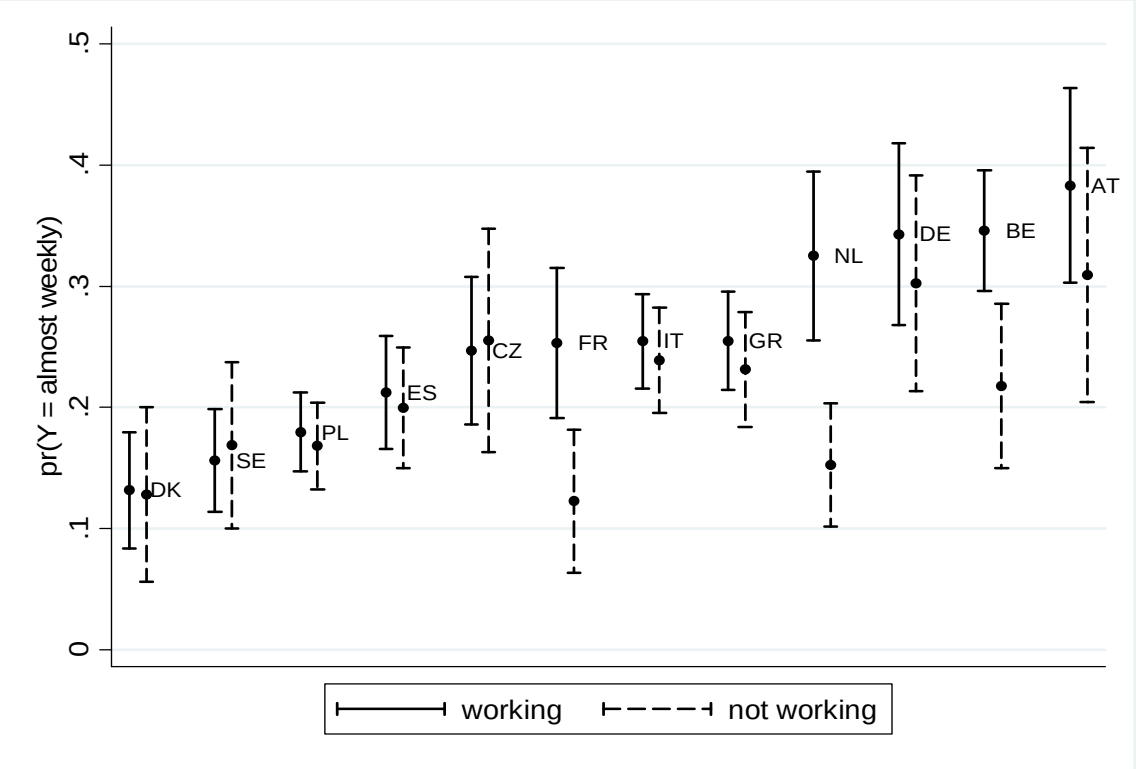


**Figure 7.** Predicted probability of grandparenting on a weekly basis by working status and country. All the other variables are held constant as explained in the text.

# 6. Conclusion

Socio-demographic changes of the family in modern societies now draw stronger attention to three-generation interactions. In line with the need to shed light not only on the variation in informal provision of childcare at individual-level, but also on the country-specific welfare setting, this paper assessed the role of three different policies on the informal childcare provided by grandparents. Active grandparental childcare appears sensitive to the public provision of childcare services.

Using separate country-specific regression models on comparable data from twelve countries from SHARE, we confirm that certain crucial individual characteristics influence the engagement of grandparents in childcare. For example, younger and non-working grandparents are more likely to help their children in taking care of grandchildren on a regular basis, as compared to older grandparents or to their working counterparts. Grandparents are also more likely to help a daughter than a son with childcare, especially if she is in the labour market. Although these characteristics have a similar effect in all the countries considered, we identify a clear country-specific pattern, with grandparents in Mediterranean countries being more likely to offer daily care and grandparents in Scandinavian countries much less. Yet, we argue that country-level structures are also important predictors of intergenerational transfers within the family. We have proposed to explain the European divide in grandparenting patterns with the between-country divergence in social policies, which are likely to influence the decision of young families to ask older family members for help. Following the dimensions of intergenerational regimes identified by Saraceno and Keck (2010), we have explored the country-specific welfare arrangement in terms of defamilialisation, supported familialism and familialism by default, as measured by public services offered for child care, parental leave, and legal obligations of family support. This categorization goes beyond the public/private responsibilities dichotomy and allows considering public support as possible incentive of family responsibilities (Saraceno, Keck, and Dykstra, 2009). The availability of public childcare services eases — without fully substituting — (grand)parental care responsibilities. Generous parental leaves support parental care and lighten the need to recur to grandparental care. Intergenerational obligations vary greatly across countries, as they have varied across time, shaping different contexts for intergenerational family relationships. Legal obligations may either impose dependencies that limit the autonomy of individuals, or support the choice to assume intergenerational obligations (Leira, 2002; Saraceno, 2010). From this

study, all the three dimensions of welfare to the family that we considered, matter in explaining the frequency of grandparental engagement.

The current analysis is largely descriptive and is therefore not without shortcomings. Importantly, we cannot observe how generations interact and negotiate grandparents' duties of childcare supply nor do we have information on attitudes (of the parents and the grandparents) for childcare. Despite its limitations, our analysis significantly contribute to the discussion on the effects of different welfare arrangements on intergenerational solidarity between grandparents and (grand)children, adding to it a focused analysis on grandparental care "users". We can also conclude that childcare is a crucial mechanism to reconcile work and family. The impact of the policy context on grandparenting appears to be stronger for working mothers, who presumably try to balance a working career with family life. The evidence presented here highlights the need to consider three-generation intergenerational relationships when framing retirement policies aiming at increasing retirement age, employment policies pointing to an increase of women in the labour force, as well as policies planning for child- and elderly-care.

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