



Deliverable D6.1

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE MULTILINKS RESEARCH PROGRAMME

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BACKGROUND

This report describes key findings from MULTILINKS (<http://www.multilinks-project.eu/>), a programme of research funded through the Seventh Framework of the European Commission, in which data from the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP), European Social Survey (ESS), and the Survey of Health and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) are analysed. The key findings are examples of research where MULTILINKS has brought new and unique insights, and these pertain to **macro and micro** views of family constellations, **East-West** differences in family patterns, **generational interdependencies**, **attitudes versus behaviour** in families, and intergenerational **policies versus regimes**.

MULTILINKS has focused on:

- **multiple linkages** in families (e.g. transfers up and down family lineages, interdependencies between older and younger family members);
- **multiple linkages** across time (measures at different points in time, at different points in the individual and family life course); and
- **multiple linkages** between national and regional contexts on the one hand (e.g. policy regimes, economic circumstances, normative climate, religiosity), and individual behaviour, well-being and values on the other hand.

Debates on ageing societies predominantly focus on the circumstances of the old. In

¹ Full title of the project: How demographic changes shape intergenerational solidarity, well-being, and social integration: A multilinks framework. Seventh Framework Programme Theme 8 Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH), SSH-2007-3.1.1 The impact of demographic changes in Europe, Grant agreement no.: 217523

MULTILINKS we felt that a change of focus was needed, one that started from three key premises.

First, population ageing is not only about older persons: it affects people of **all ages**. In debates on ageing societies, there seems to be an implicit assumption that demographic ageing primarily affects older persons, their economic situation, health, mobility, social integration, family support and care. Of course, increasing longevity and decreasing birth rates have resulted in larger numbers of older persons both in absolute and relative terms. Nevertheless, with dramatic shifts in the balance between old and young, the worlds of younger age groups have profoundly changed. The young are growing up in societies where they are a numerical minority and where they have several generations of family members “above” them. These considerations suggest that attention should be given to people of all ages.

The new demographic circumstances in which members of multiple family generations share several decades together compel us to recognize that individuals are embedded in a complex web of vertical and horizontal ties. Thus, a second key premise is that there are critical **interdependencies** between family generations and between men and women in families, which are built and reinforced by social policies. These interdependencies should not be taken for granted as is often done. Rather, it is important to address explicitly the ways in which legal and policy arrangements constitute differential opportunities and constraints for men and women and across generations in families.

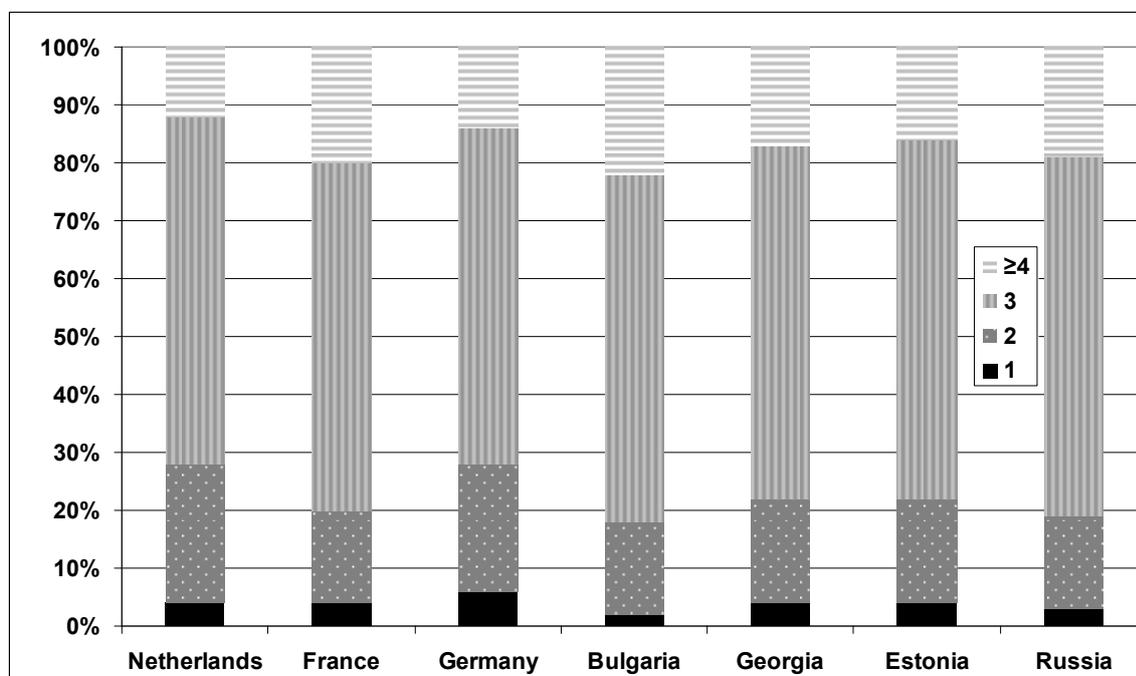
A third key premise is that to understand interdependencies in families, a spectrum of **levels** and units must be distinguished and recognized: country, historical generation, family, dyad (partners, parent-child) and the individual. Countries have disparate political, religious and economic histories, and different welfare state arrangements. To understand the impact of demographic changes on people’s lives, it is not sufficient to consider cross-national differences only. Regional diversity, including urban-rural differences, and social change over time must also be considered – the rapid changes in Central and Eastern Europe being a case in point.

MACRO AND MICRO VIEWS OF FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS

The conventional portrayal of family change under the influence of macro demographic trends is that the extension of life and the drop in birth rates result in “beanpole” families with relatively many vertical ties (e.g. parents, grandparents, greatgrandparents) and relatively few horizontal ties (e.g. siblings, cousins). Micro data from the Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS) provide a more nuanced view. Contrary to popular belief, vertically

extended families with four or five generations alive at the same time are not the norm (Herlofson & Hagestad, forthcoming; Puur, Sakkeus, Schenk, & Põldma, 2010). The majority of adults are members of **three-generation** families (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Adults aged 20 – 80, by number of family generations, selected countries



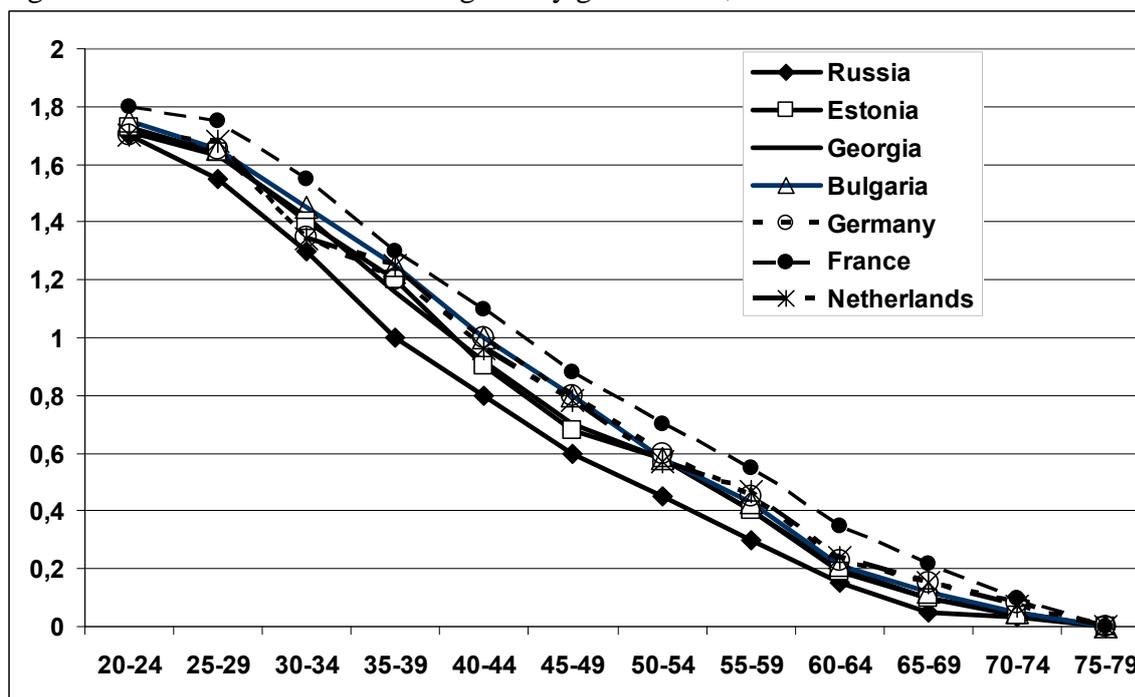
Source: Puur, Sakkeus, Schenk, & Põldma (2010), based on GGS

Note, however, that we would find greater proportions of four- and five-generation families if we included the very old (> 80 years of age) and the very young (< 10 years of age) in our samples (Herlofson & Hagestad, forthcoming). In addition, mapping generational structures is not a straightforward task. For example, respondents might be part of a three-generational lineage on the paternal side of the family, and part of a five-generational lineage on the maternal side (Herlofson & Hagestad, forthcoming).

Increased longevity and postponed childbearing have opposing effects on the generational structure of families. On the one hand, the extended lifespan means that older family members are living longer than they did in the past, which in turn suggests that three, four or even five generations of family members may be alive at the same time. On the other hand, delayed childbearing means that the age gap between generations is relatively large, which in turns reduces the likelihood that multiple generations are alive at the same time. Micro data make it possible to examine these opposing effects of increased longevity and postponed childbearing on the generational structure of families (Puur, Sakkeus, Schenk,

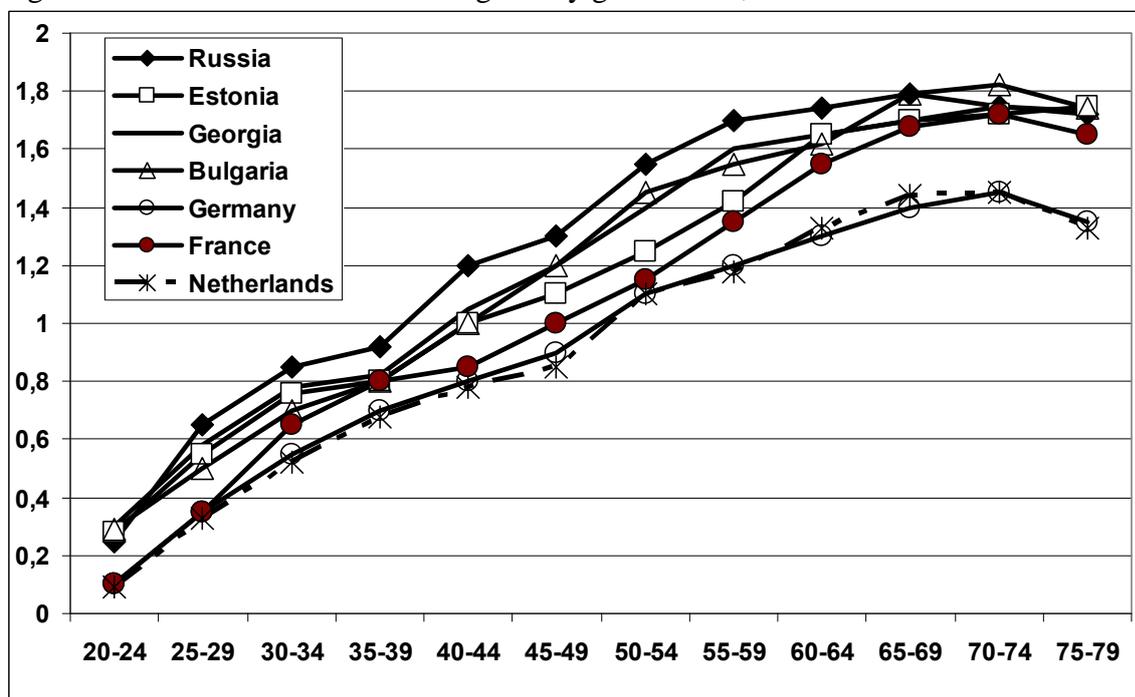
Põldma, & Dykstra, 2010).

Figure 2. Mean number of ascending family generations, selected countries



Source: Puur, Sakkeus, Schenk, & Põldma (2010) Dykstra (2010), based on GGS

Figure 3. Mean number of descending family generations, selected countries



Source: Puur, Sakkeus, Schenk, & Põldma (2010) Dykstra (2010), based on GGS

An example of this is the virtually identical proportions of one-, two-, three-, and four-generation families in France and in Russia. As Figures 2 and 3 show, the underlying demographic processes are quite different in these countries. In France, where people tend to

live long lives, adults have relatively many ascending family generations. In Russia, where people tend to have children at a young age, adults have relatively many descending family generations.

Another conventional view portrayed in studies of family change resulting from macro demographic trends is the metaphor of the **sandwich generation**, where men and women are caught between simultaneous responsibilities for their parents and children. MULTILINKS findings give little credence to this view (Puur, Sakkeus, Schenk, & Pöldma, 2010). Adults typically occupy middle-generation positions between the ages of 30 and 60. This is not a period in life when young children and elderly parents are likely to need care simultaneously. For those in the younger part of the age range (i.e. those with childcare responsibilities), parents are not at risk of frailty. For those in the older part of the age range (i.e. those caring for their parents), children will generally lead independent lives. Though the metaphor of a sandwich generation juggling care commitments towards parents and children is clearly a misconception of midlife, it continues to figure prominently in public and policy debates (Moor & Komter, 2011).

MULTILINKS research also challenges contemporary views on the effects of the drop in fertility. In gerontology, decreasing fertility rates over recent decades have received a considerable amount of attention, mostly motivated by a concern for parent care in years to come. It is, however, important to keep in mind that standard measures of fertility are woman-based and are therefore not perfectly indicative of the number of children in families with children. As Hagestad and Herlofson (forthcoming) note, the decline in fertility means a decrease in the average number of children per woman. It does not necessarily mean that the average number of children among mothers is dramatically lower. A critical factor to consider is patterns of childlessness.

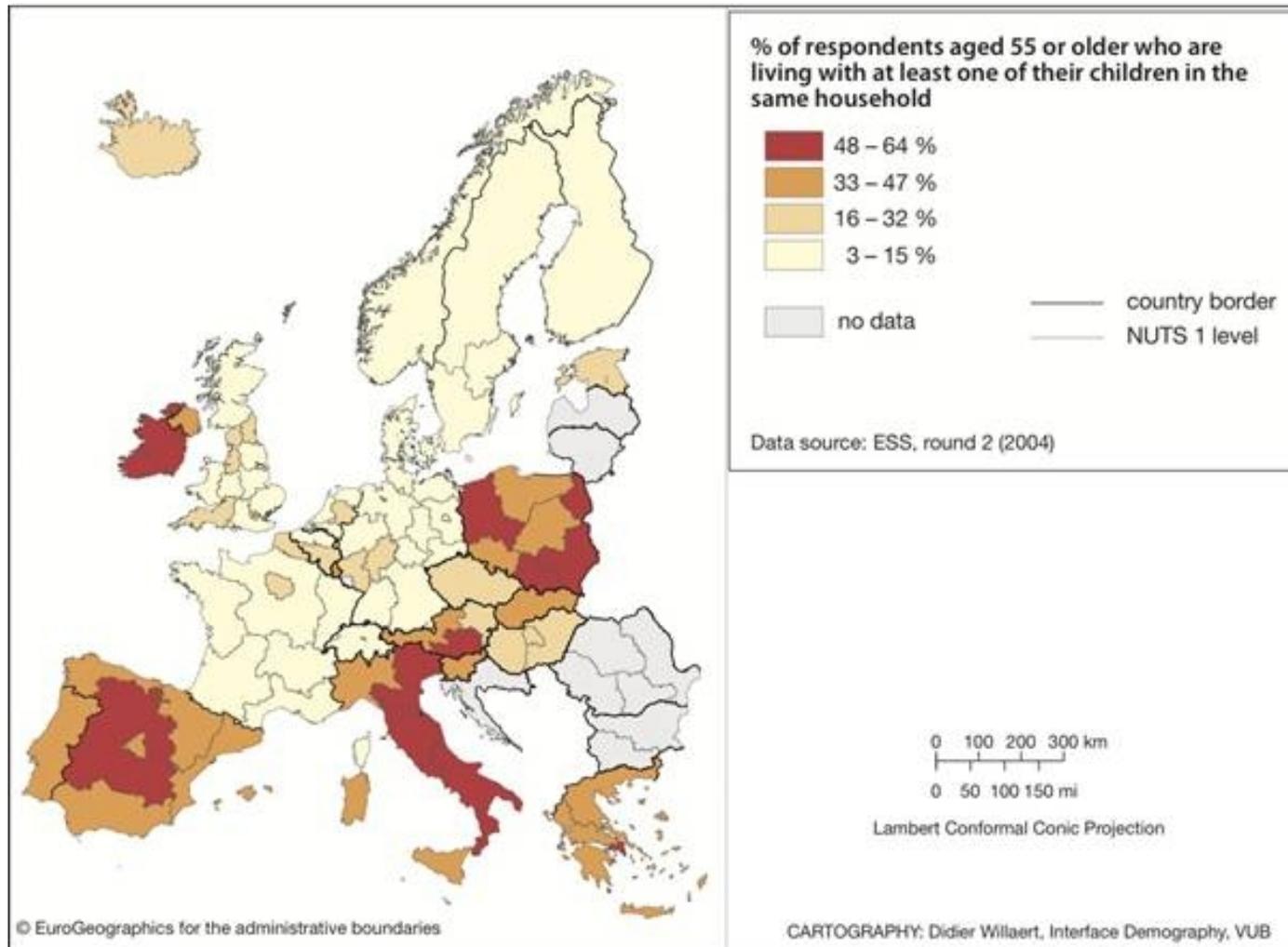
In addition, in previous research little attention has been given to individuals who are **vertically deprived** in the sense that they have no children or grandchildren, or no surviving parents or grandparents (Herlofson & Hagestad, forthcoming). Whereas an examination of childbearing and mortality patterns informs us about the existence of biological kin, an examination of divorce and separation provides insight into a different form of vertical deprivation, that is, having severed ties. Men are more likely to have broken family ties than women. One should not assume that all adults are part of multigenerational family structures. The focus on a presumed growth in multigenerational families has made researchers and policy makers overlook the substantial number of **generational solos**: individuals without any direct ascendant or descendant generational links.

EAST-WEST DIFFERENCES IN FAMILY PATTERNS

Patterns of exchange in European families are often described in terms of a north-south gradient; until recently, research rarely included East European countries. For example, intergenerational transfers of time and money among non-coresident family members have been shown to be less frequent in the Nordic countries in comparison to Southern European countries, with the Continental European countries being somewhere in the middle. However, research from the MULTILINKS programme demonstrates that **coresidence** of generations is widespread in certain countries. Figure 4 shows regional differences in the proportions of older adults who are living with adult children. Levels of coresidence are particularly high in Ireland, parts of Spain, Italy, Hungary, and Poland. In those countries, over half of the 55-plus live with adult children. Generational economics, an interaction of generational interdependence and economic resources, are behind coresidence. Insufficient independent income precludes young adults and the elderly from maintaining their own households. General economic malaise restricts this more widely, but specific housing markets may keep young people in their parental home, and the absence of affordable public residential and home care may necessitate intergenerational coresidence for older adults in need of assistance.

Intergenerational co-residence is among the strategies that can be adopted to organize support, economic and otherwise (Heylen & Mortelmans, 2009; Heylen, Mortelmans, Hermans, & Boudiny, forthcoming). Nevertheless, when parents and adult children share a household, the direction of intergenerational transfers is not always clear. Who is supporting whom? Compared to previous data collection efforts, the GGS have the advantage of including Eastern European countries and containing information on exchanges between family members both within and outside the household. In MULTILINKS we examined flows of assistance up and down generational lines in coresidential households. As Table 1 shows, the direction of “assistance”, such as providing help with household tasks, personal care, and financial transfers, tends to be **downward**. Most often, older parents are helping their adult children (over 60% of cases). The older adult is the primary recipient of assistance in less than 5% of coresident households. Contrary to popular belief, coresident living arrangements generally respond to the needs of adult children rather than those of the elderly parents. This finding is consistent with research on older adults living independently, which has repeatedly shown that the direction of intergenerational support flows tends to be primarily downward (Dykstra & Fokkema, 2011; Schenk & Dykstra, 2011). Again, this is contrary to popular belief. Parents become net beneficiaries of help only at an advanced age (> 80 years). Parents want to be parents, and maintain assistance patterns long after the children grow up.

Figure 4. Coresidence patterns in Europe



Source: Jappens & Van Bavel (2011), based on ESS

Table 1. Exchanges of assistance in coresident households

Low levels up / down	35%
Primarily upward	4%
Primarily downward	61%

Source: De Jong Gierveld, Dykstra, & Schenk (2011), based on GGS

A further East-West contrast was revealed with regard to levels of **well-being**. Analyses using GGS data show that in Eastern Europe, older adults tend to be lonelier (Gierveld, Dykstra, & Schenk, 2011), and feel more depressed (Moor, Komter, & De Graaf, 2011) than their age peers in Western Europe. This East-West well-being differential is consistent with earlier work showing lower life satisfaction and poorer self-perceived health in former communist countries than among long-term members of the European Union. An issue of debate is whether cross-national differences reflect real differences or cultural differences in the way people rate their experiences. In MULTILINKS we lean towards the former, given that the well-being measures used in the GGS have proven cross-national equivalence. The reliability, validity and structural characteristics of the measures are of high quality and allow intercultural comparison. The persistent East-West contrasts, which can be traced to differences in wealth, economic organization, political traditions, cultural systems, and policy arrangements, underscore the need to question whether determinants of well-being operate in a similar way across countries (Aassve & Robette, 2011; Saraceno, 2011a). A critical perspective on the transferability of different explanatory models from “West” to “East” is required.

GENERATIONAL INTERDEPENDENCIES

The new demographic circumstances, in which members of multiple family generations share several decades together, compel us to recognize that individuals are embedded in a complex web of interconnected ties. In MULTILINKS, we did **not separate** the old and young in families, but considered them jointly. In policy and research communities there tends to be a split between discussions on responsibilities for children and responsibilities for old people. “Family policy” usually refers to young families. Issues related to the old come under different headings: “ageing policy”, “long-term care policy”, or “caregiver burden”. The separation of care and financial policies into “young” and “old”

spheres is unfortunate because it disregards similarities between the young and the old and overlooks interdependencies across generations. It also provides a disjointed notion of what families are about.

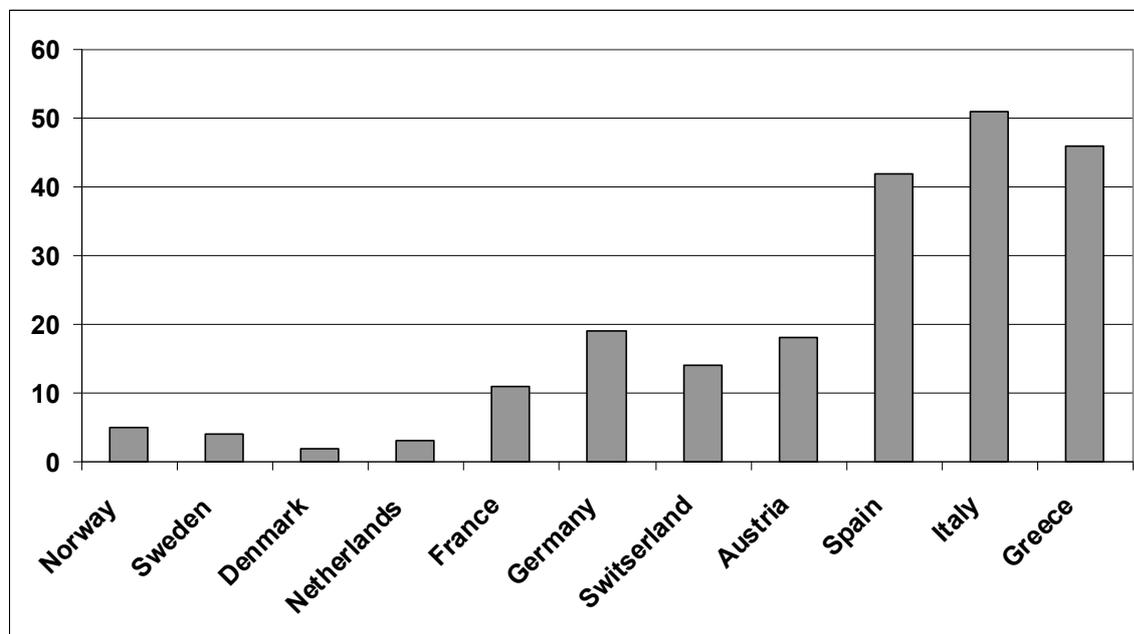
In all advanced societies, responsibility for the old and the young is shared in some manner between the family and the state. Interdependencies within families, both between generations and between men and women, are built and reinforced by the legal and policy arrangements in a particular country. Laws define the relationships of dependence and interdependence between generations and genders, whereas policies reward or discourage particular family patterns and practices. A consideration of legal norms and public policies draws attention to cultural specificity. Countries differ in their understanding of “proper” intergenerational family relations. For that reason, it is difficult to disentangle culturalist and structuralist explanations of cross-national differences in patterns of intergenerational exchange in families.

To understand the family/state division of responsibility for the old and the young, three patterns in legal and policy frameworks have recently been distinguished in the context of MULTILINKS (Saraceno, 2010; Saraceno & Keck, 2010). These patterns distinguish the degree to which country-specific institutional frameworks support the desire to be responsible towards one’s children and frail aged parents and/or support individual autonomy, thereby partially lightening intergenerational dependencies and the gendered division of family labour. The first pattern is **familialism by default**, where there are few or no publicly provided alternatives to family care and financial support. The second is **supported familialism**, where there are policies, usually in the form of financial transfers, which support families in maintaining their financial and caring responsibilities. The third is **defamilialization**, where caring needs are partly addressed through public provision (services, basic income, pensions). This differentiation of three patterns in legal and policy frameworks goes beyond the public/private responsibilities dichotomy used in current debates. This differentiation also makes clear that public support may be both an incentive for and lighten private, family responsibilities.

MULTILINKS research provides illustrations of the ways in which country-specific **policies structure** family care. Figure 5 shows, for selected European countries, the proportion who rely on grandparents for childcare. Data are from the Survey of Health and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). The reliance on grandparental care is particularly high in Spain, Italy, and Greece. Care provided by grandparents can be viewed as an effort to improve the life circumstances of the middle generation (adult sons and daughters). By

providing childcare, the middle generation can be gainfully employed and can advance in their working career.

Figure 5. Percentage of grandparents looking after grandchildren on a daily basis



Source: Herlofson, Hagestad, Slagsvold, & Sørensen, (2011), based on SHARE

In addition, Figure 6 shows that the likelihood that grandparents provide childcare is strongly linked to the availability of public policy arrangements. Again, the data are from SHARE. The larger the circle, the greater the likelihood that grandparents provide care. The circles are particularly large for Italy, Greece, Spain, and also Poland.² The position of the circle is determined by the availability of childcare services and parental leave. Clearly, the largest circles are where services and leave provisions are the least generous. Grandparents step in because there is a lack of public arrangements facilitating the combination of paid work and parenting responsibilities.

The MULTILINKS focus on intergenerational dependencies has prompted new research questions. Studies on labour force exit, for example, have tended to look at the retiring generation in an isolated way (Liefbroer, 2009) ignoring the intergenerational ties that may play a role in the retirement decision. Van Bavel and De Winter (2011) examined whether grandchild care might encourage older workers to leave the labour force before the official retirement age in countries with legal and policy arrangements allowing early

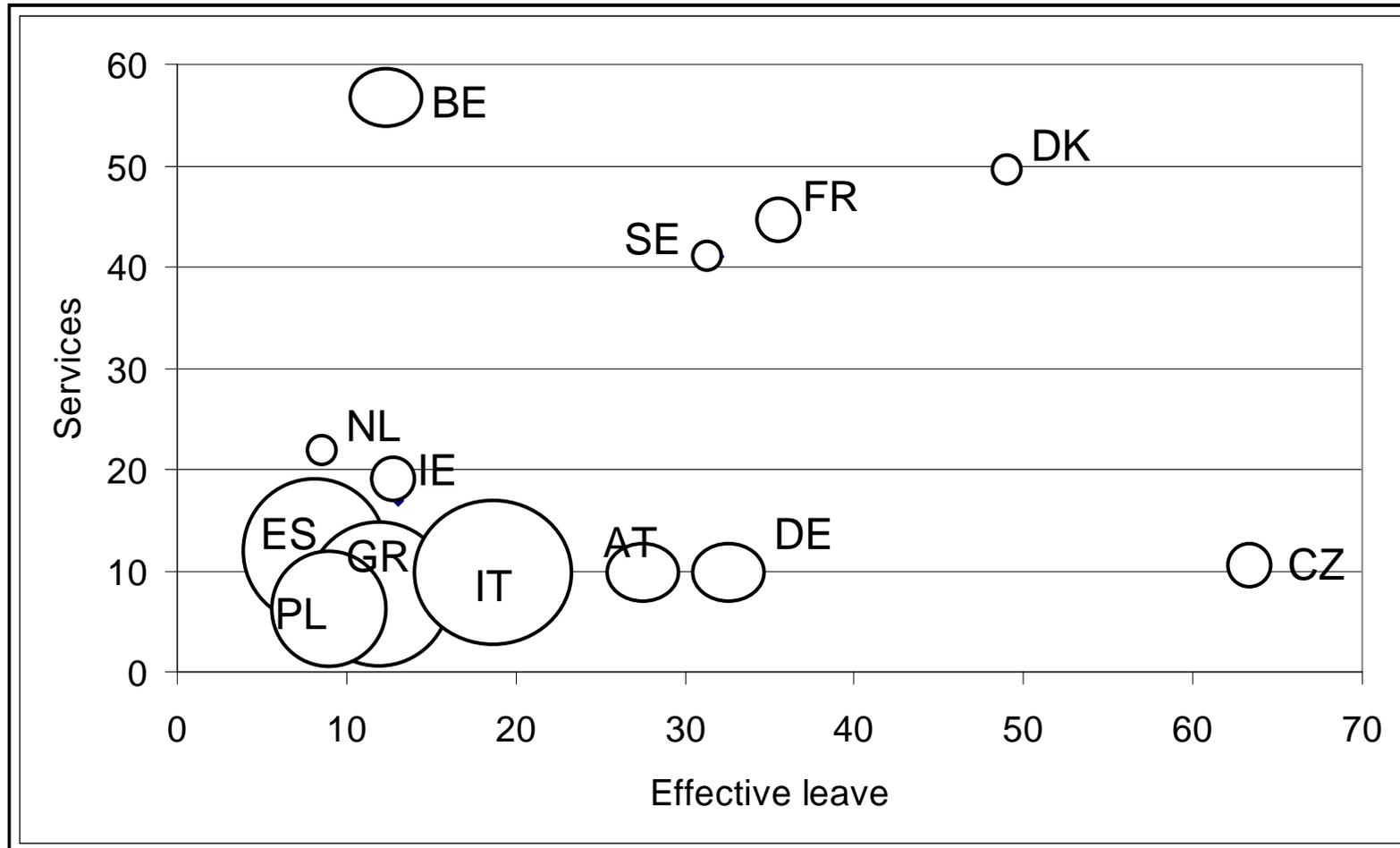
² Figure 5 is based on an earlier release of SHARE, which did not yet include data from Poland.

retirement. Their findings suggest that **grandparenthood speeds up retirement**, particularly for older women (see Figure 7). Across all countries participating in the European Social Survey, just over 50% of grandmothers who were previously active in the labour market had retired before reaching the age of 60, as compared to 37% of the women without any grandchildren. Among men, the difference between grandfathers and men without any grandchildren was smaller: before reaching the age of 60, 27% of the grandfathers had already retired in comparison to 23% of men without grandchildren.

ATTITUDES VERSUS BEHAVIOUR IN FAMILIES

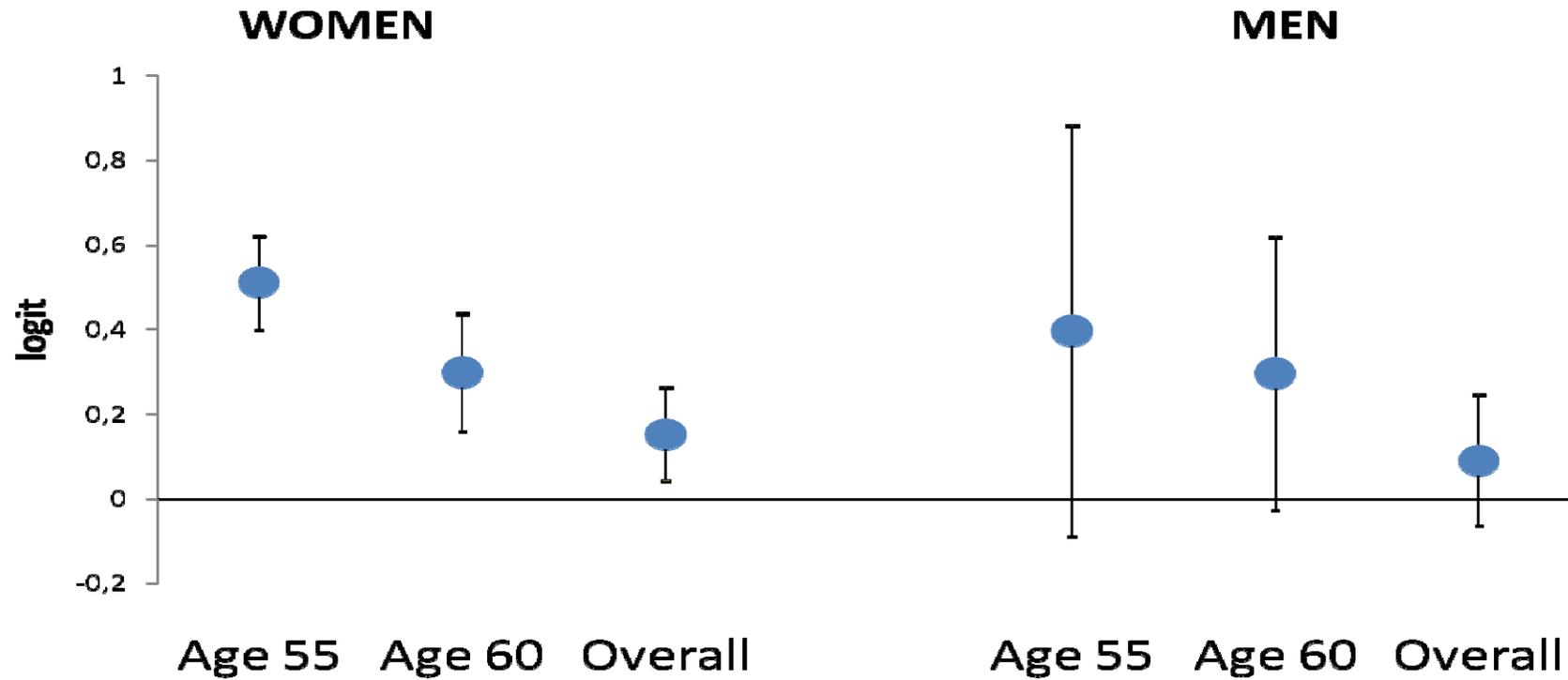
Attitudes about family members' responsibilities for each other are generally referred to as **family obligations** (Van Bavel, Dykstra, Wijckmans, & Liefbroer, 2010). They are socially shared and have a normative component. Not only do they reflect the cultural climate in which people live, but also the individual circumstances in which they find themselves. Family obligations are of interest because they are predictive of intergenerational support behaviour: they predispose people to behave in a certain way towards their family members. Family obligations are also of interest because they serve as a source of information for policymakers. The answers to questions about people's wishes for care and about the types of care people are prepared to give, provide insight into the extent to which policy measures are in line with public attitudes. They also offer tools for developing policy that enables or promotes the application of personal care preferences. Finally, family obligations are of interest because they provide insight into people's well-being. If the support exchanges in which people are engaged are consistent with their expectations and normative frameworks, then levels of well-being are higher than if there is a discrepancy between family obligations and behaviour. Moor and Komter (forthcoming) have demonstrated that the positive association between family ties and mental well-being is stronger for people who strongly endorse norms of family obligation.

Figure 6. Predicted probability of caring for a grandchild of a working daughter by level of effective leave and services



Source: Aassve, Arpino, & Bordone, in collaboration with Hagestad & Herlofson (2011), based on SHARE

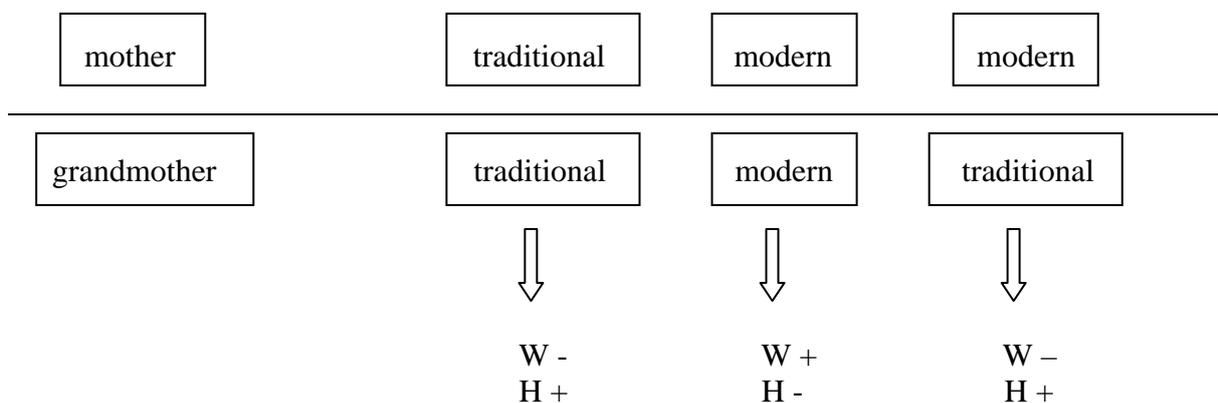
Figure 7. Estimated effect of being a grandparent on early retirement (cross-country average)



Source: Van Bavel & De Winter (2011), based on ESS

Research carried out in the context of MULTILINKS revealed that a focus on attitudes provides a better understanding of intergenerational exchanges (Aassve, Arpino, & Goisis, forthcoming). Focusing on the role of mothers and grandmothers, Aassve and his colleagues distinguished three hypothetical types of families (see Figure 8): in the first type, both mother and grandmother have traditional attitudes, in the second type, both the mother and the grandmother have modern attitudes, in the third type, the mother has modern attitudes but the grandmother has traditional attitudes. Traditional mothers are unlikely to work outside the home, whereas modern mothers are likely to have paid jobs. Traditional grandmothers are likely to help their offspring, by providing childcare, for example. Modern grandmothers are unlikely to provide childcare. A positive association between care provided by grandparents and maternal employment emerged in each of the seven Generations and Gender Survey countries under investigation (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Hungary, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Russia). However, the strength of the association was biased by the attitudes of the mothers and grandmothers. After correcting for attitudes, a “true” effect was found only for France, Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria. A “true” effect implied that care by grandmothers **helped mothers** maintain paid employment outside the home.

Figure 8. Attitudes (biasing effects) towards mother’s work and grandmother’s help



Source: Aassve, Arpino, & Goisis (forthcoming)

INTERGENERATIONAL POLICIES VERSUS REGIMES

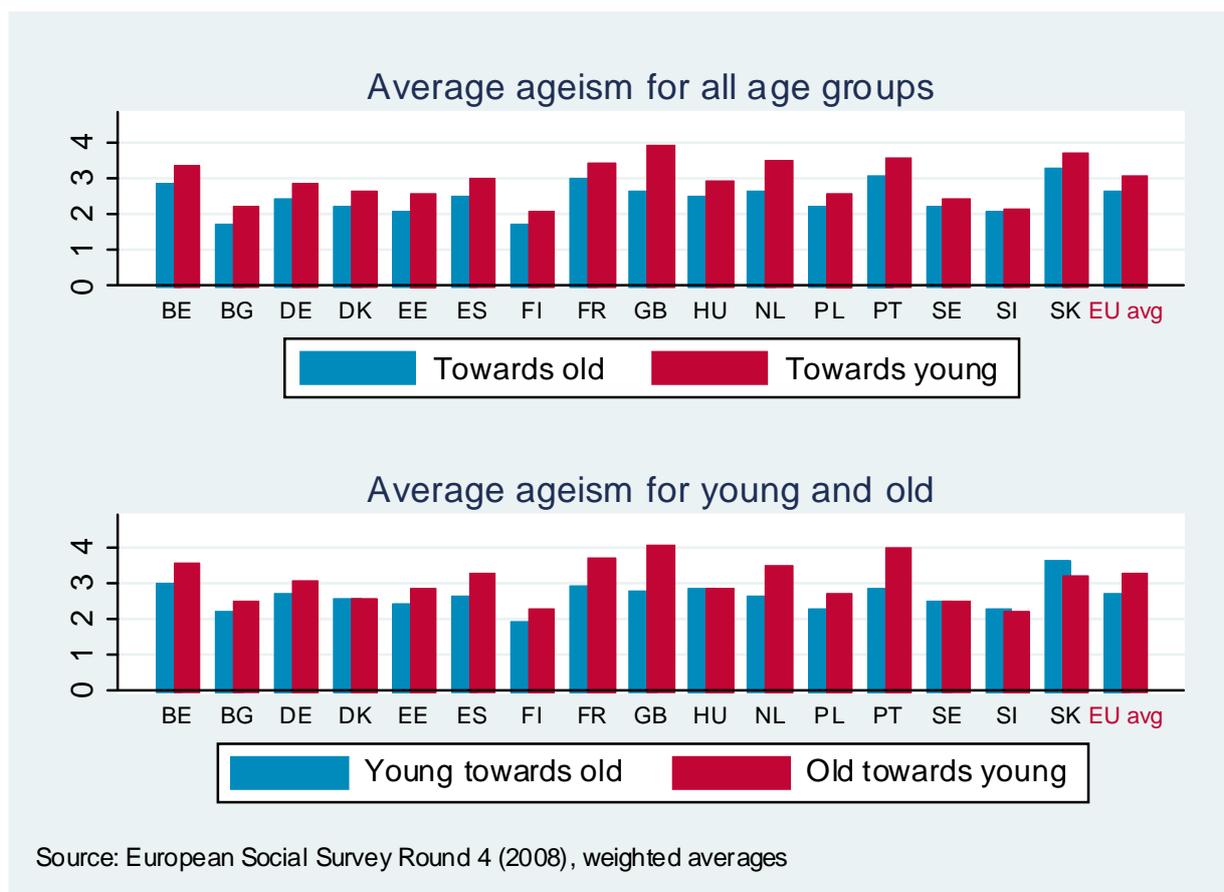
Welfare state typologies are popular in cross-national comparative research. Nevertheless, they have clear drawbacks (Schenk & Dykstra, 2010). First, they assume homogeneity among countries belonging to a particular regime type, and second, they lack

concrete measures of policies belonging to the respective regime types. MULTILINKS overcomes these limitations. **Comparative indicators** of legal and policy frameworks shaping financial and caring responsibilities in families (gendered intergenerational regimes) for all EU 27 countries (plus Norway, Russia and Georgia) have been developed in the context of this program (Keck, Hessel, & Saraceno, 2009). Note that the indicators represent policy frameworks, not service usage. The indicators represent the allocation of responsibilities to the state or to families for (a) caring for children, (b) financially supporting children, (c) caring for frail older persons, and (d) financially supporting older persons. The database focuses on 2004 (the year of GGP-data collections), and changes since then, using existing indicators as far as possible (OECD, EUROSTAT, and MISSOC).³ Information was also collected through national informants. Care was taken to harmonize information across countries (e.g. financial support is related to the average net national income level). Care was also taken to be explicit about decisions taken in quantifying the indicators (see Keck, Hessel, & Saraceno, 2009 for further information). The database has 71 indicators; 48 pertain to responsibilities for the young, and 23 pertain to responsibilities for the old.

The usefulness of the MULTILINKS database was illustrated, among others (Aassve, Arpino, Bordone, in collaboration with Hagestad, & Herlofson, 2011; Saraceno, 2011b; Schenk, Dykstra, & Maas, 2010; Van Bavel & De Winter, 2011; Yerkes, Schenk, & Dykstra, 2011) in cross-national studies of positive and negative feelings towards the young and towards the old. The question of interest was whether policies shaping generational interdependencies help to prevent or reduce **ageism** (Dykstra & Schenk, 2010). One view is that policies benefiting specific age groups represent “compassionate ageism”, a climate favourable towards the old or the young. An alternative view is that policies benefiting specific age groups are a source of intergenerational conflict, and thus contribute to ageism. Findings supported the first view. For example, in countries with high child allowances, people tend to have more positive attitudes towards the young.

³ Unfortunately, the information in MISSOC was less useful than we had hoped. See the First Policy Brief (Saraceno, Keck, & Dykstra, 2009), for details.

Figure 9. Ageism towards the young and towards the old



Source: Dykstra & Schenk (2010), based on ESS

RELEVANCE OF MULTILINKS FOR POLICY MAKERS

A focal message is that interdependencies between generations and between men and women in families are built and reinforced by the legal and policy arrangements in a particular country. Laws define the relationships of dependence and interdependence between generations and gender, whereas policies reward or disincentive particular family patterns. Policy makers should critically examine the ways in which caring responsibilities for the young and the old have been allocated between the family and the collectivity. To what extent do country specific institutional frameworks impose dependencies which limit the autonomy of individuals? To what extent do they support the choice to assume intergenerational obligations? Such a critical examination calls for a “holistic” approach to policymaking: a serious consideration of the ways in which public family provisions (or the lack thereof) create **differential opportunities** for individual autonomy for young and old, men and women. National policies should seek to support intergenerational care regimes without reinforcing social class and gender inequalities.

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