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Intergenerational transfers of time and money

in European families:

Common patterns – different regimes?

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Abstract

The 'generational contract' is the most important and also the most contentious dimension of contemporary welfare systems. Much of the debate on how to reform it is still truncated, however, by focussing on its public dimension only, especially on pensions and health care provisions. For a full account, the transfer of resources between adult generations in the family needs to be included as well. So far, research on family transfers has almost exclusively been limited to single-country studies. In this article, we present a comparative study of financial transfers and social support in ten Western European countries based on the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) conducted in 2004. Our results confirm, at the European level, the existence of a common transfer pattern. There is a net downward flow from the older to the younger generations, both by inter vivos financial transfers and by social support. Transfers from the elderly parents to their children are much more frequent and also usually much more intense than those in the opposite direction. The positive balance decreases with age but even those beyond age 70 clearly remain net givers. Our results also demonstrate that country-specific transfer patterns follow the typology of welfare regimes. Transfers from parents to children are less frequent but more intense in the Southern European countries than in the Nordic ones, with the Continental European countries being somewhere in-between the two. This welfare regime effect still holds after controlling for the most relevant characteristics of the parents.

Key words

Intergenerational transfers, informal support networks, European families, welfare regimes, ageing societies, generations

Introduction

The ‘generational contract’ is the most important and also the most contentious dimension of contemporary welfare systems. It is at the very heart of the problems presented by population ageing: protecting the old and investing in the young while keeping a balance between financial sustainability and the principles of social justice and fairness. Much of the debate on how to reform the generational contract is still truncated, however, by focussing on its public dimension only, especially on old-age pensions and health care provisions. For a full account, the transfer of resources between generations in the family needs to be included as well. What parents do for their children to help them grow up to maturity is well known, but the patterns of exchange of time and money between adult family generations has only recently found systematic attention. These patterns are crucial not only for the well-being of individuals and families, but also for the broader issues of social policy, social inequality and stratification, and social integration (Kohli, 2004; cf. also Attias-Donfut, 1995; Esping-Andersen, 1999, 2002; Spilerman, 2000; Szydlik, 2000; Myles, 2002; Künemund et al., 2005; Kohli, Künemund and Vogel, 2005).

A key question is how the ‘public’ (state- and market-provided) and the ‘private’ (family) dimension of the generational contract interact. According to the conventional story of modernization, the emergence of the modern welfare state has gone hand-in-hand with that of the nuclear family, and has restricted intergenerational family transfers to the nuclear unit. The results of most recent studies, however, point to the opposite conclusion: (i) Substantial transfers between adult generations in the family beyond the nuclear household still exist, with a net downward flow of resources from the elderly to their adult descendants. (ii) These intergenerational resource flows in the family in many ways depend on and are ‘crowded in’ by public support; in other words, it is the welfare state provisions that enable the family to provide transfers (Kohli, 1999; Künemund and Rein, 1999; Attias-Donfut and Wolff, 2000; Kohli et al., 2000; Knijn and Komter, 2004; Attias-Donfut et al., 2005).

Assuming that adult children have in the past financially supported their elderly parents¹, this support has indeed vanished; in this respect, the welfare state has crowded

¹ This assumption is to some extent debatable. Social historians (e.g., Ehmer, 2000) now point out that the support for the elderly by their children has been less pronounced than conventionally thought, and that

out family support (cf. Reil-Held, 2005). But in other respects, family support has on the contrary been encouraged and enabled by the new welfare arrangements. As an example, the financial support given by elderly parents to their adult children is often possible only on the basis of public pension incomes and health care coverage.

So far, research on family transfers has almost exclusively been limited to studies in a few single countries. Now, the availability of comparative data through the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) opens up new research avenues. The first question to be asked from the comparative evidence is for similarities: To what extent are the results found in the single-country studies valid across most or all of the countries – in other words, to what extent do modern Western societies show a common transfer pattern? The second question is for differences, which are to be expected along such dimensions as demographic and economic structure, institutional regulation of transfers, and cultural patterns of values and beliefs. A powerful base-line is provided here by the comparative welfare regime literature, which essentially refers to the degree of de-commodification and de-familialization of public transfers and services. Do family transfer patterns follow the typology of welfare regimes, in other words, is there a correspondence between the public and the private dimension of the generational contract?

Our article addresses these two questions. Its aim is thus, first, to document cross-country similarities in the likelihood and intensity of intergenerational transfers, and second, to analyze their relationship with welfare regime types.

A theoretical model of intergenerational solidarity

In the sociological literature a range of factors that would affect intergenerational family transfers and their national patterns have been put forth, for example, the demographic structure of families, the educational and occupational status balance between the sexes and the generations, the legal obligations of intergenerational support, the legal regulation of gift and inheritance taxation, the instruments of family policy, and the values and traditions that make up a family culture. Differences in the specific set of factors examined are often closely related to the theoretical approach

there has been a pervasive pattern of help from elderly parents to their adult offspring. The same point is made by evolutionary anthropologists (e.g., Low, 1998).

adopted. Thus, behind the various combinations of explanatory factors used in the literature, there is variation in the theoretical models of intergenerational solidarity (Kohli, 2004; Szydlik, 2004). Furthermore, explanations differ according to which specific characteristics of the exchange are considered – e.g., qualitative versus quantitative dimensions, or social support and help in kind versus financial transfers.

This complexity can be reduced by taking account of levels of aggregation and categories of explanatory factors. For the sake of simplicity, we distinguish here between the micro (individual and family) and the macro (anything above) level only, and between three broad categories: structural, institutional and cultural factors (Kohli, 2004) (Table 1).² Of particular importance for comparative research is how the macro factors are interrelated and packaged into patterns such as welfare regimes. The latter term often refers to a specific class of institutional factors but can also be used more broadly to include structural and cultural factors as well.

[Table 1 about here]

Our focus here is on documenting the patterns of intergenerational family transfers and on demonstrating their link to these packages or regimes. This already suggests some possible explanations. To spell out and fully validate these explanations will however require analyses based on parent-child dyads, which are beyond the scope of the present article.³

Data and variables

Our empirical analyses are based on the first wave of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), a longitudinal, multidisciplinary and cross-

² It is clear that, as in all such schemes, this grouping of factors is somewhat arbitrary. If, for instance, we conceive of an ‘institution’ as a set of rules, values, norms and practices which regulate social relations and behaviours of (groups of) individuals, institutional factors could be viewed as a combination of the other two categories.

³ Transfers need to be explained (i) by the patterns of institutional, cultural and structural factors at the macro and micro level, and (ii) by how these factors specifically affect transfers. Thus, for example, cross-country differences in the likelihood and intensity of social support may result from differences in the distribution of certain institutional, cultural or structural factors (e.g., in country A there are more elderly people in poor health than in country B); but they may also result from differences in the way in which these factors affect intergenerational transfers (e.g., in country A the effect of parents’ health on support received is lower than in country B because the level of public service provision is higher). In what follows we will sometimes refer to the first type of explanation as ‘compositional effect’.

national survey representing the population of individuals aged 50 and over in Europe.⁴ The first wave of SHARE data collection took place in 2004 with ten participating countries: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The number of individual respondents in Release 1 is 22,777.

SHARE contains detailed information on social support and inter vivos financial transfers from the perspective of adults aged 50 and above. In this article we consider the following information: (i) occurrence and amount of financial or material gifts or support (other than for shared housing and food) of at least 250 EUR (or the equivalent in local currency) from/to someone within or outside the household; (ii) occurrence and amount (in hours) of social support in any of three forms – personal care, practical household help, and help with paperwork – from/to someone outside the household; (iii) occurrence and amount (in hours) of looking after grandchildren. All these questions refer to the twelve months prior to the interview. For couples, questions on financial transfers, both given and received, and on social support received are addressed to only one member who is asked to answer for both members of the couple, whereas questions on social support given are addressed to all individuals included in the sample. There is one exception: if the two members of a couple indicate that they have separate finances, information on financial transfers is asked from both of them individually.⁵ The SHARE transfer data refer to exchanges between respondents and all other individuals (parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren, friends, neighbours, etc.). In the present article we restrict our analysis to the exchange between respondents and their children (both their own and those of their current spouse/partner). Transfers between parents and children comprise by far the largest proportion of all transfers and represent a fundamental part of each individual's welfare package.

⁴ This article uses data from Release 1 of SHARE 2004. This release is preliminary and may contain errors that will be corrected in later releases. The SHARE data collection has been primarily funded by the European Commission through the 5th Framework Programme (project QLK6-CT-2001-00360 in the thematic programme Quality of Life). Additional funding came from the US National Institute on Aging (U01 AG09740-13S2, P01 AG005842, P01 AG08291, P30 AG12815, Y1-AG-4553-01 and OGHA 04-064). Data collection in Austria (through the Austrian Science Fund, FWF), Belgium (through the Belgian Science Policy Office) and Switzerland (through BBW/OFES/UFES) was nationally funded. The SHARE data set is introduced in Börsch-Supan et al. (2005); methodological details are reported in Börsch-Supan and Jürges (2005).

⁵ As a consequence of the peculiar forms of SHARE data collection on social support and financial transfers, the construction of our dependent variables is rather complex. A brief description is provided in the methodological appendix available from the authors.

From the elderly to their offspring: The downward flow of resources at the European level

As mentioned above, previous studies have found evidence, in a number of different countries, of a net downward flow of resources from the elderly to their children, and thus in the opposite direction of the public transfers through the old-age security system. So far, however, data were available only for a few countries, and the fact that they were collected in different formats made comparisons difficult. Now that good comparative data exists, the first question is for commonalities: To what extent has the resource flow between the generations the same direction and intensity in the different European societies? SHARE data show that the downward direction is indeed a general pattern, both for inter vivos financial transfers and for social support (Table 2). Resource transfers from parents to children are much more frequent and usually also more intense than those from children to parents. In the ten European countries considered here, 21 percent of the respondents have given financial transfers to, and only 3 percent have received financial transfers from their children in the previous twelve months. For social support, the picture at first sight is somewhat different, with 9 percent having given and 16 percent having received such support. But if looking after grandchildren – which can be critical for young mothers' labour force participation and thus for their ability to combine parenthood and gainful work – is included, the downward direction of help is reaffirmed: 37 percent of elderly parents with at least one child outside the household have given to their offspring; among those with at least one grandchild, this percentage increases to 46 percent. The average intensity of the help provided by parents to their children is also higher than the opposite flow: 902 hours of social support per year given versus 602 hours received, and 2914 € of financial transfers given versus 1470 € received.

[Table 2 about here]

The story varies to some extent with age.⁶ It is often assumed that children receive financial and social support when their parents are still young and give it back when their parents become old and frail. SHARE's age range of 50 years or more comprises several distinct life phases. Patterns of intergenerational transfers reflect these different situations. While in the youngest group (50-59 years) only 7 percent of respondents receive social support, among those aged 70 years or more this proportion increases to 28 percent. Social support given decreases from 12 percent among those up to 59 years to 6 percent among the 70+, and when looking after grandchildren is included, from 62 to 29 percent (which means that in the latter perspective, even among those aged 70+ receiving and giving are equally frequent). With financial transfers, there is a net downward flow for all three age groups, even though it is less marked among the older ones. Regarding the amount of support and the balance between receiving and giving, the results are similar. While the oldest individuals tend to give fewer hours of social support than the two other age groups, there are no significant differences in the balance of financial transfers. The SHARE results thus do not support the assumption of a reversal of the direction of support with increasing age. They show instead that there is a net downward flow of resources from parents to their adult offspring across all countries and age groups. It is most pronounced among the youngest group, but even for the oldest group the balance remains equal or even somewhat positive.

Is there evidence of transfer regimes? And are they related to welfare regimes?

The second question to be asked from the comparative data is for differences: To what extent are there country-specific transfer patterns? Structural, institutional and cultural factors do not vary independently among countries; they tend to occur in packages. Is it possible to identify a small number of such combinations of the factors that regulate intergenerational family transfers, in other words are there different transfer regimes?

⁶ We speak of 'age' here even though some of the variation may reflect cohort differences. With the currently available cross-sectional data, we are not able to systematically differentiate between age and cohort effects.

As we have shown elsewhere, no studies exist so far that have done for the transfer field what the comparative welfare state literature has achieved with the creation of broadly accepted typologies of welfare regimes (Kohli, 2004: 272). In line with welfare state research (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999), the identification of transfer regimes can proceed in two steps: (i) to study the national packages of structural features, social institutions and cultural values which regulate intergenerational exchange (input), and (ii) to analyze the effects of these packages on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of intergenerational transfers (output). In the present article, we will move directly to the second step and examine the output side, i.e., the likelihood and intensity of social and financial exchange between elderly parents and their offspring. We will also analyze the correlation between these transfer regimes and welfare regimes.

Why should transfer and welfare regimes be correlated, in other words, why should countries usually grouped in the same welfare regime type have similar intergenerational transfer patterns? Three answers can be put forth: (i) The geography of welfare regimes as proposed by Esping-Andersen in many respects corresponds to a geography of structures, institutions and values related to family solidarity (Lesthaeghe, 1995; Mason and Jensen, 1995; Pinelli, 1995; Reher, 1998). This correspondence seems to be more distinct in the case of the Anglo-Saxon ('Liberal') and the Nordic ('Social democratic') welfare regimes, whereas the Continental European ('Conservative') group is more heterogeneous. The goodness of fit of the welfare regime geography with the issues of family solidarity can be increased by distinguishing in the Continental group those countries belonging to the Southern European model identified by many authors (for example, Leibfried, 1992; Lessenich, 1995; Ferrera, 1996).⁷ (ii) As argued above, a number of macro level factors connected with the specific configuration of welfare regimes are relevant for intergenerational transfers, including those institutional regulations usually grouped together under the heading of 'family policy' (Gauthier, 1996; Kaufmann et al., 2002). Thus, for example, we would expect that intergenerational exchange is more frequent and more intense in those countries – such as Austria, Germany, Italy and Spain - where there is a legal obligation of

⁷ With regard to family culture and values, it is interesting to note that answers to items on family solidarity and responsibility towards younger generations follow closely the differences between welfare regimes.

intergenerational support, i.e., a prescription that parents (or children) be responsible for their children (or parents) in case of need, so that social assistance will not be granted even to adults if their parents or children can support them. (iii) Welfare regimes can have an impact on the relation between factors at the micro level and exchange behaviour. Thus, we would expect that the role of an individual's need and opportunity factors in explaining intergenerational transfers is stronger where welfare state provisions are weaker.

The range of countries in SHARE does not allow for a full test of the welfare regime impact. There are no countries fully belonging to the liberal cluster. Table 3 gives an overview of the intergenerational transfers in the three remaining clusters. It should be noted that Switzerland is usually classified as lying somewhere between the liberal and the conservative model, and the Netherlands between the conservative and the social democratic one.

[Table 3 about here]

The first result is that the general pattern - a net downward flow of resources - shown in Table 2 applies to each single country. The downward flow is especially clear for financial transfers; but it is also valid for social support if looking after grandchildren is accounted for. In this respect, all countries are similar. Beyond this, there are similarities among countries according to welfare regimes, but also some differences within them.

Financial transfers between parents and children. Elderly people who receive financial help from their children represent a small minority of less than 4 percent in all countries with the exception of Greece (8 percent). Variation across countries is larger in the amounts received but regime patterns are difficult to discern. The story is different for giving financial help. In the Southern European group – with the exception of Greece which is at the level of the Continental cluster – the likelihood of financial transfers from parents to children is lower: 16 percent in Italy and 9 percent in Spain. On the other hand, these two countries have higher mean transfer values (per donor). It would seem, then, that the family support system of the Mediterranean societies is

stronger but for a smaller number of children. Financial transfers to children are less likely to take place but more intense.

Social support to/from children outside the household. With regard to the time balance of support given and received to and from children, SHARE data show that elderly persons are net receivers in France, Germany, Greece and Spain, whereas they are net givers in Denmark and the Netherlands.⁸ As noted above, however, when the time devoted to looking after grandchildren is taken into consideration the average elderly persons are net givers in all ten countries. The country patterns of social support received only partially follow the proposed distinction between Southern, Continental and Nordic welfare regimes. For the likelihood of support received, the regimes seem not to matter; the proportion of those receiving help is significantly higher in Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Germany and Greece than in France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy and Spain. However, the intensity of social support received corresponds well with the regime clusters. The lowest group in terms of the average number of hours of help received is that made up of Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands; Austria, France and Germany are in the middle group, and Italy, Spain and Greece in the highest one. With regard to the giving of social support, the correspondence between welfare regimes and intergenerational family transfers is high again for its likelihood, and somewhat less so for its intensity. Denmark and Sweden are the two countries in which elderly people are most likely to give social support to children living outside the household. This downward flow of time resources is significantly less frequent in Continental European countries, and least frequent in Southern Europe. As to the average yearly amount of hours given to children, the pattern is reversed. The Southern European countries are highest, the Nordic ones lowest, and the Continental ones somewhere in-between: while confidence intervals for France and the Netherlands overlap with those for the Nordic countries, that for Germany overlaps with those for the Mediterranean countries.⁹

In general, our analysis of country patterns in intergenerational family transfers suggests the existence of a north-south gradient. Denmark and Sweden are the countries in which the exchange of time and money is more frequent but with the lowest intensity. On the opposite side, Italy and Spain show the lowest proportion of elderly givers and

⁸ In all other cases the confidence intervals range from negative to positive values.

⁹ It should be noted that when looking after grandchildren is included, the regime pattern in likelihood of support almost disappears but still holds for its intensity.

receivers but the highest average value of the exchange. The differences correspond to the three welfare state groups; there is thus some evidence for a correlation between transfer and welfare regimes.

One explanation for the observed differences in social support is clearly to be found in the different rates of co-residence. As shown in Table 4, in Southern Europe co-residence of elderly parents with their children is much more widespread than in northern Europe (see also Kohli, Künemund and Lüdicke, 2005). The difference is particularly relevant for parents aged 50-59 (which is probably due to the late age of living the parental home in Southern European countries), but it remains high also for the oldest parents. There are two simple ways of controlling for this compositional effect. The first one is that of reproducing the statistics in Table 4 only for those individuals who have children but live alone (i.e. do not co-reside neither with a partner nor an adult child); the second one is that of recalculating all statistics regarding exchange likelihood by considering parent-child co-residence per se as an existing resource-exchange from parents to children and *vice versa*. The first solution provides numbers and patterns which are not significantly different from those shown in Table 4. The second solution, applied by Kohli, Künemund and Vogel (2005), generates a completely different picture in which Southern European countries have much higher proportions of support, higher than those in the Continental and Nordic countries. These results suggest that co-residence is the Southern European way of transferring resources from parents to children and vice versa. This is the norm, and when it happens that an elderly parent remains alone he/she is less likely to give or receive help than an elderly parent in the Continental or Nordic countries. On the other hand, in the relatively few cases in which resource exchange does take place between non co-residing parents and children it tends to be much more intense than in other countries, thus probably resembling what in the 'normal' families occurs within the household. In the Nordic countries, where intergenerational co-residence is rare, family support tends to revolve around separate households and to be less intense.

[Table 4 about here]

Many of the observed between-country differences remain problematic, however. Why do financial transfers differ as well – despite the fact that transfers both within and outside the household are taken into account? Are there other compositional effects that, together with co-residence, can provide better explanations? Do the identified transfer patterns still hold after controlling for the possible compositional effects?

Testing the consistency of intergenerational transfer regimes

Our analysis so far has largely confirmed the results of previous single-country studies: (i) substantial transfers between adult generations in the family beyond the nuclear household still exist; (ii) there is a net downward flow of resources from the elderly to their adult descendants. It has also shown that a correlation exists between welfare regimes and broad general country patterns in the likelihood and intensity of social support and financial transfers between parents and their offspring. The correlation is such that it provides tentative evidence for the crowding in as well as the crowding out hypothesis: In the stronger welfare states of the North, parents support their children more frequently but with less intensity.

What remains to be explored now is the consistency of these between-regimes differences. Many of them may simply be due to compositional differences – for example in economic and/or health conditions of the elderly population, or in patterns of household composition and family co-residence. Thus, in the following analyses we will test the consistency of the observed inter-regimes differences once major socio-economic individual characteristics are introduced in the explanatory model.

Four of our dependent variables will be taken into consideration: likelihood and amount of financial transfers from parents to children, and likelihood and amount of social support given to children including looking after grandchildren. We will present two different models for each of these variables. In the first model we will estimate the effects of individuals' characteristics on the dependent variable. The second model introduces dummies accounting for the welfare regimes, thus testing whether, after controlling for relevant compositional effects, the differences between welfare regimes still hold.

[Tables 5 and 6 about here]

First we analyse the determinants of whether financial transfers have been given or not (likelihood). As to the characteristics of the respondents, Table 5 shows that being younger, being male, living in a couple, having higher wealth¹⁰ and education, being in employment, and having good health have a significant positive impact on the likelihood of providing financial resources to offspring. There is also some evidence of reciprocity: for parents who have received a small amount of social support from their children, the odds of making a financial transfer to their children is significantly higher than for parents who have not received any social support from their children, holding all other variables constant.¹¹ The primary aim of this article is addressed by the following model. It demonstrates that the welfare regime effect persists even after controlling for a large number of potential compositional effects: people living in Southern and in Continental Europe are less likely to make a financial transfer than people in the Nordic countries, consistent with what we have found in the descriptive statistics.

Table 6 presents the results for the amount of financial transfers. The most striking results are the following: (i) While clear country and regime patterns could not be discerned in the descriptive account (Table 3), financial transfers after controlling for respondents' characteristics tend to be significantly higher in the Continental and Southern European countries than in the Nordic ones. (ii) The amount of social support received from children in the previous twelve months seems to be positively related to the amount of money given to them. The coefficients for parents who received between 271.5 and 1786.5 hours are positive, whereas the t statistic for those above this value, due to the low number of cases, is slightly lower than the significance threshold. In sum, the welfare regime effect on likelihood and intensity of financial transfers from parents

¹⁰ Wealth is defined as the sum of real assets (i.e., the sum of the value of the primary residence net of mortgages, the value of other real estate, the owned share of own businesses and the owned cars) and of net financial assets (i.e., gross financial assets minus financial liabilities). In our analyses we use per capita wealth, i.e., household wealth adjusted for purchasing power parities and divided by the number of household members.

¹¹ The values utilized to create dummies from the yearly amounts of hours of social support received correspond to relevant thresholds in the distribution of the variable. Thus, 63 hours is the median value of the variable when it is positive, and 271.5 and 1786.5 hours are the values corresponding respectively to 75% and 95% of its cumulative distribution.

to children is confirmed after controlling for some of the most relevant socio-economic characteristics of respondents.

[Table 7 and 8 about here]

In Table 7, the correlates of giving or not giving social support to children outside the household (including looking after grandchildren) are modelled in parallel to Table 5. The likelihood that parents, in the previous twelve month, have given some kind of social support to their children is negatively affected by age, poor health, having received help from care services, and being unemployed or still in employment (versus being retired or homemaker). Having grandchildren, higher wealth and education, co-residing with a partner and being female have a significant positive effect. Moreover, there is a significant positive relation between giving social support and receiving a small amount of social support from one's children; this positive effect disappears when parents have received a higher amount of help, which may be due to the fact that having received so much help means that they are not in the condition of being able to reciprocate. As the second model shows, the welfare regime has again a significant impact even after controlling for respondents' characteristics. In particular, there is a marked positive effect of the Nordic welfare regime on the likelihood of giving help to children – a clear indication that family solidarity is crowded in by a strong welfare state.¹²

The analyses of the determinants of the amount of support to children (Table 8) yield some interesting results. The first model shows that being female, having grandchildren, co-residing with a child, being low educated and being a homemaker positively affect the amount of social support given to children. However, some significance levels change after introducing the dummies for the welfare regime (model 2); the effect of having children in the household and of being sick or disabled is not significant any more, while the negative relation between the amount of help given and age becomes significant. With regard to help received from children, it has to be noted

¹² In models of intergenerational transfers, time and money can to some extent substitute for one another. For this reason we have also used a combined dependent variable – the likelihood of financial or social support from parents to children – in testing the relationship between transfer patterns and welfare regimes. Multivariate analyses with this combined variable confirm the results obtained for the likelihood of parents' financial and social support separately.

that, first,, receiving a substantial but not enormous amount of help negatively affects the amount of help given, and that, secondly, the few who receive a very high amount of help from their children and who reciprocate this help tend to give a lot to their children. Model 2 again demonstrates that systematic differences between welfare regimes persist even after controlling for respondents' characteristics. Combined with our previous findings, these results confirm that in the Nordic countries transfers from parents to children are more frequent but less intense.

Conclusions

The generational contract is a crucial dimension of contemporary European welfare systems, and the debate on how to reform them revolves to a large part around the necessity of reshaping this contract. Its public pillar consists mainly of pensions, and thus of an upward flow of economic resources from the younger to the older generations. Some authors have argued that generations have opposing interests over welfare reform, and thus predict a generational conflict scenario, whereas others are less willing to embrace this scenario (Preston, 1984; Hernes, 1987; Mirowsky and Ross, 1999; Esping-Andersen and Sarasa, 2002; see Kohli, 2005, for an overview). What is largely missing in this literature, however, is an adequate account of the private pillar of the generational contract. Where authors do (marginally) take it into account, they often assume that it consists of care services provided by the younger generations to the older ones.

We have reached a different conclusion. Our analysis of family transfers presented here largely confirms, at the European level, what has been found in the previous literature based on single-country studies: Substantial transfers of resources between parents and their offspring still exist and, in general, there is a net downward flow from the older to the younger generations, both by inter vivos financial transfers and by social support. Transfers from the parents to their children are much more frequent and also usually much more intense than those in the opposite direction. The positive balance decreases with age but even those beyond age 70 clearly remain net givers.

Our results also demonstrate the existence of consistent country patterns in the likelihood and intensity of intergenerational family transfers. We have shown that these

transfers vary across welfare regimes. Transfers from parents to children are less frequent but more intense in the Southern European countries than in the Nordic ones, with the Continental European countries being somewhere in-between the two. This welfare regime effect still holds after controlling for the most relevant characteristics of the parents. In future work, it remains to be explained why intergenerational transfer patterns are correlated with welfare regimes – a task which will require a more detailed examination of the social mechanisms of transfers at the micro level.

Tables

Table 1 Exemplary factors affecting intergenerational family transfers and their patterns across countries

	<i>Macro level (above family)</i>	<i>Micro level (family, dyads and individuals)</i>
<i>Structural factors</i>	Demographic structure of families and households; labour force structure; income and wealth distribution	Family and household composition; educational and occupational status of parents and children; income and wealth status
<i>Institutional factors</i>	Legal obligations of intergenerational support; gift and inheritance taxation; family and social security policies	Marriage/cohabitation arrangements; household division of labour
<i>Cultural factors</i>	Religious traditions; family and gender values; age and generation values	Values, beliefs, attitudes and cultural practices of families, parents and children

Table 2 Likelihood and intensity of intergenerational transfers by age

Financial transfers to/from children *					
	Given	Received	Amount given	Amount received	Balance
	%	%	€	€	€
Age					
50-59	28	1	2642	1672	2420
60-69	22	3	3172	1605	2568
70+	13	4	3161	1282	2229
Total	21	3	2914	1470	2423
Social support to/from children outside the household ²					
	Given	Received	Amount given	Amount received	Balance
	%	%	Hours	Hours	hours
Age					
50-59	12	7	651	425	244
60-69	11	11	536	265	145
70+	6	28	504	751	-497
Total	9	16	569	602	-171
Social support to children outside the household including looking after grandchildren					

	Given [‡]	Given [†]	Amount given	Balance
	%	%	hours ³	hours ³
Age				
50-59	62	37	850	691
60-69	60	49	933	747
70+	29	27	912	83
Total	46	37	902	469

Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe 2004 (release 1). Own calculations, weighted.

Notes: *Respondent has at least one child; [†]Respondent has at least one child outside the household; [‡] Respondent has at least one child outside the household and one grandchild.

Table 3 Likelihood and intensity of intergenerational transfers by country

Financial transfers to/from children *					
	Given	Received	Amount given	Amount	Balance
	%	%	€	received	€
				€	
Nordic Regime					
Denmark	28	1	2825	1331	2718
Sweden	32	1	1391	745	1300
Continental European Regime					
Austria	25	4	2754	740	2245
France	22	1	3362	2956	2895
Germany	27	4	2203	882	1879
Netherlands	22	1	2854	1139	2603
Switzerland	21	1	9788	1584	8981
Southern European Regime					
Greece	25	8	2509	1072	1630
Italy	16	2	3436	3230	2816
Spain	9	3	3493	1169	2160
Social support to/from children outside the household ²					
	Given	Received	Amount given	Amount	Balance
	%	%	Hours	received	hours
				Hours	
Nordic Regime					
Denmark	20	20	247	135	67
Sweden	17	17	218	182	15
Continental European Regime					
Austria	11	21	405	320	-65

France	9	12	285	486	-124
Germany	12	23	508	457	-153
Netherlands	13	13	298	134	91
Switzerland	11	12	535	360	87
Southern European Regime					
Greece	7	24	676	596	-298
Italy	7	12	1449	1498	-451
Spain	3	12	894	829	-351
<hr/>					
Social support to children outside the household including looking after grandchildren					
	Given [‡]	Given [†]	Amount given		Balance
	%	%	Hours ³		hours ³
<hr/>					
Nordic Regime					
Denmark	60	51	382		264
Sweden	52	43	388		274
Continental European Regime					
Austria	45	36	820		516
France	50	40	742		447
Germany	44	36	689		250
Netherlands	59	45	471		381
Switzerland	43	31	673		473
Southern European Regime					
Greece	45	36	1647		820
Italy	44	35	1443		766
Spain	40	32	1338		699

Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe 2004 (release 1). Own calculations, weighted.

*Notes:** Respondent has at least one child; [†]Respondent has at least one child outside the household;

[‡]Respondent has at least one child outside the household and one grandchild.

Table 4 Co-residence of elderly people with children and partners by country

	Respondents living in household with an adult child				Respondents living in
					household without partner nor
					adult child
	%				%
	All	<60	60-70	>70	
<hr/>					
Nordic Regime					
Denmark	7	14	4	2	32
Sweden	9	20	4	1	35
Continental European Regime					
Austria	18	26	16	11	33
France	18	34	12	6	27
Germany	14	26	9	8	31
Netherlands	17	32	10	3	28
Switzerland	20	36	12	7	27
Southern European Regime					
Greece	37	63	35	14	27
Italy	39	64	36	19	26
Spain	40	56	37	27	26

Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe 2004 (release 1). Own calculations, weighted.

Table 5 Likelihood of financial transfers to children (logistic regression; odds ratios)

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Age	0.970** (6.24)	0.970** (6.16)
Female (Ref.: Male)	0.934 (1.40)	0.907* (2.03)
Living in couple (Ref.: Not living in couple)	1.234* (2.51)	1.223* (2.40)
Number of children	1.019 (0.76)	1.005 (0.22)
Children in household (Ref: None)	0.790** (3.10)	0.885 (1.49)
Per capita net wealth: 2nd quartile (Ref.: 1st quartile)	1.324** (2.75)	1.351** (2.91)
3rd quartile	1.733** (5.55)	1.780** (5.76)
4th quartile	1.870** (6.26)	1.942** (6.56)
Educational level: Middle (Ref.: Low)	1.984** (8.77)	1.776** (7.11)
High	3.245** (12.58)	2.816** (10.66)
Employment status: Retired (Ref.: Homemaker)	1.203 (1.89)	1.126 (1.22)
Employed	1.389** (3.38)	1.268* (2.43)
Unemployed	1.032 (0.19)	0.938 (0.38)
Sick or disabled	1.030	0.926

	(0.17)	(0.43)
Good and better health (Ref.: Less than good)	1.278** (3.93)	1.262** (3.72)
Received help from care services (Ref.: No)	1.157 (1.03)	1.100 (0.68)
Received help from children, 1-63 hours (Ref.: No)	1.518** (3.27)	1.438** (2.82)
Received help from children, 63-271.5 hours	1.280 (1.40)	1.237 (1.20)
Received help from children, 271.5-1786.5 hours	0.899 (0.46)	0.896 (0.48)
Received help from children, more than 1786.5 hours	1.005 (0.01)	1.041 (0.09)
Continental European regime (Ref.: Nordic)		0.751** (4.62)
Southern European regime		0.544** (6.81)
Observations	18860	18860

Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe 2004 (release 1). Own calculations, weighted. Unit of analysis: all respondents with children.

Notes: * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%. Absolute value of t statistic in parentheses.

Table 6 Amount of financial transfers to children (OLS regression; coefficients)

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Age	0.003 (0.53)	0.003 (0.50)
Female (Ref.: Male)	-0.084 (1.87)	-0.072 (1.63)
Living in couple (Ref.: Not living in couple)	-0.427** (5.23)	-0.422** (5.22)
Number of children	0.009 (0.31)	0.015 (0.55)
Children in household (Ref: None)	0.199** (2.72)	0.157* (2.03)
Per capita net wealth: 2nd quartile (Ref.: 1st quartile)	0.146 (1.54)	0.149 (1.56)
3 rd quartile	0.321** (3.32)	0.323** (3.34)
4 th quartile	0.490** (4.53)	0.486** (4.50)
Educational level: Middle (Ref.: Low)	-0.003 (0.04)	0.042 (0.44)
High	0.451** (4.26)	0.501** (4.25)
Employment status: Retired (Ref.: Homemaker)	-0.233* (2.06)	-0.205 (1.85)
Employed	-0.155 (1.54)	-0.109 (1.09)
Unemployed	-0.295 (1.70)	-0.247 (1.44)
Sick or disabled	-0.281	-0.224

	(1.53)	(1.24)
Good and better health (Ref.: Less than good)	-0.000 (0.01)	0.005 (0.07)
Received help from care services (Ref.: No)	0.083 (0.76)	0.095 (0.87)
Received help from children, 1-63 hours (Ref.: No)	-0.167 (1.43)	-0.142 (1.21)
Received help from children, 63-271.5 hours	0.040 (0.25)	0.054 (0.33)
Received help from children, 271.5-1786.5 hours	0.470** (2.66)	0.476** (2.67)
Received help from children, more than 1786.5 hours	0.322 (1.16)	0.320 (1.18)
Continental European regime (Ref.: Nordic)		0.172** (2.88)
Southern European regime		0.293** (3.29)
Constant	6.940** (18.02)	6.670** (16.96)
Observations	4334	4334
R- squared	0.08	0.08

Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe 2004 (release 1). Own calculations, weighted. Unit of analysis: all respondents with children. Unit of dependent variable: natural log of the value of the transfer in Euros. *Notes:* * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%. Absolute value of t statistic in parentheses.

Table 7 Likelihood of social support to children including looking after grandchildren (logistic regression; odds ratios)

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Age	0.922** (17.98)	0.922** (17.91)
Female (Ref.: Male)	1.279** (4.61)	1.257** (4.29)
Living in couple (Ref.: Not living in couple)	1.563** (5.87)	1.565** (5.89)
Having children and grandchildren (Ref.: Having children but no grandchildren)	22.914** (30.13)	22.847** (30.05)
Children in household (Ref: None)	0.922 (1.04)	0.970 (0.38)
Per capita net wealth: 2nd quartile (Ref.: 1st quartile)	1.100 (1.08)	1.104 (1.11)
3rd quartile	1.291** (2.90)	1.307** (3.02)
4th quartile	1.567** (4.96)	1.609** (5.21)
Educational level: Middle (Ref.: Low)	1.201** (2.80)	1.136 (1.77)
High	1.353** (3.22)	1.254* (2.23)
Employment status: Retired (Ref.: Homemaker)	1.110 (1.22)	1.055 (0.62)
Employed	0.630** (4.48)	0.583** (5.13)
Unemployed	0.623** (2.62)	0.589** (2.92)

Sick or disabled	0.697 (1.86)	0.652* (2.19)
Good and better health (Ref.: Less than good)	1.396** (5.55)	1.378** (5.30)
Received help from care services (Ref.: No)	0.708** (3.16)	0.688** (3.42)
Received help from children, 1-63 hours (Ref.: No)	1.524** (3.30)	1.475** (3.04)
Received help from children, 63-271.5 hours	1.095 (0.63)	1.081 (0.54)
Received help from children, 271.5-1786.5 hours	1.146 (0.82)	1.157 (0.87)
Received help from children, more than 1786.5 hours	1.420 (0.79)	1.465 (0.86)
Continental European regime (Ref.: Nordic)		0.650** (6.84)
Southern European regime		0.566** (6.72)
Observations	16648	16648

Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe 2004 (release 1). Own calculations, weighted. Unit of analysis: all respondents with at least one child outside the household.

Notes: * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%. Absolute value of t statistic in parentheses.

Table 8 Amount of social support to children including looking after grandchildren (OLS regression; coefficients)

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Age	-0.733 (1.66)	-1.127** (2.59)
Female (Ref.: Male)	10.543* (2.09)	14.465** (2.97)
Living in couple (Ref.: Not living in couple)	10.410 (1.46)	11.823 (1.63)
Having children and grandchildren (Ref.: Having children but no grandchildren)	28.753* (2.18)	25.725* (1.96)
Children in household (Ref: None)	21.235* (2.36)	4.029 (0.48)
Per capita net wealth: 2nd quartile (Ref.: 1st quartile)	-9.075 (0.99)	-12.581 (1.42)
3rd quartile	-5.336 (0.70)	-8.924 (1.18)
4th quartile	-2.737 (0.30)	-9.193 (1.03)
Educational level: Middle (Ref.: Low)	-20.598** (2.69)	3.913 (0.44)
High	-37.191** (4.42)	-7.222 (0.81)
Employment status: Retired (Ref.: Homemaker)	-19.024* (2.16)	-6.102 (0.73)
Employed	-41.847** (4.49)	-24.796** (2.82)
Unemployed	-59.748** (4.75)	-42.849** (3.52)

Sick or disabled	-42.844** (2.72)	-25.472 (1.65)
Good and better health (Ref.: Less than good)	0.862 (0.15)	4.871 (0.87)
Received help from care services (Ref.: No)	-5.634 (0.37)	6.904 (0.46)
Received help from children, 1-63 hours (Ref.: No)	-8.365 (0.69)	0.458 (0.04)
Received help from children, 63-271.5 hours	-27.793** (2.62)	-21.907* (1.99)
Received help from children, 271.5-1786.5 hours	5.328 (0.28)	6.319 (0.32)
Received help from children, more than 1786.5 hours	73.355* (2.05)	55.051 (1.57)
Continental European regime (Ref.: Nordic)		24.262** (5.44)
Southern European regime		93.851** (10.45)
Constant	134.364** (3.78)	89.320* (2.55)
Observations	6408	6408
R-squared	0.04	0.08

Source: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe 2004 (release 1). Own calculations,

weighted. Unit of analysis: all respondents with at least one child outside the household who have made a positive transfer. Unit of dependent variable: 10 hours.

Notes: * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%. Absolute value of t statistic in parentheses.

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