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# The Relationship Between Public Policy and Grandparents' Involvement in Childcare: A Scoping Review of the International Evidence

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Grandparent childcare is important to support parents' work/care reconciliation. Research has begun to identify relationships between grandparent childcare patterns and policy settings. However, this work is disparate and focused on childcare policy, with little engagement with the broader range of policies that shape grandparent childcare. A holistic approach to understanding the relationship between policies and grandparent childcare is important to capture the intergenerational dynamics of family decisions about childcare and the complementarities (or not) of policies in different domains. This scoping review identifies policies that *directly* aim to shape grandparents' involvement in childcare and that *indirectly* shape configurations of care. Most literature focuses on childcare and parental leave policies' impact on parental *demand* for grandparent childcare. But a wider, intergenerational, policy lens reveals that policies (such as retirement income policies) affect parents' demand for, *and* grandparents' *supply* of childcare, and that policies in different domains are not always aligned.

**Keywords:** grandparent; childcare; paid work; public policy

## Introduction

Over recent decades, higher maternal labour market participation has generated greater needs for childcare. Barriers to formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, such as limited affordable, accessible, flexible childcare options (Adamson, 2017), and a preference for familial care in some contexts (Wheelock and Jones, 2002), mean that many parents draw on grandparents as a source of childcare. Emerging research examines the nature of grandparent childcare, the characteristics of families that draw on it, its benefits for grandparents, parents, and grandchildren, and the impacts of grandparent childcare on the labour supply of both parents and grandparents.

Grandparent childcare is common in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, though the prevalence and patterns of care vary, with greater intensity in some nations (e.g. southern and eastern Europe), than in others (e.g. northern Europe) (Glaser *et al.*, 2013; Price *et al.*, 2018). In European countries, the prevalence of at least weekly care by grandparents is around 30 per cent (Bratti *et al.*, 2018). Grandmothers provide much more childcare than grandfathers. Some research suggests more intensive levels of grandparent childcare in low socio-economic status (SES) families compared with high SES families (Bordone *et al.*, 2017; Floridi, 2022).

There is substantial research showing that grandparent childcare increases maternal labour supply (Gray, 2005; Zamarro, 2011; Aparicio-Fenoll and Vidal-Fernandez, 2015; Garcia-Moran and Kuehn, 2017; Bratti *et al.*, 2018). In one study of fourteen European countries, having access to at least weekly grandparent childcare increased maternal labour supply by 17 per cent and had no impact on paternal labour supply (Barslund and Schomaker, 2019). Research has also explored the relationship between grandparenthood/grandparent care and grandparents' labour supply (Gray, 2005; Zamarro, 2011; Van Bavel and De Winter, 2013; Rupert and Zanella, 2018; Backhaus and Barslund, 2021; Floridi, 2022; Frimmel *et al.*, 2022), suggesting that becoming a grandparent negatively affects grandparents' (particularly grandmothers') labour supply (Barslund and Schomaker, 2019; Backhaus and Barslund, 2021). Backhaus and Barslund found that being a grandmother 'reduces the probability that a woman aged between fifty-five and sixty-four years is employed by more than 30 per cent' (2021: 8). Grandparents' involvement in childcare is therefore shaped by their labour market participation, other socio-demographic factors, and family circumstances.

Grandparent childcare arrangements are also shaped by public policy settings. Over the last few years, scholars have begun to use a work/care regime analysis to understand country differences in the organisation of grandparent childcare. Research on grandparenting regimes explores the relationship between grandparent childcare prevalence and intensity, and different combinations of ECEC access or use, parental leaves, and cultural and gender norms about work and childcare (Glaser *et al.*, 2013; Di Gessa *et al.*, 2016; Bordone *et al.*, 2017; Floridi, 2022). This work has been highly important in beginning to understand how policy configurations shape grandparent childcare. However, it focuses on ECEC and parental leave policies with only limited engagement with the broader range of policies that shape configurations of grandparent childcare. A very small body of research (i.e. Van Bavel and De Winter, 2013; Ho, 2015; Lakomý and Kreidl, 2015) has begun to identify how other policy settings shape grandparental involvement in childcare. However, this work is disparate and draws on diverse methodological approaches. A holistic approach to understanding the relationship between different policies and grandparent childcare is important to capture the intergenerational dynamics of family decisions about childcare, and the complementarities (or not) of policy settings in different domains. For example, policies that aim to increase mothers' labour market participation may, if not accompanied by strong ECEC policy settings, conflict with policies to boost mature age labour market participation by simultaneously drawing grandparents into childcare, and out of work.

Using an intergenerational lens that encompasses factors driving the demand for grandparent childcare among parents, and supply of childcare by grandparents, this article maps the existing evidence on the relationship between public policies and grandparents' childcare across policy settings that span the life course. Through a scoping review of the literature, the article asks: what is known about the relationship between public policy and the demand for, supply of, and configuration of grandparent childcare? The article contributes new knowledge by bringing together the research evidence on the role of different policy domains in shaping grandparent childcare. It is the first to assess these according to different criteria, including whether the relationships identified between policies and grandparent childcare are direct or indirect, whether public policies shape the availability, patterns or nature of grandparent childcare, and which policy domains are foregrounded, and neglected.

Understanding the ways public policies shape grandparent childcare is important for both scholarship and policy. Understanding the policy/grandparent childcare nexus provides the structural backdrop for empirical studies on family decision-making about intergenerational childcare. It also makes grandparent childcare visible to public policymakers by revealing the ways in which it is a *product* of policy programmes and constellations that intersect with family preference and circumstances to create patterns of grandparent childcare.

## Method

The project was approved by the University of Sydney Ethics Committee [2022\_HE000074]. To chart what is known about the relationship between public policy and the demand for, supply of, and configuration of grandparent childcare, we conducted a scoping review of the literature. A scoping review is ideally suited to identify and map literature on a given topic, particularly where the evidence is broad in scope and diverse in methodological approach (Levac *et al.*, 2010; Peters *et al.*, 2015; Munn *et al.*, 2018), but unlike a systematic review, there 'is no expectation or possibility of statistical pooling, formal risk of bias rating, and quality of evidence assessment' (Peters *et al.*, 2021: 3).

We conducted a scoping review following the five-stage framework devised by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), reviewing the available evidence from the last thirty-three years. The PRISMA ScR JBI Checklist was followed to ensure rigorous application of Arksey and O'Malley's framework. Scoping review methodology is an increasingly common approach to evidence synthesis and is developing as a policy- and decision-making tool (Peters *et al.*, 2021).

### Stage 1: identifying the research question

We set out to answer the question: What is known about the relationship between public policy and the demand for, supply of, and configuration of grandparent childcare?

### Stage 2: identifying relevant studies

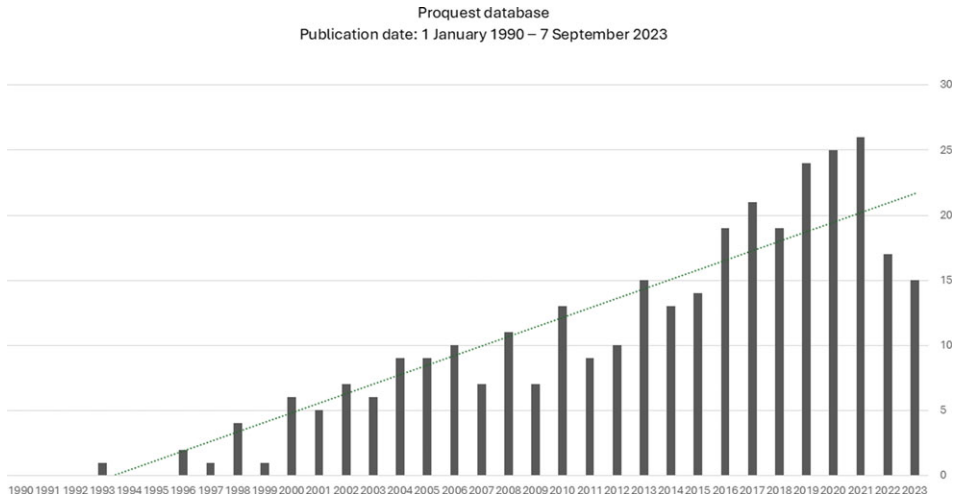
Searches were conducted on the seventh of September 2023 across three multi-disciplinary databases with strong and broad coverage of the social sciences and public policy and their intersections with other disciplines: Scopus, ProQuest Central, and JSTOR. The initial search terms for all searches were (grandparent\* OR grandmother\* OR grandfather\*) AND (childcare OR child care OR child-care OR child\*) AND polic\*. Boolean operators and truncation symbols, applicable to these databases, were used.

Search parameters included: titles in English and limited to books, reports, scholarly journals and working papers published between the first of January 1990 and the seventh of September 2023. This time span was selected because of rising maternal labour market participation and transformation of ECEC and family policies during this period. The number of titles increased over the search period: for example, from an initial nine titles in the Proquest database over the decade 1990–99, to eighty-three titles since 2020 (see Fig. 1).

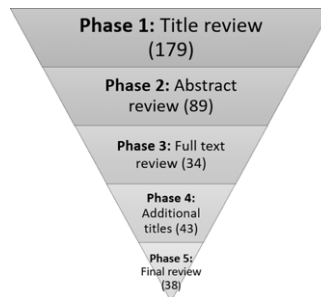
Three hundred and twenty-two titles resulted from the Proquest search, 564 titles from Scopus, and thirty-seven from JSTOR. These were exported into MS Excel to create one file with 923 entries. Duplicates were deleted, leaving 701 entries.

### Stage 3: study selection

Two researchers reviewed the 701 titles using inclusion and exclusion criteria. Included studies were: studies in English; studies focused on full member OECD countries (to allow comparison between more similar familial and governmental structures); and studies focusing on all household types, including intergenerational households (i.e. where parents and grandparents resided in the same premises) to incorporate the full range of grandparent childcare from highly intensive to more peripheral. Excluded studies were: studies focused on health outcomes (of grandparents and/or grandchildren); and studies focused on kinship caring (where grandparents act permanently *in loco parentis* i.e. take over all or nearly all responsibilities pertaining to raising a child, often through custodianship or guardianship arrangements), as the research is part of a larger study that is focused on the sharing of childcare by parents and grandparents and kinship



**Figure 1.** Example of increase in articles in this area.



**Figure 2.** Selection process.

care has very different dynamics. The reviewers applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria in five phases (Fig. 2).

**Phase 1** involved two researchers independently reviewing each entry by title. Where assessments differed, resolution was achieved through discussion. One hundred and seventy-nine titles remained. In **Phase 2**, abstracts were reviewed by two researchers. Disagreement was resolved through discussion, after which eighty-nine titles remained. In **Phase 3**, the same reviewers independently read the full text, reducing the number to fifty-three titles, of which they had high confidence in twenty-nine that addressed both the research topics of public policy and grandparental childcare. A third team member resolved the differences in their assessment of the remaining twenty-four titles, retaining five, so that thirty-four scholarly titles remained. In **Phase 4**, an additional nine titles were included after evaluating the reference lists of the chosen titles, resulting in forty-three titles. **Phase 5** involved a rigorous re-examination of these articles in relation to the research question, and a further five titles were removed, resulting in thirty-eight.

#### **Stage 4: charting the data**

Following Arksey and O'Malley's descriptive/analytical method, we charted key aspects of the thirty-eight titles – including author, year, title, country/region, publication type, methods, policy area, and aim(s) of the study, using a 'data charting form' (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005) created in MS Excel (Table 1).

Table 1. Charting the data

Author, Year	Policy Area	Title (abbreviated)	Country/ Region	Type of Publication	Methods	Aim(s)
Aggarwal and Das Gupta (2013)	Migration	Grandmothering at work: conversations with Sikh Punjabi grandmothers . . .	Canada	Journal article	Qualitative (interviews)	Recognition of contribution of unpaid grandmothering
Aidukaite <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Policy regimes	The father’s role in childcare: parental leave policies . . .	Lithuania, Sweden	Journal article	Case study (qualitative interviews with policy experts & quantitative survey)	Explore national attitudes towards parental leave policies
Aparicio-Fenoll and Vidal-Fernandez (2015)	Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	Working women and fertility: the role of grandmothers’ labor force participation	Italy	Journal article	Quantitative (Families & Social Subjects survey)	Examine impact of grandmothers’ labor supply on their daughters’ fertility and labor market participation
Backhaus and Barslund (2021)	Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	The effect of grandchildren on grandparental labor supply . . .	Europe: 10 countries	Journal article	Quantitative (SHARE database)	Determine causal effect of grandchildren on the labor supply of grandparents
Berkovitch and Manor (2023)	Policy regimes	Between familism and neoliberalism: the case of Jewish Israeli grandmothers	Israel	Journal article	Qualitative (interviews)	Explore how grandmothers navigate expectations they will ‘fill’ the ‘care deficit’
Bordone <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Parental & Grandparent leaves & flexible work;  Childcare & education policy – availability	Patterns of grandparental childcare across Europe . . .	Europe: 12 countries	Journal article	Quantitative (SHARE database, Multilinks database and Eurostat)	Assess countries’ policy context and frequency of grandparental childcare
Bratti <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	Grandparental availability for childcare . . . pension reform evidence from Italy	Italy	Journal article	Quantitative (SHIW database)	Assess role of grandparental childcare in labor force participation of mothers

(Continued)

**Table 1.** (Continued)

Author, Year	Policy Area	Title (abbreviated)	Country/ Region	Type of Publication	Methods	Aim(s)
Bryson <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Childcare and education policy - affordability and flexibility	The role of informal childcare: A synthesis and critical review	UK	Working paper	Quantitative (UK Ofsted data and Department for Education Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents)	Examine patterns of childcare use in the United Kingdom
Cabrera-Herández <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Childcare & education policy – availability	Women as caregivers: full-time schools and grandmothers' labor supply	Mexico	Working Paper	Quantitative (National Employment and Occupation Survey)	Examine effects of implicit childcare subsidy on labor supply of grandmothers.
Can (2019)	Childcare & education policy – availability; Income support	Caring for solidarity? The intimate politics of grandmother childcare . . .	Turkey	Journal article	Qualitative (interviews)	Examine grandmothers' experience of pilot Turkish government subsidy
Del Boca <i>et al.</i> (2005)	Childcare & education – affordability & flexibility	Child-care choices by working mothers . . .	Italy	Journal article	Quantitative (Bank of Italy (SHIW) & ISTAT Multiscopo databases)	Examine determinants of use of child-care in dual worker families
Di Gessa <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Childcare & education policy – availability; Policy regimes; Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	What drives national differences in intensive grandparental childcare in Europe?	Europe: 11 countries	Journal article	Quantitative (SHARE database)	Investigate cross-national variations in grandparental childcare
Estes <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Income support	Implications of welfare reform on the elderly . . .	USA	Journal article	Mixed methods (interviews, focus groups and secondary survey data)	Examine implications of welfare reform on benefits for older people

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Author, Year	Policy Area	Title (abbreviated)	Country/ Region	Type of Publication	Methods	Aim(s)
Ferrer (2015)	Migration	Examining the disjuncture between policy and care in Canada's Parent and Grandparent Supervisa	Canada	Journal article	Case study (interviews and document analysis)	Examine impacts of Parent and Grandparent Supervisa and actual experience of older adults
Floridi (2022)	Parental & grandparent leaves & flexible work; Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	Daily grandchild care and grandparents' employment: ... four European child-care policy regimes	Europe: 20 countries	Journal article	Quantitative (SHARE database)	Examine association between daily grandchild care provision and (1) probability of being employed and (2) average weekly working hours, for grandparents
Glaser <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Childcare & education policy – availability; Policy regimes; Income support	Grandparenting in Europe: family policy and grandparents' role ...	Europe: 11 countries	Book	Mixed methods: quantitative (SHARE database); qualitative policy analysis	Explore how family policy relates to diversity in levels of grandparent childcare
Gray (2005)	Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	The changing availability of grandparents as carers ...	UK	Journal article	Quantitative (UK Time Use Survey & British Household Panel Survey)	Examine trends in grandparents' childcare provision and use of formal childcare services
Hamilton <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Migration	Moral geographies of care across borders	Australia	Journal article	Qualitative (interviews, focus groups)	Explore experiences of migrant grandparents
Hamilton <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Migration	Childcare by migrant nannies and migrant grannies: A critical discourse analysis ...	Australia	Journal article	Document analysis	Examine distribution of reproductive labor in Australian policy debates
Hamilton <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Migration	The Temporary Sponsored Parent Visa, migrant grandparents and transnational family life	Australia	Policy brief	Document analysis	Examine a proposed new temporary migrant visa and potential consequences for grandparent childcare

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Author, Year	Policy Area	Title (abbreviated)	Country/ Region	Type of Publication	Methods	Aim(s)
Hamilton and Suthersan (2020)	Childcare & education – availability, affordability, flexibility	Gendered moral rationalities in later life: grandparents balancing paid work and care of grandchildren . . . ,	Australia	Journal article	Mixed methods (focus groups, survey)	Examine impact of social policy structures on the gendered division of care
Ho (2015)	Income support	Welfare-to-work reform and intergenerat-ional support . . .	USA	Journal article	Quantitative study (Health and Retirement Study database)	Assess how welfare reform affected grandmothers' labor force participation
Igel and Szydlik (2011)	Childcare & education policy – availability; Policy regimes	Grandchild care and welfare state arrangements in Europe	Europe: 11 countries	Journal article	Quantitative (SHARE database)	Investigate cross-national variation in grandparental childcare
Jappens and Van Bavel (2012)	Childcare and education	Regional family norms and childcare by grandparents . . .	Europe: 23 countries	Journal article	Quantitative (European Social Survey)	Examine how structural and cultural factors influence grandparental childcare in European countries
Lakomý and Kreidl (2015)	Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	Full-time versus part-time employment: Does it influence frequency . . .	Europe: 19 countries	Journal article	Quantitative (SHARE database)	Analyze impact of employment on frequency of grandparental care
Le Bihan and Martin (2004)	Childcare & education	Atypical working hours: Consequences for childcare arrangements	Finland, France, Portugal	Journal article	Mixed methods (secondary quantitative and interview data from SOCCARE project)	Analysis of ways families manage atypical working hours
Lie (2006)	Childcare & education – affordability & flexibility	Towards equal voices: childcare policy and children in the Chinese and Bangladeshi communities . . .	UK	Journal article	Qualitative (interviews and focus groups)	Identify childcare needs of minority ethnic groups

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued)

Author, Year	Policy Area	Title (abbreviated)	Country/ Region	Type of Publication	Methods	Aim(s)
Lumsdaine and Vermeer (2015)	Retirement incomes policy	Retirement Timing of Women and the Role of Care Responsibilities for Grandchildren . . .	US	Journal article	Quantitative (US Health and Retirement Study database)	Examine relationship between provision of grandparent childcare, and retirement intentions
Mensing <i>et al.</i> (2000)	Income support	Childcare selection under welfare reform . . .	USA	Journal article	Qualitative (interviews)	Examine childcare decisions of mothers in a welfare-to-work programme
Osuna (2021)	Parental & grandparent leaves & flexible work; Childcare & education – affordability & flexibility	Subsidising formal childcare versus grandmothers’ time . . .	Spain	Journal article	Quantitative (economic modeling)	Quantify effectiveness of childcare subsidies and subsidies on grandmothers’ time
Price <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Childcare & education policy – availability; Policy regimes	Grandparental childcare: A reconceptualisation of family policy regimes	Europe: 11 countries	Book chapter	Quantitative (SHARE database)	Assess welfare state impact on grandparental childcare
Robins (2007)	Income support	Welfare reform and childcare . . .	USA	Journal article	Quantitative (surveys, welfare and employment data)	Evaluate childcare and employment choices of families in welfare-to-work programmes
Souralová (2019)	Parental & grandparent leaves & flexible work; Policy regimes; Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	Mother–grandmother contracts: Local care loops and the intergenerational transfer of childcare . . .	Czech Republic	Journal article	Secondary analysis of scholarly works	Explore how local care loops are reproduced by social policies

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Author, Year	Policy Area	Title (abbreviated)	Country/ Region	Type of Publication	Methods	Aim(s)
Tu (2023)	Migration policy	Aging, migration infrastructure and multi-generational care dynamics . . .	United Kingdom, China	Journal article	Qualitative interviews	To unpack the complexities of transnational family care in the context of (im) mobility and (in)equality issues surrounding migration and care infrastructures
Van Bavel and De Winter (2013)	Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	Becoming a grandparent and early retirement in Europe	Europe: 22 countries	Journal article	Quantitative (European Social Survey and MULTILINKS databases)	Examine impact of becoming a grandparent on early retirement
Wheelock and Jones (2002)	Parental & grandparent leaves & flexible work;  Childcare & education – affordability & flexibility	‘Grandparents are the next best thing’: informal childcare for working parents . . .	UK	Journal article	Mixed methods (survey, telephone interviews and focus groups)	Investigate use of childcare by parents
Zamarro (2011)	Childcare & education – affordability & flexibility;  Mature age employment, retirement & pensions	Family labor participation and childcare decisions . . .	Europe: 10 countries	Journal article	Quantitative study (SHARE database)	Analyze extent of childcare provided by grandmothers and combination with paid work
Zhou (2013)	Migration	Toward transnational care interdependence: rethinking . . . care, immigration and social policy	Canada	Journal article	Qualitative Study (interviews)	Examine how skilled Chinese migrant families organize care resources in a transnational context

**Table 2.** Country/region of study

Country	Number of articles
Europe	18
USA	5
UK	5
Australia	4
Canada	3
Mexico	1
Israel	1
Turkey	1
TOTAL	38

*Summary of categorised studies*

*Country/Region.* Half the thirty-eight studies (eighteen) focused on Europe (Table 2). Within this group, almost two-thirds (eleven studies) used multi-country databases that included between ten and twenty-two countries.

*Type of publication.* Most of the studies were published as journal articles (thirty-three), with two working papers and single instances of a book, book chapter, and policy brief.

*Study design.* Nearly half the studies (twenty) were quantitative, seven were qualitative, five used mixed methods, three case studies, two document analyses, and one literature review. Of the quantitative studies, nearly half (eight) involved analyses of the European Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement in Europe (SHARE).

**Stage 5: collating, summarising and reporting the results**

Three authors reviewed the corpus and identified policy areas shaping grandparent care patterns. Five key themes were divided among the first three authors who then sought input from authors four and five to refine the themes.

**Results**

We identified five policy domains that shape patterns of grandparent care. A domain encompasses a set of policies that address a shared substantive issue and has ‘integrative properties’ or a shared logic (May *et al.*, 2006). For example, the first domain, ‘parental and grandparent leaves, and flexible work’ encompasses workplace accommodations of childcare responsibilities, and the second, ‘childcare and education policy’, encompasses formal settings in which children receive education and care. The findings for each policy domain are presented separately below. The methodological approach used in some studies made it difficult to untangle the impact of different policies. This was particularly evident for parental and grandparental leaves, and childcare and education policies.

**Parental and grandparent leaves and flexible work**

The literature suggests that longer parental leaves reduce grandparent childcare, particularly intensive childcare, except where parental leaves are transferrable to grandparents. In the Czech Republic, extending maternity/parental leave to three or four years saw an increase in mothers

caring for their children aged three and under, and a concomitant decrease in grandparents' childcare (Souralová, 2019). Floridi (2022) examines the relationship between countries' parental leave schemes, ECEC use, and grandparents' daily childcare provision, finding that, when ECEC policies and patterns of use are roughly comparable, longer parental leaves paid at a higher rate reduce rates of intensive (daily) grandparent childcare.

In Lithuania, Bulgaria and Hungary, grandparents can use 'parental' leave (Van Bavel and De Winter, 2013; Aidukaite and Telisauskaite-Cekanavice, 2020). In Lithuania, for example, if both parents want to return to work, parental leave can be transferred to a grandparent. Baird *et al.* (2022) find this policy is also available in Cuba, Russia, Portugal, and Germany and is mooted in other countries. However, Osuna (2021) suggests that increasing ECEC subsidies is more effective in boosting maternal labour market participation than making parental leaves available to grandparents.

Other forms of leave help shape grandparent care arrangements. Wheelock and Jones (2002) report both mothers and fathers draw on their annual leave to meet childcare needs during school holidays in ways that complement grandparents' availability. Hamilton and Suthersan (2020) report grandparents saving their annual leave to provide intensive childcare during school holidays. The availability of annual leave, therefore, can shape parents' need for grandparent childcare, and grandparents' availability for childcare, particularly during school holidays. Baird *et al.* (2022) also identify emerging models of employer-provided grandparent leave, however we found no research examining the impacts of these policies on grandparent childcare arrangements.

Employment policy and the availability of part-time employment also shape grandparent childcare. A lack of part-time employment, combined with poor access to ECEC, fosters more intensive grandparental childcare (Floridi, 2022). According to Bordone *et al.* (2017), countries with low maternal part-time work see the highest intensive (daily) grandparent care, because mothers who do work, do so full-time and (where formal ECEC services are lacking) daily grandparent childcare is required. In contrast, countries with high maternal part-time work had higher *prevalence* of grandparent care, but the care was less intensive (weekly). This is because although more mothers work, they require less childcare from grandparents because part-time hours facilitate providing some childcare themselves (Bordone *et al.*, 2017).

### **Childcare and education policy**

A growing literature examines the impact of ECEC policies (and primary education) on grandparent caregiving. Childcare and education policies were the most common structural variable identified. The measurement of 'childcare' differed across studies, sometimes with multiple indicators used (see Glaser *et al.*, 2013; Price *et al.*, 2018). Most studies considered availability (enrolment or coverage), but some identified the importance of affordability (Del Boca *et al.*, 2005), and flexibility (Wheelock and Jones, 2002; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004).

#### *Availability*

Wide availability and use of formal childcare tends to create complementary or occasional patterns of grandparent childcare, whereas low availability tends to generate intensive grandparent care (Di Gessa *et al.*, 2016; Bordone *et al.*, 2017; Price *et al.*, 2018). Di Gessa *et al.* (2016: 150) found that 'as the percentage of formal childcare provision in a country increases, parents are less likely to receive intensive grandparental childcare'. Studies using the Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) dominate the literature on the relationship between childcare availability and grandparent care patterns. When public investment in ECEC is high, grandparent care complements formal care. Glaser *et al.* (2013: 68) hypothesise that in 'countries with large percentages of children in formal childcare institutions (particularly more than thirty hours per week) ... we would expect lower levels of intensive grandmaternal

childcare'. Their analysis finds a strong negative relationship between the percentage of children under two years of age in formal childcare and the provision of *intensive* (daily) grandmaternal childcare.

Price and colleagues' (2018) analysis predominantly using SHARE data shows that as the proportion of children under two years of age in formal care increases, the proportion of grandmothers providing intensive care drops. However, consistent with Bordone *et al.* (2017), Price *et al.* (2018) find that as the proportion of children under two years of age in formal care increases, the proportion of grandmothers providing *any* care increases. This is likely because countries with well-developed ECEC systems have more mothers employed, and parents use grandparents to fill gaps, or to collect and deliver children to/from ECEC. Consistent with this, using SHARE data for eleven European countries, Igel and Szydluk conclude 'expenditure on childcare infrastructures [has] a positive effect on the occurrence of grandchild care, but a negative effect on its intensity' (Igel and Szydluk, 2011: 214). Bordone *et al.* (2017) build on Igel and Szydluk (2011) and Di Gessa *et al.* (2016), showing that public childcare availability 'crowds in' grandparent childcare. In countries with low state support for childcare, predicted probability of *daily* (high intensity) grandparent care is highest, with values up to 41.7 per cent for Poland, compared with 1.9 per cent for the Netherlands, which has a well-developed ECEC system. However, the Netherlands also has the highest predicted probability of *weekly* (low intensity) grandparent care (42.1 per cent), where grandparents bridge the gaps between formal childcare and parental availability.

Cabrera-Hernández and Padilla-Romo (2021) examined the impact on grandmothers' labour supply of a primary education policy change in Mexico. In one municipality, extending the school day for students aged six to twelve years from four and a half to eight hours increased grandmothers' employment, likely through a substitution effect in which primary school aged children moved from morning and afternoon grandparent care into longer stays at school.

The quantitative studies identified above are complemented by qualitative and mixed method studies that produce similar results. Can's (2019) study of grandparent caregiving in Turkey proposes that scant childcare facilities combined with 'the patriarchal division of labour at home' result in high levels of care by grandmothers. Hamilton and Suthersan (2020) also found that Australian grandparents' decisions about employment and caregiving were shaped by the (lack of) available formal childcare.

#### *Affordability and flexibility*

Availability intersects with affordability and flexibility in shaping access to formal ECEC. Where ECEC is expensive, grandparent care tends to substitute for formal care (Del Boca *et al.*, 2005; Osuna, 2021). Zamarro (2011) used SHARE data from ten European countries to examine how public investment in childcare and patterns of use among children aged three and under, related to grandparent care. They find that in Greece and Italy, where generosity of public funding for ECEC is lowest, grandmothers are most likely to provide regular care for grandchildren (i.e. at least weekly care). They suggest that 'grandmothers of young children in countries with higher childcare fees provide care with a higher probability' (Zamarro, 2011: 16).

Bryson *et al.* (2012) find that, while childcare places in the UK increased by 50 per cent between 1997 and 2008, there was a simultaneous increase in grandparent care provision. They identified (lack of) affordability, flexibility and appropriateness (including for children with additional needs) as key reasons grandparent care remained high. Hamilton and Suthersan (2020: 3) also note that grandparents report that sparse access to flexible and affordable formal ECEC in Australia was a key reason driving their care. In Zhou's (2013) study of childcare by Chinese grandparents in Canada, migrant mothers perceived grandparent care as their only option due to the expense and inflexibility of formal childcare.

Aidukaite and Telisauskaite-Cekanavice (2020), in Lithuania, found that a combination of limited formal childcare places and the *short operational hours* of ECEC centers fosters high reliance on grandparents. Wheelock and Jones (2002) suggest that the (in)flexibility of formal settings shapes grandparent care provision. This aligns with Le Bihan and Martin (2004) who examine the impact of atypical working hours in Finland, France, and Portugal and different family types: lone parent, dual-earner, and male breadwinner. They show that, particularly where public childcare provision is inflexible, more families require support from grandparents. Lie's (2006) qualitative study with ethnic minority parents in the UK highlighted that it is particularly important that children's services are culturally appropriate and inclusive. When they are not, families are more likely to rely on grandparental care.

### **Income support policy**

In addition to childcare subsidies, other income support policies shape grandparent childcare, including direct payments to grandparents. In 2017, the Turkish Government announced a pilot programme to pay grandmothers (not grandfathers) providing daily childcare one-third of the minimum wage. The policy was designed to boost maternal labour market participation. Can argues that it will likely further increase 'the already rising percentage of grandmothers providing daily and intensive care for their grandchildren' (Can, 2019: 91), though the article did not provide direct data on the policy's impact. In contrast, many other countries provide cash benefits to support mothers to stay at home to care for their children (Glaser *et al.*, 2013), which has the effect of reducing the extent of grandparent childcare required.

There is more literature on the effects of policies intended to boost employment among low-income parents, particularly single mothers. Studies suggest that welfare reform policies that increase work requirements for mothers on income support *do* increase their labour supply, with implications for childcare (e.g., Løken *et al.*, 2018). Studies have examined the relationship between such welfare reform measures and grandparent childcare. In a US study of ten small welfare reform programmes aimed at increasing the employment of low-income parents, Robins (2007) found that childcare needs rose and that most of this need was met by informal carers, particularly grandparents.

In a qualitative study on mothers in a US welfare-to-work programme, Mensing *et al.* (2000) found that mothers' childcare decisions were primarily driven by trust in the provider. Consequently, most relied on grandparents for childcare. In another US study of a work activation<sup>1</sup> policy for low-income mothers, Estes *et al.* (2006) found that when these parents entered work, grandparents took on more childcare, especially in three-generation households. Conversely, in an article on the same reforms, Ho (2015) found that while more mothers were employed and required more childcare, the reforms may have partially crowded out grandparent childcare due to higher childcare subsidies accompanying the policy (Ho, 2015). Grandparent childcare is also shaped by income support policies in retirement, discussed below.

### **Mature age employment, retirement, and pensions**

Broadly, policies focusing on mature age employment *reduce* grandparent childcare, while policies offering opportunities for early retirement *increase* grandparent childcare. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia, the statutory retirement age is not only several months lower for women than for men but is further lowered by between twelve and eighteen months for every child a woman (but not a man) has (Souralová, 2019: 676). This provision is underpinned by the presumption that older women should be available to care for grandchildren. The Czech Republic's pension scheme also has an option to retire five years before the statutory age, and research suggests that women are more likely to do this. Male and female retirement ages are being

slowly equalised, which is likely to reduce the supply of grandparent (especially grandmaternal) childcare (Souralová, 2019).

Gray (2005) finds UK women aged forty-five to sixty-four are twice as likely to provide regular care for grandchildren if they are not employed. Using different data, she also finds that women who are over fifty are half as likely to provide childcare if they are employed and concludes that policies encouraging or compelling grandparents to continue working later are likely to reduce their availability for childcare. Zamarro (2011) also found employment participation negatively affected the probability of providing regular grandchild care. Di Gessa *et al.* (2016) found that, as the percentage of women aged fifty-five to sixty-four in paid work increases, the likelihood of intensive grandparental childcare decreases. Van Bavel and de Winter (2013) find that in countries with low grandparental employment rates, regular care of grandchildren is more prevalent.

Lakomý and Kreidl (2015) find that grandparents working part-time report considerably greater childcare involvement than grandparents working fulltime. This relationship is strongest among paternal grandmothers (suggesting that maternal grandmothers are more likely to provide intensive childcare while working part and fulltime, probably due to greater normative expectations directed at mothers). However, Lakomý and Kreidl (2015) suggest other factors are at play, such as family norms about caregiving, and grandparents may reduce their hours to provide care for their grandchildren. Greater access to part-time work increases opportunities for grandparents to combine paid work with childcare and create a more manageable work-care juggle for themselves (Lakomý and Kreidl, 2015: 330).

Aparicio-Fenoll and Vidal Fernandez (2015) find that grandmothers below the statutory retirement age are less likely to provide childcare and suggest that raising statutory retirement ages will likely decrease grandparent childcare. Similarly, Backhaus and Barslund (2021: 13) find that 'retirement eligibility of maternal grandmothers matters for the labour force participation of mothers', suggesting an indirect relationship between grandmothers' retirement age and propensity for childcare provision. Bratti *et al.* (2018: 1268), modeling the impacts of Italian pension reforms, estimate that 'the potential availability of maternal grandmothers for childcare increases their daughters' LFP [labour force participation]'. Increasing the retirement age or tightening requirements for age pensions may therefore reduce grandparental childcare. Floridi (2022) argues that it is not just the retirement age that can shape grandparent childcare, but the replacement rate of retirement pensions. She finds that the association between being a grandparent and early retirement is stronger in countries with higher pension replacement rates. In contrast, a US study of retirement intentions, Lumsdaine and Verneer (2015) found no relationship between the existence and type of retirement benefit (i.e., defined contribution versus defined benefit) and the likelihood of providing grandparent childcare.

Several countries have introduced measures that support grandparents to balance paid work and childcare, such as credits to pension accounts during periods spent caring or introducing a right-to-request flexible work for grandparents providing regular childcare (AHRC, 2013). However, we found no research examining the impacts of these policies on grandparent childcare arrangements.

### **Migration policy**

Some research has examined migration policy and grandparent care. This research has focused on Canada (Aggarwal and Das Gupta, 2013; Zhou, 2013; Ferrer, 2015), Australia (Hamilton *et al.*, 2018, 2024, 2021), Singapore (Chiu and Ho, 2020) and the United Kingdom and China (Tu, 2023). Host country migration policies are sometimes deliberately constructed to facilitate *unpaid, temporary* grandparent care, with limitations to grandparents' participation in work and access to benefits (Zhou, 2013; Ferrer, 2015; Hamilton *et al.*, 2024; Chiu and Ho, 2020).



Hamilton *et al.* (2024) conducted a critical discourse analysis of Australian policies and debates concerning migrant grandparents during a time of visa reform (2013–2019) and Ferrer (2015) conducted a case study and policy analysis of a new sponsored temporary Parent and Grandparent Supervisa in Canada. These articles identify how specific long stay (grand)parent visas facilitate long-term, but time-limited, periods of intensive grandparent childcare in migrant families.

The impact of grandparents' temporary or visitor visas on family care dynamics was explored in several articles (Aggarwal and Das Gupta, 2013; Zhou, 2013; Ferrer, 2015; Tu, 2023; Hamilton *et al.*, 2021). Migrant grandparents in these studies typically co-resided with their children and grandchildren and undertook both childcare and domestic duties, but had no legal pathways into paid employment, thus creating the context for very intensive childcare responsibilities (Ferrer, 2015; Hamilton *et al.*, 2021). However, these periods of intensive childcare were time limited (Tu, 2023).

## Discussion and conclusion

A review of existing literature suggests that public policies relating to leaves, flexible work, ECEC, mature age employment, retirement incomes, income support and migration shape the *availability, patterns, and nature* of grandparental childcare. Most reviewed articles on policies influencing grandparent childcare focus on ECEC and parental leave policies, with considerably fewer articles on mature age/retirement incomes policies and other policy areas and an absence of articles on some policy areas, including disability and housing policy. In many cases untangling the factors that are shaping patterns of work and childcare across generations is difficult. Many studies showed how policies interact to shape care arrangements (Van Bavel and De Winter, 2013; Bordone *et al.*, 2017; Bratti *et al.*, 2018).

Across all policy areas except ECEC, there is evidence of policies that have been designed to *directly* shape grandparent involvement in childcare by boosting the supply of grandparents, in all cases, enabling or increasing grandparent involvement in childcare. This included transferable parental leaves in countries such as Lithuania and Bulgaria (and emerging instances of grandparent leaves), income support payments for grandparents providing childcare in Turkey, the lowering of the statutory retirement age for each child a mother has in the Czech Republic and Slovenia (to make them available to provide grandparent childcare), and grandparent visas in countries like Australia and Canada.

However, most policies do not directly or explicitly aim to shape the demand, supply, or involvement of grandparents in childcare, but rather do so *indirectly* through altering the opportunities for paid work and unpaid care among parents and grandparents and access to alternative formal care options. The evidence suggests that access to ECEC plays the strongest role in shaping the demand for, and nature of, grandparent childcare. Widely available, formal, state-subsidised ECEC plays a clear role in reducing intensive grandparental childcare. Parental leave also plays a strong role in shaping demand for grandparent care, as longer leaves provide greater opportunities for parents to provide care for their very young children, obviating the need for grandparent care. The exception is where parental leaves are transferrable to a grandparent, which *increases* the involvement of grandparents in childcare.

The articles taking a regime analysis approach combine analysis of ECEC, mothers' patterns of work, and parental leave. In countries with generously, publicly-resourced ECEC services (such as Northern European countries) *occasional* grandparent childcare is common to fill gaps around formal childcare while mothers work, but *intensive* grandparent childcare is uncommon. These are described as 'no grandparent childcare assumed' regimes (Glaser *et al.*, 2013), or 'defamilialised regimes' (Floridi, 2022). In contrast, countries with poor access to ECEC (such as the Southern and Eastern European countries) tend to have lower levels of grandparent care overall, because many mothers take time out of paid work to provide childcare, but where



grandparent childcare is provided, it is intensive due to the lack of formal ECEC. These have been described as ‘assumed grandparent childcare’ regimes (Glaser *et al.*, 2013), or familialised regimes, though the nature of familialisation depends on the design of the parental leave schemes. Countries with generous parental leave schemes are described as ‘supported familialism’, where the state supports parents to provide family care when their children are young and grandparent care becomes intensive at the end of the parental leave period (Floridi, 2022). Countries with ungenerous parental leave schemes are described as ‘familialism by default’, where levels of intensive grandparenting are high due to the absence of any other support (Floridi, 2022). A third group of countries, described as ‘middling’ (Glaser *et al.*, 2013) or ‘grandparent childcare neutral’ (Floridi, 2022) (such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia), have patchy ECEC and modest parental leaves which leads to a mix of occasional and intensive grandparent care.

While the literature on the impacts of ECEC and parental leave policies on grandparent childcare is more developed, it focuses on the policies’ impact on parental demand for grandparent childcare. A wider, intergenerational, policy lens that considers the impacts of the ‘ageing’ policy agenda, used in this review, reveals that policies affect both parents’ *demand for* grandparent childcare, and grandparents’ *supply of* childcare. For example, mature age employment and retirement incomes policies, alongside workplace leave for grandparents, shapes the availability of grandparents for childcare. Early retirement schemes, for example, increase grandparent availability for and involvement in childcare. Conversely, delayed retirement ages decrease the supply, and prevalence, of grandparental childcare.

The policies shaping demand and supply are not always aligned. In some countries, such as some of the Central and Eastern European countries, policies increasing parental demand for grandparent childcare, such as poor access to ECEC, are aligned with policies facilitating grandparent supply of childcare, such as early retirement schemes. In others, such as Italy, policies increasing parental demand for grandparent childcare, such as poor access to ECEC, conflict with policies that *reduce* grandparental supply, such as increasing pension eligibility ages. The intergenerational lens used in this article allows us to identify policy *coherence* across grandparenting regimes. It also enables us to understand policy areas that are less obvious drivers, but nonetheless drive parental *demand for* (i.e. income support policy) and grandparental *supply of* (i.e. migration policy) grandparent childcare.

Hence, while some policies are explicitly *designed* to facilitate or encourage grandparent childcare (there were no policies designed to *reduce* grandparent childcare), most policies are not directly aimed at shaping grandparent childcare but do so indirectly. Direct interventions can be positive insofar as they make visible and, in some instances, remunerate, grandparents who provide regular childcare, rather than expecting them to take on an invisible, ‘assumed’ or ‘default’ role in families. However, in most instances, policies directly targeting grandparent childcare emerge in deeply familialised policy settings such as Central and Eastern European countries and focus on promoting the role of grandparents as ‘mother relievers’ rather than being situated in a broader framework that balances equity across genders and generations.

The review also identified critical *gaps* in the literature on the relationship between policies and patterns of grandparent care. While there is now a modest but disparate body of work on the relationship between public policy and grandparent childcare, there is a notable gap on how *employer* policy – flexible work arrangements, annual leave and carer leave entitlements – influences patterns of grandparent care. Qualitative literature reveals that employer policies are likely to affect parents’ demand for grandparent childcare, and grandparents’ supply of childcare (Hamilton and Suthersan, 2020). More research needs to be done in this field. The review also uncovered two other policy areas that have the *potential* to shape grandparent childcare but have not yet been directly linked with it: disability policy and housing policy. During the review process, two articles on disability policy and services were excluded (Hillman *et al.*, 2016; Moffatt *et al.*, 2019). The studies suggested that grandparents were stepping in to care for grandchildren with disability to compensate for gaps in the service system. They did not, however, examine the impact of these policy settings on grandparent childcare so they were excluded from the study. The

second example is housing policy. A UK study draws attention to changes to housing benefit eligibility which led many low-income families to move out of metropolitan London, with possible effects on the supply of grandparent childcare (because they are no longer living near their grandchildren) (Wellard, 2012). These articles suggest a need for further research to examine the impacts of disability and housing policy on grandparent childcare.

Finally, this review identifies room for more research mapping the impacts of policies beyond ECEC and parental leave on grandparent childcare. It makes the case for policymaking and policy discourse that explicitly identifies the consequences of policymaking for gender inequalities across, as well as within, generations.

## Limitations

This scoping review, unlike a systematic review, does not provide new evidence on the impact of policies on grandparental childcare. Rather, it identifies, interrogates and brings together existing literature to reveal how different policy settings shape grandparents' involvement. The scoping review method enables authors to bring together studies that employ a range of research aims and methodological designs to indicate the size and characteristics of a field of research (Levac, *et al.*, 2010). As such, a scoping review does not seek to 'combine statistical or qualitative data from different sources to develop synthesised results' (Peters *et al.*, 2021) and there 'is no expectation or possibility of statistical pooling, formal risk of bias rating, and quality of evidence assessment' (Peters *et al.*, 2021: 3). Further reviews are required to examine the integrity of the methods employed in studies that examine the relationship between public policy and grandparent childcare.

Gender differences were not the focus of the review, so we cannot draw conclusions about whether policies shape grandmothers' and grandfathers' care patterns differently. Our analysis was limited by the methodological approaches taken in the studies, whereby in some quantitative studies gender was controlled for (Bordone *et al.*, 2017), while in others, grandfathers were explicitly excluded from the sample (Zamarro, 2011; Price *et al.*, 2018; Cabrera-Herández *et al.*, 2021) because most grandparent caregivers were grandmothers. Some studies found that policies were more likely to affect grandmothers' childcare provision, compared to grandfathers (Floridi, 2022). Many studies also recognised the central role of cultural norms concerning gender in shaping grandparent care. It is thus important that further research about policy impacts on grandparent childcare pays attention to gender differences across generations. Importantly, future analysis needs to pay attention to the gendered implications of policies targeted to different generations. More research is also needed to fill gaps in our understanding about how policies, culture, and individual preferences interact to shape patterns of grandparental childcare.

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## Note

**1** Work activation policies are widely understood to be income support policies that are linked to participation in work or work-related activities.

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