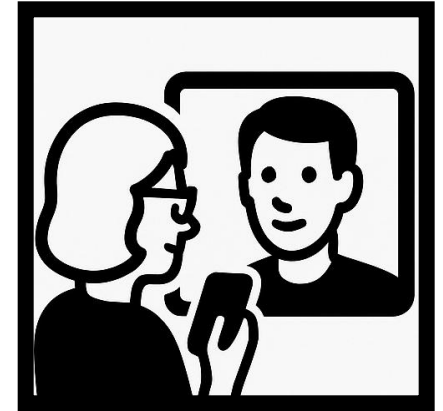


Older parent-adult child contact and proximity across Europe: new evidence and measurement issues



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Joint work with Bruno Arpino and Marco Tosi

ESS-SHARE-GGP Joint User Meeting 2026, Vienna

Parent-child contact & proximity in Europe

- Cross-national analyses in **Europe** are especially informative
 - advanced population ageing + heterogeneity in family configurations
 - BUT evidence largely based on (old waves of) SHARE (Bordone 2009; Dykstra & Fokkema 2011; Fokkema et al. 2008; Hank 2007; Kohli et al. 2005; Mönkediek & Bras 2014)

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- Persistent European **gradient** in intergenerational ties:
 - frequent parent–child contact, short-distance proximity, co-residence are **highest** in Southern Europe, lowest in Northern Europe and intermediate in Central/Eastern Europe (Hank 2007; Isengard 2013) → institutionalized generational interdependence
 - **Eastern** European countries are not simply “in between” → filial norms and post-socialist housing legacies increase dependence on family resources and often prolong co/near-residence (Heylen et al., 2012; Saraceno & Keck 2010; Stephens et al., 2015; Tosi & Grundy, 2019)

Digital contact

- The intergenerational solidarity model treats face-to-face interaction and remote communication as **associational solidarity** (Bengtson & Roberts 1991)
- In an increasingly digitalized world, digital contact has been recognized crucial for intergenerational solidarity → **“digital solidarity”** (Peng et al. 2018)
 - Video calls, instant messaging, and social media now *complement* traditional forms of contact, enabling family members to sustain emotionally close relationships, eventually despite physical distance (Peng et al. 2018; Hwang et al. 2024; Tosi & Arpino 2025)

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- Offer a systematic comparative analysis of **digital communication**
 - face-to-face, phone, digital (text, video)
- Assess the consequences of different **methodological approaches** to measuring parent–child contact and proximity in SHARE and ESS-10
 - simple “simulation” exercises evaluate how country rankings of frequent contact and geographical closeness respond to methodological choices
 - focus on the most-contacted vs a random child, aggregating vs separating contact modes, using distance vs travel time for proximity

Measuring Parent–Child Contact and Proximity in Surveys

SHARE wave 9 (2021-22)

ESS round 10 (2020-22)

Reference child	Dimension	Measurement approach	SHARE-9 measures	ESS-10 measures
All children	Contact	Any mode	SHARE most contacted child	
		Mode specific		
	Proximity	Spatial	SHARE closest child	
		Travel time		
Random	Contact	Any mode	SHARE contact random child	ESS highest contact type
		Mode specific		ESS face-to-face; ESS text; ESS video; ESS phone
	Proximity	Spatial	SHARE close random child	
		Travel time		ESS close random child



Harmonisation

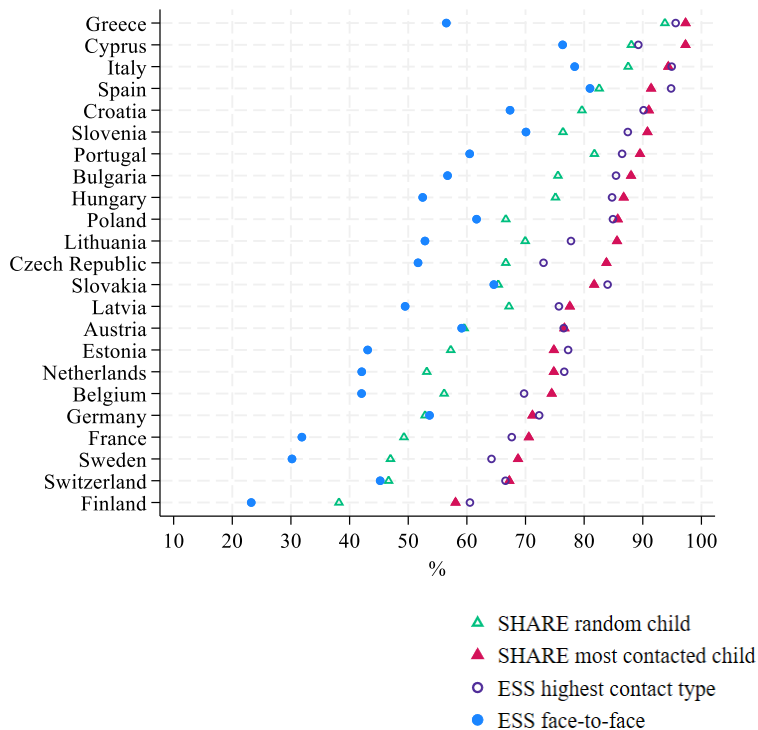
- Parents aged 60+ of at least 1 child 12+, same 23 countries
- Frequent contact: >1/week (Hank 2007)
- Living close: ≤ 25 km in SHARE (Hank 2007); ≤ 30 minutes in ESS (Shelton & Grundy 2000)

Method

- Weighted sample proportions of frequent contact - 4 ways
 - ESS: F2F; highest contact type
 - SHARE: most contacted child; 1 random child

Prevalence of frequent parent-child contact

Fig1. By contact measurement option



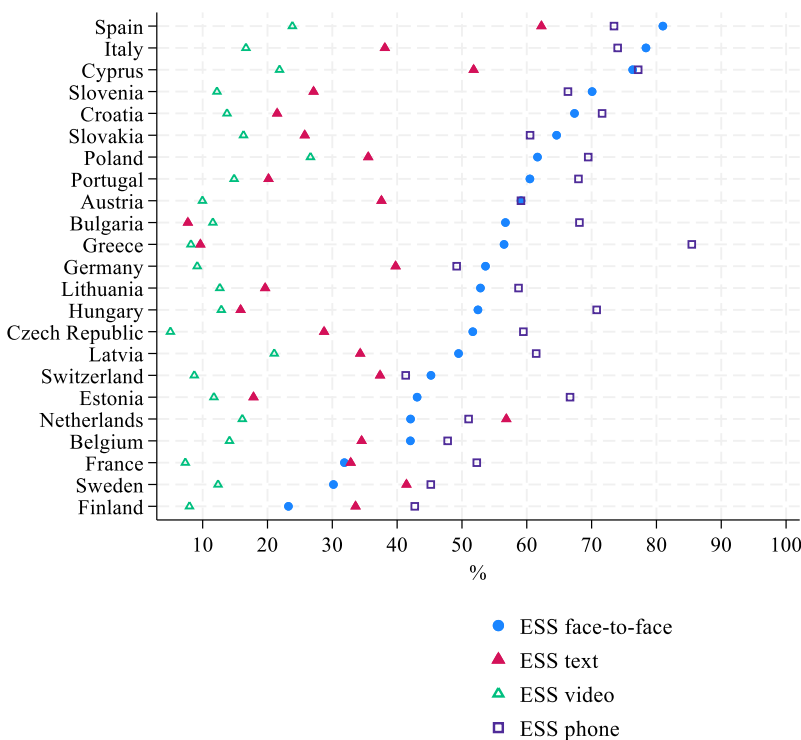
- Ordered by “SHARE most contacted child”: well-known North–South gradient
- Extremely similar country rankings on “SHARE most contacted child” and “ESS highest contact type” ($\rho = 0.99$) → **ESS randomization???**
- **Consistent rankings** across measures ($\rho \geq 0.94$) → robust cross-national contrasts despite substantial level differences
- **“ESS face-to-face”** shows greater variability across/within regions

Source: ESS round 10, 2020-2022; SHARE wave 9, 2020-2021 (weighted)

Note: Parents 60+, countries in ESS-10 & SHARE-9, frequent: > once a week

Prevalence of frequent parent-child contact

Fig2. By contact type in ESS data



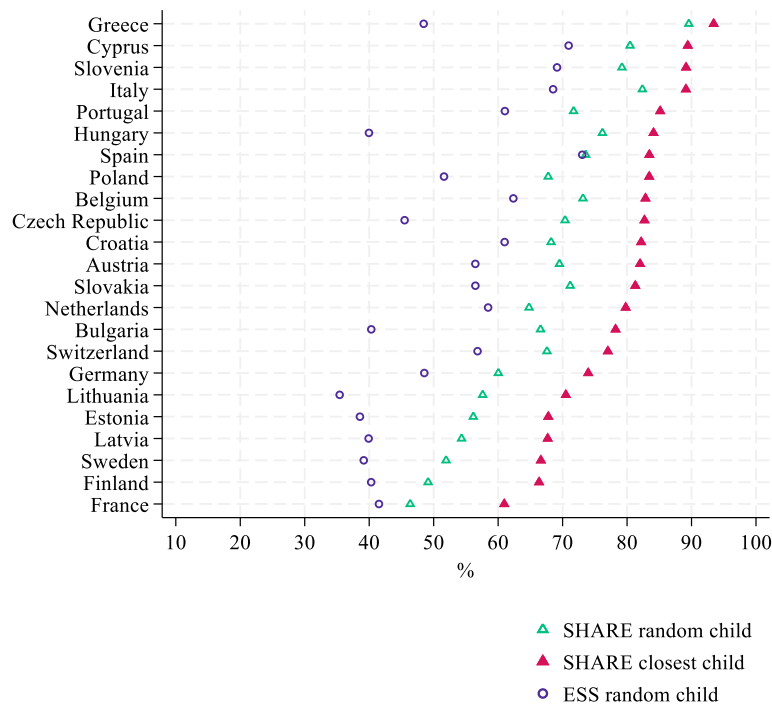
- Frequent phone contact parallels face-to-face patterns ($\rho=0.75$)
- Southern countries at the top, Nordic countries at the bottom; some Eastern countries ~ Southern Europe, other Eastern/Continental in the middle
- Digital modes makes cross-national patterns less straightforward
- Low Spearman correlations for most pairs → countries differ in how often parents-children are in touch AND in how they keep in touch

Source: ESS round 10, 2020-2022; SHARE wave 9, 2020-2021 (weighted)

Note: Parents 60+, countries in ESS-10 & SHARE-9, frequent: > once a week

Prevalence of living close parent-child

Fig3. By measurement option



- Ordered by “SHARE closest child”: South–East–Continental–North gradient
- Share of parents with at least one child ≤25 km: very high (90%) in Southern countries, high (80%) in Eastern/Continental Europe, lower (60-65%) in Nordic countries/France
- “SHARE close random child” reduces prevalence by about 1pp but preserves rank orders ($\rho = 0.96$)
- “ESS close random-child” measure (30 min): systematically lower prevalence than the SHARE random-child measure based on 25 km (lower rank-order correlation $\rho = 0.67$)

➔ the broad gradient remains visible, but proximity rankings are not interchangeable across measures of spatial distance and travel time.

Source: ESS round 10, 2020-2022; SHARE wave 9, 2020-2021 (weighted)

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Concluding remarks

- **Limitations**

- cross-sectional snapshot, parents' reports, quantity vs quality, thresholds

- Updated portrait of parent-child contact and proximity across Europe suggests **gradient** of intergenerational cohesion across Europe

- well-known but still striking pattern: frequent intergenerational contact & close residential proximity are most prevalent in Southern Europe and least common in Nordic and several Continental countries, even after adjusting for basic socio-demographic factors
- the “new” Southern cases reinforce the strong-family pattern, whereas Eastern European countries occupy intermediate positions, with **substantial internal heterogeneity**

- **Digital communication** emerges as part of older parents' intergenerational repertoire, as a *supplement* of more traditional modes

- **Measurement choices** shape the conclusions we draw

- Robustness checks

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Thank you!

