'I guess we are from very different backgrounds':

Educational Mobility and Attitudes Towards Social Justice in Europe

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This paper addresses the relationship between intergenerational educational mobility and attitudes towards social justice. We investigated if the type of mobility experienced (upward, downward or no mobility) is associated with stronger support for different principles of social justice: Equality, Equity, Need, and Entitlement (Hülle, Liebig, and May 2018). For that, we analysed national surveys from 29 countries participating in the European Social Survey in 2018. Using Mobility Contrast Models (MCM), we estimated the effect of educational mobility on social justice attitudes. Despite mixed results at the country level, the pooled sample indicate that upward mobility is a significant predictor of support for the Equality principle, with greater effects for longer mobility journeys

Keywords: Social Justice; Education; Mobility; European Social Survey; Attitudes; Inequality

1 Introduction

Inequality and social justice are pressing topics for academics and policy makers in the first quarter of this century. From one side, a solid research agenda has been assessing the rising in social inequalities and its consequences (Savage 2021). On the other side, a global development policy agenda has been established with a strong focus on these topics (Fukuda-Parr 2019). However, there is still a lack of evidence on both sides about how individuals perceive and view social justice and what are the factors that influence those views (Benson et al. 2021), despite several studies observing relevant social and political consequences of social justice and inequality attitudes Adriaans (2023). Despite a relatively recent research agenda on factors associated with welfare attitudes (Oorschot et al. 2022), income inequality (Clark and D'Ambrosio 2015) and social justice attitudes (Adriaans and Fourré 2022; Reyes and Gasparini 2022; Steele and Breznau 2019), there is still insufficient evidence on the determinants of such attitudes, especially the role of educational mobility.

In this work, we contribute to expanding this literature by investigating the relationship between attitudes towards social justice and educational mobility. Two main aspects are important in this endeavour. First, the focus on mobility which provides a more complex understanding of the influence of social stratification by assessing social positions not only within but also across generations. Secondly, this approach also emphasises education as a social process that goes beyond human capital acquisition, shaping perceptions and normative attitudes in relation to social matters. In this sense, intergenerational mobility in educational attainment translates not only into a change in material conditions (i.e. occupation, income) but also in the way individuals view social justice.

With this intent, we investigated the relationship between intergenerational educational mobility and attitudes towards social justice aiming to respond the following two main questions:

1) Does the experience of upward mobility predict attitudes towards principles of social justice?

2) Is the educational level of the origin (parental) or the destination (respondent's) more influential in shaping attitudes toward social justice?

In this the subsequent sections, we briefly discuss previous studies about the impact of intergenerational educational mobility as well as research on determinants of attitudes towards social justice. This is followed by a description of the methods and data utilised in this analysis. Finally, we report on the main results from this investigation emphasising the research and policy implications of the findings.

2 Literature Review

Several works over the past decades found solid evidence that one's position within a stratified social order shapes their views about inequality, social justice and welfare (e.g. Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Jasso 2021; Rodon and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020; Svallfors 2012). The general idea underlying this conception is that individuals who share the same social position would also share a similar view about the prevailing socioeconomic order. But what happens when an individual changes their position within this stratified order? Do their attitudes reflect the prevailing views of their original or their destination positions?

We argue that education is an ideal process to investigate these questions.Intergenerational educational mobility is a widely used measure of societal fluidity. In addition, formal education institutions in contemporary European societies provide the main space in which socialisation (i.e., the introduction of the rules/norms/expectations of society) occurs, which is a crucial dimension of attitudinal formation. For some, educational mobility is a subset of a broader process of social mobility, reflecting the idea that intergenerational mobility is reflective of a more equitable society where one's social origins are less determinant of outcomes (Esping-Andersen 2015; Hout and DiPrete 2006). Some point out that education is no longer a clear

engine of mobility (Brown 2013), particularly in contexts where there is less mobility as a consequence higher levels of schooling enabled by the rapid expansion of educational systems. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that education may not predict social position as much as it does in moments/contexts where the expansion of educational systems has been slower (Breen 2010; Marshall and Swift 1993).

Regardless of the prevalence of educational mobility in a given society, several studies have identified important consequences of this type of mobility. For instance, educational attainment is seen as an important predictor for openness towards globalisation, but as Kunst et al. (2023) show using European Social Survey data, there is an enduring influence of parental educational level on the respondents' views. Using the same data, Creighton et al. (2022) found that upward educational mobility can moderate antipathy towards immigration.

Similarly, some studies have also pointed out the role of educational mobility on perception of social phenomena. Lavrijsen & Nicaise (2016:25–42) have shown that educational mobility can predict the perception of educational fairness. Gross (2003) shows that perceived inequality is determined by the educational system, which is shaped by social mobility.

3 Methods

3.1 Data

The analysis is based on the rotating module of the European Social Survey Round 9 on justice and fairness. The European Social Survey (ESS) is a biennial cross-national survey of attitudes and employs cross-sectional, probability samples that are representative of the population aged 15 and above living in private households in each country. The analytical sample of this study includes data from all the 29 participating countries and excludes observations from respondents who were still in formal education age (24 or younger). This decision is due to the centrality of education attainment in this study. The inclusion of respondent who could still be in formal education would directly affect the analysis.

Removing the observations of younger respondents resulted in a final sample of 44584 observations. For all variables that were used in this analysis, the proportion of missing values was lower than 5%. However, considering that we expect that missing values, particularly in relation to parental education, is affected by respondent characteristics (e.g. age, income), we do not assume it to be missing completely at random.

In this sense, the missing values were replaced using an iterative multiple imputation method based on the random forest algorithm introduced by Stekhoven & Bühlmann (2012). For that, we have used the R Package 'MissRanger' (Mayer 2023), which improves the computational performance of the algorithm and combines it with predictive mean matching avoiding the imputation of values that are not present in the observed data. The main tables of this paper are reproduced in the Appendix using a reduced sample from the original data after listwise

deletion. Although some differences can be observed in the number of statistically significant effects comparing the imputed and the reduced sample, the main conclusions of the study are similar for both methods.

3.2 Outcome variables

The theoretical framework underlying the outcome variables emphasises the importance of investigating individuals' normative orientations in relation to how society should be organised in order to explain objective conditions of inequality and social justice (Hadler 2005). Following this principle, Hülle et al. (2018) propose a quantitative assessment of individuals' normative orientations in relation to social justice. The Basic Social Justice Orientations (BSJO) scale include questions validated originally using social surveys in Germany but that have also been tested in different European contexts (Adriaans 2023; Van Hootegem, Meuleman, and Abts 2021).

The questions designed by Hülle et al. (2018) aimed at assessing the following four principles of social justice: i) the idea that everyone should receive the same in a society (equality) ii) the idea that benefits and responsibilities should be distributed according to individual investments (equity); iii) the idea that everyone should get enough to cover basic needs; and iv) the idea that benefits or burdens should be allocated according to achieved status such as gender, education, occupation, or origin (entitlement). The support for these principles were evaluated through the level of agreement in relation to four statements that were preceded by the following question: "*There are many different views as to what makes a society fair or unfair. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?*" The exact wording of the statements and their respective associated principles are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Wording of the outcome variables and respective social justice principle

Principle	Variable	Wording
Equality	sofrdst	A society is fair when income and wealth are equally distributed among all people
Equity	sofrwrk	A society is fair when hard-working people earn more than others
Need	sofrpr	A society is fair when it takes care of those who are poor and inn need regardless of what they give back to society
Entitlement	sofrprv	A society is fair when people from families with social status enjoy privileges in their lives between

The responses were recorded through a 5-point agreement scale with the following options: "Agree strongly", "Agree", "Neither agree nor disagree", "Disagree", and "Disagree strongly". The original scale was inverted so higher values denote higher level of agreement, ranging from 1 to 5.

3.3 Explanatory variable

The measurement of educational attainment level in the European Social Survey is based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012). However, instead of a direct replication of the ISCED levels, the ESS devises a scheme that takes into account the European context. In this way, to facilitate comparability, the variable levels consider information on 'programme orientation', 'programme duration' and 'order in the national degree and qualification structure'. At the same time, it reduces the number of ISCED levels as to aggregate levels for which the distinction is not relevant in Europe today such as "less than primary education" and "primary education" (Schneider 2020). The resulting seven levels from the ESS educational attainment variable (*eisced*) are: (L1) less than lower secondary; (L2) lower secondary; (L3) lower tier upper secondary; (L4) upper tier upper secondary; (L5) advanced vocational, sub-degree; (L6) lower tertiary education, BA level; and (L7) higher tertiary education, >= MA level.

This variable is utilised as it is in the dataset for the analysis of the pooled sample of all countries. However, due to the relatively small sample sizes found within countries, these categories were collapsed to allow for enough observations in each cell of the mobility tables. For the analysis comparing different countries, the educational attainment is measured in the following three categories: until lower secondary (L1 and L2); upper secondary (L3 and L4); and advanced vocational, lower and higher tertiary (L5, L6, L7). This default recoding of the educational variable was applied to 19 countries only. The remaining 12 had their education variables recoded slightly difference to account for specific contexts, as the focus of the analysis is not comparing attainment but comparing mobility. In Italy, Portugal and Spain, for instance, the following three levels were created as more than half of the distribution for parental education is located at the lowest level: primary (L1); lower and upper secondary (L2, L3 L4); and advanced vocational, lower and higher tertiary (L5, L6, L7)

Despite reducing variance, one of the advantages of this recoding of levels is that it provides separation between qualitative differences. It is reasonable to argue that mobility between a bachelor degree and a masters degree is qualitatively different than mobility between upper secondary level and tertiary level.

3.4 Covariates

The analysis takes into consideration a group of covariates such as age, gender and feeling about household income. Previous studies have indicated that gender and age are relevant variables to explain attitudes and perceptions about fairness and justice (Adriaans and Targa 2023; Hülle et al. 2018) with women showing stronger support for principles related to equality and need and men supporting more principles of equity and entitlement.

Considering that the current material conditions are one of the major influences for normative views about equality we include in our analysis a variable assessing this dimension. Although

the ESS asks respondents on their household income, there is a high proportion of missing values for this variable (*hinctnta*) with 23% of cases without a valid answer in the pooled sample, and up to 40% in countries like Italy and Hungary. Therefore, we used a variable that provides a subjective assessment of the respondents' material conditions. Participants were asked which of the following sentences best described their "feeling about their household income nowadays": "Living comfortably on present income", "Coping on present income", "Finding it difficult on present income", or "Finding it very difficult on present income".

Finally, for the analysis using the pooled sample with all 29 participating countries, we included country fixed-effects in the models to take the cross-national variation into account (Allison 2009).

Table 2 below shows the mean values and standard error od the mean for outcome variable by covariates. As alluded in the section describing the explanatory variables, the three levels shown in Table 2 were used only for the analysis by country. The initial analysis with the pooled sample of all countries used the original 7-level scale (*eisced*).

Table 2: Summary statistics for outcome variables by explanatory variables and covariates

	Equality		Equity		Need		Entitlement	
	Mean	Std. Error	Mean	Std. Error	Mean	Std. Error	Mean	Std. Error
Educ. attainment (Resp.)								
L1	3.57	(0.01)	3.97	(0.01)	3.90	(0.01)	2.24	(0.01)
L2	3.56	(0.01)	3.99	(0.01)	3.87	(0.01)	2.08	(0.01)
L3	3.08	(0.01)	3.94	(0.01)	3.92	(0.01)	2.09	(0.01)
Educ. attainment (Parent.)								
L1	3.52	(0.01)	3.98	(0.01)	3.89	(0.01)	2.15	(0.01)
L2	3.41	(0.01)	3.95	(0.01)	3.86	(0.01)	2.09	(0.01)
L3	3.08	(0.01)	3.95	(0.01)	3.93	(0.01)	2.15	(0.01)
Mobility direction								
Downward	3.36	(0.02)	3.96	(0.01)	3.89	(0.01)	2.27	(0.02)
Nonmobile	3.42	(0.01)	3.96	(0.01)	3.90	(0.01)	2.16	(0.01)
Upward	3.38	(0.01)	3.97	(0.01)	3.89	(0.01)	2.07	(0.01)
Age group								
25-44	3.33	(0.01)	3.94	(0.01)	3.86	(0.01)	2.18	(0.01)
45-64	3.40	(0.01)	3.97	(0.01)	3.91	(0.01)	2.10	(0.01)
65+	3.48	(0.01)	3.98	(0.01)	3.93	(0.01)	2.13	(0.01)
Gender								
Female	3.44	(0.01)	3.93	(0.01)	3.89	(0.01)	2.14	(0.01)

Male	3.35	(0.01)	4.00	(0.01)	3.90	(0.01)	2.13	(0.01)
Feeling about income								
Very difficult	3.79	(0.02)	3.96	(0.02)	4.01	(0.02)	2.11	(0.02)
Difficult	3.72	(0.01)	3.94	(0.01)	3.90	(0.01)	2.10	(0.01)
Coping	3.46	(0.01)	3.96	(0.01)	3.85	(0.01)	2.15	(0.01)
Living comfortably	3.09	(0.01)	3.98	(0.01)	3.94	(0.01)	2.13	(0.01)
Full sample	3.40	(0.01)	3.96	(0)	3.89	(0)	2.13	(0)

Source: European Social Survey (Round 9)

A few points stand out after examining the descriptive statistics. First, the overall lower support for the principle of Entitlement and stronger support for the principle of Equality as already highlighted by (Adriaans et al. 2020). Secondly, the covariates follow the expected distribution in relation to the outcome variables. Women tend to give more emphasis to the principle of Equality whereas men tend to emphasise Equity. Older respondents and those with worse economic conditions tend to support the principle of Equality more compared to younger respondents and those with better economic conditions, respectively.

Finally, in relation to the explanatory variables, there is a higher support for Equality among those with lower educational attainment and whose parents have lower educational attainment. In terms of mobility, the mobile respondents present lower average support for the principles of equality and entitlement.

3.5 Analytical approach

Initial strategies to investigate the effect of social mobility on social outcomes used to compare the average values between mobile and nonmobile individuals. However, as initially argued by Duncan (Duncan 2018), mobility is a dynamic process that involves both origin status (e.g. parental education) and a destination status (e.g. one's own education), which cannot be considered independently. The most common approach to date is the diagonal mobility model (DMM), sometimes referred to as the diagonal reference model (DRM), which emerged in the 1980s (Sobel 1981, 1985). The innovation of the model is the possibility of separating the role of mobility from that of the origin and destination statuses and, as such, the DMM enjoys widespread usage in the literature on social, educational and occupational stratification (Zang, Sobel, and Luo 2023).

However, as demonstrated by Luo (2022), the Diagonal Mobility Models present two main limitations for our investigation. First, the accuracy of the estimation is affected in cases where there is a significant proportion of mobile individuals given that the model relies on the observed values of the nonmobile individuals as reference (the diagonal in a mobility table). In our pooled sample, about two thirds of the respondents are mobile. Secondly, although DMM

provides a parsimonious and insightful estimate to evaluate importance/weight of origin and destination education in its equation, it does not discriminate between heterogeneous effects of mobility, which can result from the direction (upward or downward) or range of the mobility (number of levels between origin and destination).

Therefore, to deal with those issues we adopted a new method called Mobility Contrast Model (MCM) recently developed by Luo (2022). If the mobility effects are similar among mobility groups, both the DMM and the MCM should provide similar results. However, as we expect to observe different effects on social justice attitudes depending on the direction and range of mobility, the MCM is the preferred approach as it provides better estimates for those heterogeneous effects.

4 Results

As alluded before, the analysis was divided into two parts. The first one comprises the estimation of mobility effects on the four outcome variables using the pooled sample with responses from all 29 participating countries. In the second part, we have analysed the data from each country separately. The model specification and covariates are the same for both analyses, with the exception of the change in the educational attainment variable in the analysis by country as described in the previous section.

4.1 Mobility effects (all countries)

The Appendix contains a table showing the estimates for all variables included in the model. The covariates followed the expected pattern for all outcome variables. Women tend to support the principle of Equality more (β = 0.038, p <.001) and the principle of Equity less (β = -0.038, p <.001) compared to men, with no statistically significant coefficients for the other two principles. Those in worse economic condition show higher support for both the principle of Equality and Need. Older respondents are predicted to support the principle of Equity and Need more than younger respondents, and support less the principle of Entitlement.

In relation to parental educational attainment, only two levels for the principle of Equality has shown a statistically significant difference compared to the other levels. Respondents whose parents had less than a lower secondary degree tend to support the principle of equality more compared to respondents whose parents had a master or doctoral degree (β = 0.11, p <.001 and β = 0.07, p <.010).

Regarding respondents' own educational attainment, no clear pattern was observed across the principles of Equity, Need and Entitlement. However, for the principe of Equality, those with an educational attainment lower than upper secondary, tend to support this principle more compared to those with master and doctoral degree. Furthermore, those with post-secondary

vocational education and bachelor's degree are predicted to show lower support for Equality compared to those with the highest level of educational attainment.

Table 3 shows the mobility effects for all outcome variables by mobility status. The results differ considerably depending on the outcome variable. Almost none of the mobility paths have shown to be significant predictors of support for either the Equity or Need principles. Only one group of downward mobility (respondent Level 5 and parental Level 7) is a significant predictor of higher support for the Need principle. However, this is weak evidence considering the absence of significant effects in any of the other mobility cells. Likewise, the model for the principle of Entitlement does not provide strong evidence for mobility effects. Significant negative effects are observed for two groups of downward mobility and one group of upward mobility.

Finally, the analysis provides evidence that intergenerational educational mobility is associated with the principle of Equality. The strongest effects are found among those whose parents completed the lowest educational level (L1) and who finished either the Level 6 ($\beta = 0.256$, p $<.05$), Level 5 ($\beta = 0.237$, p $<.05$), or Level 4 ($\beta = 0.201$, p $<.05$). The gradual increase in the effect size also suggests that more steps in the upward mobility result in stronger support for the principle of Equality. On the other hand, for one group who experienced a "shorter" journey of upward mobility (L3 to L6), we observed significant negative effects. Overall no significant downward mobility effects were detected in the model.

Table 3: Mobility effects for each justice principle

	Respondents' educational level						
Parental educ. level	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Equality							
L1	–	0.058	0.126	0.201*	0.237*	0.256*	0.066
L2	0.13	–	0.05	0.047	0.161*	0.207**	0.12
L3	-0.212	0.018	–	0.028	-0.067	-0.166*	-0.056
L4	0.107	-0.029	0.101	–	-0.102	-0.043	-0.017
L5	0.06	0.13	-0.067	-0.107	–	-0.117	0.036
L6	0.077	0.081	-0.195	-0.069	-0.08	–	-0.057
L7	-0.07	-0.165	0.078	-0.007	-0.056	-0.044	–
Equity							
L1	–	-0.009	-0.038	-0.119	-0.063	-0.041	-0.021
L2	-0.134	–	-0.036	0.029	0.029	0.022	0.009
L3	0.012	0.095	–	-0.005	0.092*	0.034	-0.053
L4	-0.038	-0.137	-0.087	–	-0.116	-0.07	0.016
L5	0.071	-0.09	0.054	0.075	–	-0.005	0.018
L6	0.191	0.149	0.114	0.015	0.007	–	0.008

L7	-0.126	-0.033	-0.031	-0.019	0.026	0.037	–
Need							
L1	–	0.033	-0.028	0.023	0.024	0.001	-0.1
L2	-0.194	–	-0.076	-0.017	-0.015	-0.003	-0.02
L3	-0.065	-0.087	–	-0.067	-0.012	-0.07	0.007
L4	-0.147	0.043	-0.007	–	-0.023	-0.057	-0.021
L5	0.2	0.073	0.065	0.078	–	0.047	0.094
L6	0.14	-0.015	-0.059	-0.13	0.096	–	-0.023
L7	0.002	-0.108	0.043	0.05	-0.133*	0.02	–
Entitlement							
L1	–	-0.031	0.081	0.013	0.07	0.14	0.067
L2	0.074	–	0.013	-0.019	0.045	0.108	0.028
L3	0.137	-0.008	–	-0.092	-0.088	-0.069	-0.094
L4	0.079	-0.156*	-0.014	–	0.027	-0.085	0.078
L5	-0.093	0.06	0.11	0.075	–	-0.061	0.037
L6	-0.085	0.06	-0.19*	-0.13	-0.068	–	-0.163*
L7	-0.158	0.028	-0.046	0.108	-0.033	-0.078	–

Source: European Social Survey (Round 9) **Notes**: *p < .05, **p< .01, ***p < .001

4.2 Mobility effects (by country)

The Appendix present the coefficients for the mobility effects across all countries and outcomes. The samples from 6 countries out of the 29 participating countries did not indicate any statistically significant mobility effect: United Kingdom, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Netherlands, and Norway. Figure 1 below shows the coefficients of the mobility effects for all the remaining countries.

The analysis of the pooled sample indicated a significant mobility effect from those whose origins lie in the lowest levels and destination in the highest levels. The same result can be observed in the French sample (FR), where the mobility from Level 1 to Level 3 is associated with additional 0.29 units in the scale of Equality ($p<0.05$). However, two cases go in the opposite direction. Portugal (PT) and Sweden (SE) have a very similar structure of mobility effect in which upward mobility from Level 1, either to Level 2 or 3, is associated with lower support for Equality. Also in both countries a negative effect is found among those in Level 1 whose parents were in Level 3. This suggests a country-level difference in relation to the effects of mobility on support for Equality.

For the principle of Equity, most of mobility effects have a positive coefficient denoting that an intergenerational mobility in educational attainment is associated with higher support for

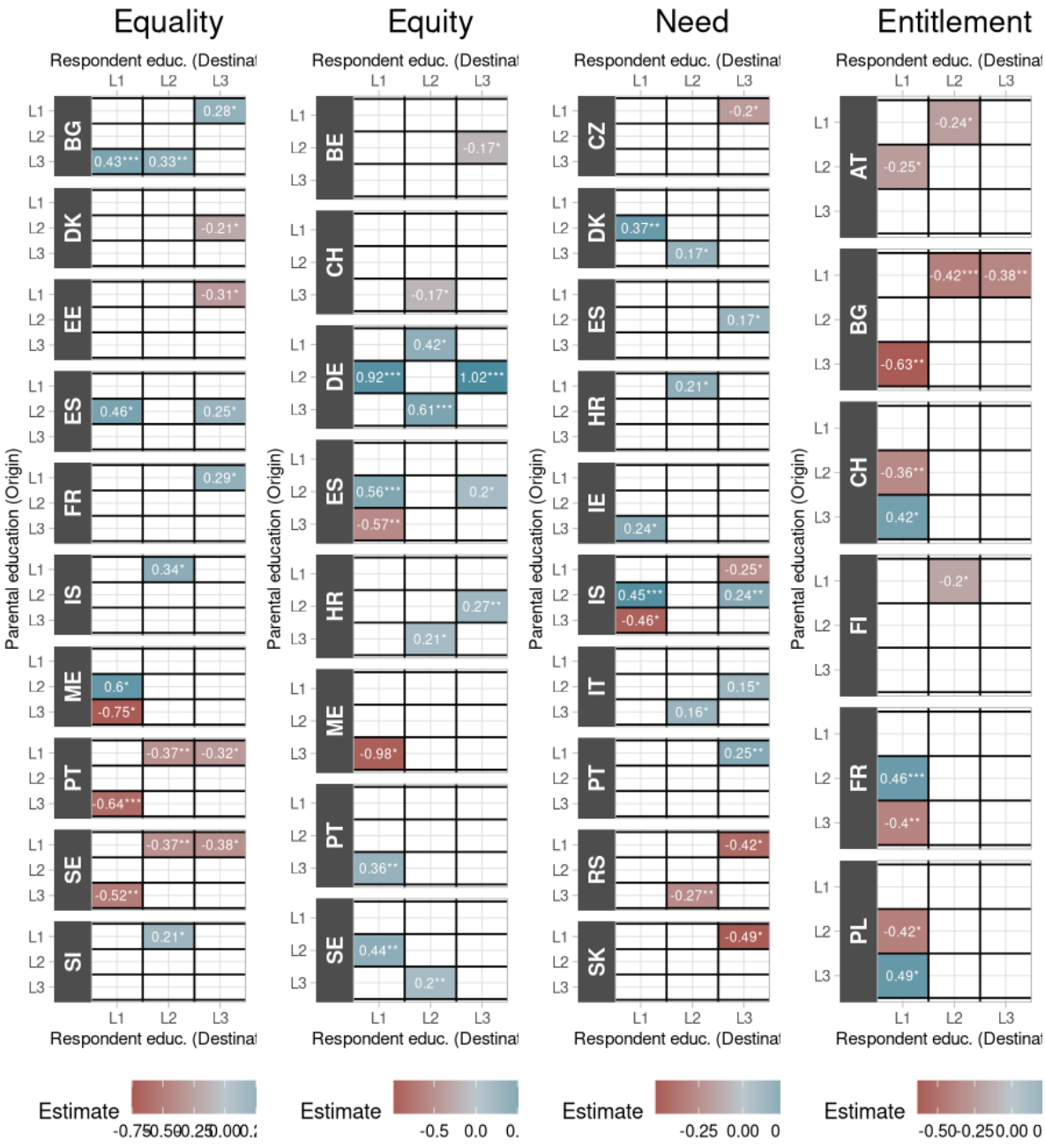

Figure 1: Mobility effects for each justice principle by country

this principle in most countries (either downward or upward) in almost all countries with the exception of Montenegro.

The German (DE) case in this model also presents evidence on the qualitative differences between mobility groups. The significant effects were found only for groups with one-step mobility (both downward and upward) whereas no statistically significant effects were found across groups with "longer" mobility (two steps).

Similarly, there is a prevalence of positive effects for the principle of Need. The exceptions here are Serbia (RS) and Slovakia (SK) where either upward or downward mobility is associated with lower support for this principle of justice.

Finally, as opposed to the other principles, the intergenerational mobility effects are generally associated with lower support for the principle of Entitlement.

5 Discussion

Limitations - Ceiling, no upward mobility from tertiary level education
- Educational attainment is a a proxy for acculturation but has limitations, there are significant differences internationally and within countries in relation to what type and quality of educational experiences individuals are exposed to in formal educational institutions. - Parental educational attainment measured at the time of the survey (not necessarily the formative period of the respondent). Highest parental educational attainment, so not necessarily from the parent with which the respondent was raised.

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