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Family-friendly workplaces and fertility intentions

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Abstract

This contribution analyses the relationship between family-friendly workplace benefits and fertility intentions among women and men in Italy. Using data from the 2016 Italian Survey on Family and Social Subjects, we extend existing research by focusing on Italy, a context characterised by one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe and little public investment in work-family reconciliation policies, where the role of workplace-based family-friendly provisions may be more salient for fertility decisions, and by distinguishing between two types of workplace benefits: time-flexible working arrangements and workplace-based childcare services (or childcare-related monetary contribution from the employer). Our regression analysis indicates that access to flexible working arrangements is positively associated with women's and men's fertility intentions. Instead, we find no significant association between the provision of workplace-based childcare services and fertility intentions.

Keywords: Workplaces, Family-friendly policies, Flexible work, Childcare, Fertility intentions, Italy

Introduction

Family-friendly workplace arrangements, i.e., those practices put in place by employers that facilitate employees' reconciliation of work and family life (OECD, 2007), are becoming increasingly widespread in Europe. Family-friendly workplaces are directly supported by the EU Work-life Balance Directive which entered into force in 2019, adopted by European Member States by 2024.

Existing literature shows that family-friendly workplaces improve employees' work-life balance and overall well-being (Thévenon, 2009) and increase mothers' continued employment after childbirth (Chung, 2017). Instead, the association between family-friendly workplace policies and fertility has seldom been studied. We hypothesise that such an association may be in place, especially in low-fertility settings where public welfare provision for families is scant.

A solid body of literature studies the role of public policies aimed at the reconciliation of work and family life on fertility decisions (Gauthier, 2007; Gietel-Basten et al., 2022; Guetto et al., 2025; Luci & Thévenon, 2013; McDonald, 2006; Neyer, 2006; Neyer & Andersson, 2008; Thévenon & Gauthier, 2011). In practice, balancing childcare

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responsibilities with full-time employment is frequently challenging, especially for women (Brewster & Rindfuss, 2000; Thévenon, 2009). By facilitating the reconciliation of work and childcare, family-friendly workplaces may favour fertility. For example, the availability or utilisation of formal, publicly-subsidized childcare services positively influences fertility (Del Boca, 2002; Rindfuss et al., 2010; Wood et al. 2019; Scherer et al., 2023). A similar positive association with fertility may be triggered by the provision of workplace-based childcare or subsidies for covering the costs associated with private childcare, particularly in contexts where public provision of formal childcare is scarce. Similarly, flexible working arrangements that grant the possibility to adjust one's work schedule with care needs may positively influence fertility.

All in all, individuals employed in family-friendly workplaces may be more likely to transition to parenthood and to a second or higher-order birth, or they may experience such transitions earlier compared to individuals employed in workplaces that are not family-friendly, all else being equal.

The importance of work-family issues and the diffusion of family-friendly workplaces vary considerably across countries. We focus on Italy, a country with one of the world's lowest fertility levels and limited public support for families with children. Publicly-subsidized formal childcare for children 0–3 is scant: less than one in 3 children in this age group participate in early childhood education and care services (Istat, 2024), one of the lowest enrolment rates in Europe (OECD, 2023). Italy's familistic welfare systems, i.e., where the family is considered as the leading provider of care for dependant or frail relatives, makes the male-breadwinner model still widespread and mothers remain, to date, the main provider of childcare (Saraceno & Naldini, 2021). The difficulty in reconciling work and childcare contributes to low rates of maternal employment and one in five mothers quit employment after childbirth (Save the children, 2024).

Mothers' primary roles as main carers for dependent children and other family members and their limited involvement in the labour force meant that work-family issues have, for long, not been considered a matter of public concern in Italy (Riva, 2016). Recently, however, in attempts to raise fertility rates, the Italian Ministry of the Family, Birth Rate and Equal Opportunities devoted attention to family-friendly workplaces as a possible determinant of fertility via the 'code of self-regulation for companies in favour of maternity[1] established in 2023. Companies are invited, on a voluntary basis, to adhere to the code by enhancing parents' work-life balance and wellbeing via three distinct strategies, aimed at favouring mother's return to work after childbirth, introducing parents' health prevention and treatment initiatives, and fostering the adaptation of times and modes of work. The latter strategy encompasses five instruments: longer and better paid parental leave compared to the national provision; flexibility of entry and exit times; transition to vertical and horizontal part-time; remote working; and availability of workplace-based nurseries or reimbursement of related expenses for children's early childhood, later education and, more generally, domestic assistance. All in all, the code is an attempt to stimulate corporate welfare provision towards family-friendly workplaces

[1] Source: https://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/media/lxnpqsnk/codice-di-autodisciplina-per-imprese-responsabili-verso-la-maternita-112023.pdf

with the aim of increasing women's employment, employees' well-being and, ultimately, the fertility rate.

This contribution asks whether being employed in a family-friendly workplace may increase the intention to have a(n other) child. Based on microdata from the 2016 Italian National Institute of Statistics' Family and Social Subjects Survey, we explore whether having access to family-friendly workplace policies in the form of flexible working arrangements and provision of workplace-based childcare services or reimbursement of related costs is associated with women's and men's fertility intentions.

This article makes three key contributions. First, it contributes to the literature by expanding existing knowledge on the association between family policies and fertility intentions by analysing specific workplace-based family-friendly policies, which have been so far underexplored. Second, we focus on a country context characterised by limited public support for families with children and difficult reconciliation of work and childcare, where the association between family-friendly workplaces and fertility may be stronger than in other contexts. Third, whereas previous international literature on the association between workplace policies and fertility intentions mainly focused on women, we consider both women and men, hence contributing to unravel the role played by men's work-family arrangements on fertility.

Background and hypotheses

Employment and fertility

Theories on the drivers of the fertility decline generally agree that family policies have become a key focus of European nations' efforts to strike a balance between work and family life. Family-friendly workplace policies are increasingly viewed as important tools for helping employees manage both their professional and personal responsibilities.

Since the emergence of low fertility, scholars have underscored labour force participation and the intricate balance between work and family commitments as important explanations for low and postponed fertility, particularly in relation to increasing rates of female employment (Kögel, 2004; Matysiak & Vignoli, 2008).

According to Becker's economic framework (1981) the costs of raising children—both financial and time-related—are central to reproductive decisions. The opportunity costs involved, particularly the time lost from paid employment and the financial burden of childrearing, often deter individuals from having children. Family-friendly workplace policies, in this regard, help address the financial and time-related burdens of raising children, effectively reducing the opportunity costs associated with childbearing. By alleviating both time constraints and economic pressures, these policies benefit families and facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life.

Other theories highlight barriers related to changing gender roles, particularly as a result of the increasing participation of women in the labour market (Goldscheider et al., 2015; McDonald, 2000). McDonald's (2000) perspective attributes the fertility decline to existing gender disparities within institutional structures. From this theoretical standpoint, the decrease in fertility arises from the conflict individuals, especially women, face between high gender equity levels in individual-oriented social institutions (e.g., market employment) and lower equity levels in family-oriented institutions. Consequently, women may face the dilemma of choosing between these roles, causing those inclined

toward employment responsibilities to delay childbirth or forego having children (Hakim, 2000; Vitali et al., 2009).

The contemporary landscape portrays motherhood as a crucial decision for women's employment, influencing career trajectories due to opportunity costs linked to professional interruptions for childbearing and childrearing. In other words, a woman will evaluate the right moment in her career to have a child, considering when the associated opportunity costs are minimised (Baizán, 2005). Given the significant role of labour market status in shaping the transition to parenthood, scholars amply researched the intricate link between employment conditions and fertility dynamics (Adsera, 2004; Baizán, 2005; Del Boca, 2005; Vignoli et al., 2012).

Existing literature convincingly shows that employment characteristics of both men and women are important determinants of fertility decisions, and a wealth of such literature is based on Italy. Unemployment, job precariousness (e.g., in the form of temporary job contracts), unstable employment careers and associated economic instability were shown to be negatively associated with union formation (Vignoli et al., 2016) and fertility (Alderotti et al., 2021, 2024; Busetta et al., 2019; Matera et al., 2023; Scherer, 2009; Scherer & Brini, 2023; Vignoli et al., 2012) for both man and women, but especially for men and for couples with medium or low incomes (Alderotti et al., 2021; Modena & Sabatini, 2012). Public employment and permanent employment generally correlate with enhanced fertility due to economic stability and job security compared to alternative employment arrangements (Adsera, 2004; Baizán, 2005; Vignoli et al., 2012). Conversely, high unemployment and precarious employment reduce fertility, an association that is particularly strong in Southern Europe (Alderotti et al., 2021; Adsera, 2004, 2011; Baizán, 2005; Del Boca, 2005; Modena & Sabatini, 2012; Scherer & Brini, 2023).

Regarding self-employment, the findings are mixed. On one hand, Del Boca et al. (2005) found that self-employment is associated with lower fertility in countries like France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Self-employment may however be the only possibility for non-employed mothers to re-enter employment (Matysiak & Mynarska, 2020). On the other hand, focusing specifically on the Italian context, Modena and Sabatini (2012) found that in couples with self-employed men, the likelihood of planning to have children is higher compared to couples with men employed as employees with a permanent contract.

The association between fertility and labour market conditions varies by parity. In Italy, employed women are more likely to delay motherhood and are less likely to have a second child compared to non-employed women, a finding that instead does not apply, e.g., in Poland (Matysiak & Vignoli, 2013). Yet, women on fixed-term contracts have lower and later fertility than those in permanent contracts (Alderotti et al., 2021; Vignoli et al., 2020) and women employed in the public sector exhibit earlier second and third birth progressions than their private-sector counterparts (Adsera, 2011). Finally, part-time employment for women is associated with higher fertility in Italy, a finding that instead does not apply in other countries such as France and the UK (Del Boca et al., 2005).

Family-friendly workplace policies and fertility

Forty years of low fertility amidst unprecedented increases in women's employment rates across the developed world have triggered an interest in family policies oriented to improve work-family reconciliation and, ultimately, empower employed people who wish to become parents or have further children to realize their reproductive aspirations. One central idea is that welfare support through work-family reconciliation policies can reduce the costs associated with childbearing and improve labour market limitations by supporting women's employment and facilitating the transition to parenthood and higher-order births (Fahlén, 2013; Gash, 2009; Guetto et al., 2025; McDonald, 2006; Neyer, 2006). In this framework, many scholars have focused on understanding the relationship between family policies and fertility, with early research yielding mixed results (Andersson et al., 2004; Del Boca, 2003; Diprete, 2003; Gauthier, 2007; Hank & Kreynfield, 2003; Hilgeman & Butts, 2009; Hoem et al., 2001; Ronsen, 2004). More recent studies have shown that policies facilitating work-family balance, such as childcare services, parental leave schemes and flexible working arrangements, influence fertility decisions as they can mitigate the opportunity costs of children by creating beneficial conditions for both fertility and female labour force participation (Billingsley & Ferrarini, 2014; Gauthier & Gietel-Basten, 2024; Thévenon & Gauthier, 2011). On the contrary, other policies like financial benefits showed a limited impact (Bergsvik et al., 2021; Dalla Zuanna & McDonald, 2023; Luci & Thévenon, 2013; Wesolowski & Ferrarini, 2018), though with some exceptions (e.g., Boccuzzo et al., 2008).

Available, affordable and quality childcare for dependent children, from infancy to early adolescence, increases mothers' labour force participation and work-life balance (Morrissey, 2017; Scherer & Pavolini, 2023). The association between formal childcare and fertility instead, is more mixed. In Belgium—a country characterised by extensive formal childcare coverage and significant regional variation—Wood and Neels (2019) found that local availability of formal childcare is positively associated with fertility among dual-earner couples. An increase in the accessibility of childcare services was found to increase the likelihood of transitioning to motherhood and to overall fertility rates in Norway (Rindfuss et al., 2007, 2010) and Spain (Baizán, 2009; Baizán et al., 2016).

Similar mixed associations were found for Italy. Del Boca (2002) found that the accessibility to formal childcare services positively influences fertility among Italian women. On the contrary, Fiori (2011) found that, in contrast to family support, formal childcare services are redundant for the intention to have a second child. Recent research indicates that the influence of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services on fertility is modest and it differs across population groups. A significant but modest association was found between the use of public vs. private childcare services and fertility (Guetto et al., 2025). Scherer et al. (2023) found no clear association between usage of public childcare, availability of public and private childcare, and fertility. Again, modest yet positive associations were only found for specific cross-classifications of genders, ages and educational levels. Means-tested daycare subsidies introduced in Friuli Venezia Giulia, a region in the North-East of Italy, were found to have a positive but modest effect on fertility (Dimai, 2023).

Workplace-based family policies—especially those related to flexible working arrangements and childcare provision—can foster the implementation of national work-family policies and can provide additional benefits specific to their employees, considerably impacting on work-life balance and employees' overall well-being. Furthermore, when offered to all employees, irrespective of their gender, by promoting equal participation of men and women in both work and domestic spheres, such policies may challenge traditional gender norms and foster a more equitable distribution of family responsibilities among partners. Particularly in contexts like Italy, where the welfare state provision for families with children is limited, these policies can considerably reduce barriers to work-family reconciliation. Hence, family-friendly workplace policies may play an important role in reconciling work and family life and provide a tangible support for childbearing, facilitating the transition to parenthood and encouraging higher-order births. Yet, little is known about the role of family-friendly workplace policies on employees' fertility.

In the following sections we review the (few) existing studies on the association between family-friendly workplaces and fertility. We start from reviewing existing studies on flexible working arrangements and fertility, then move to workplace-based benefits and fertility. Most of these latter studies are based on South Korea, Russia, and Eastern European countries. These settings are characterised by low fertility and low gender equality. We anticipate that similar mechanisms may be in place in other similar contexts, such as Italy.

Flexible working arrangements and fertility

In the European context, research addressing the association between family-friendly workplace policies and fertility is relatively limited. Having a flexible work schedule is recognised as beneficial in mitigating work and family conflict, as it allows individuals to devote time to family responsibilities as they arise (Han et al., 2010). Countries with more flexible labour policies generally experience higher fertility rates due to improved work-life balance (Ariza et al., 2005). Higher levels of work control are associated with a higher probability of intending to have another child (Begall & Mills, 2011). Studies on the association between working from home and fertility, which are burgeoning in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, find mixed results (Luppi et al., 2023; Osiewalska et al., 2024). Instead, work autonomy was found to be related with the transition to second birth for highly-educated mothers (Osiewalska & Matysiak, 2024).

Harknett et al. (2014) explored fertility intentions across 20 European countries and found that while flexible working schedules (like the ability to adjust one's work hours) are not significantly associated with the decision to have a first child, they are associated with a higher likelihood of planning a second child. More recently, Wang and Tan (2024) found that, while the existence of flexible working arrangements does not significantly impact overall fertility, actively using these arrangements—particularly by women—greatly increases the likelihood of having a first child in the United Kingdom. The authors also noted that this association is especially pronounced when both partners are in professional roles and when men are significantly involved both in earning income and sharing household responsibilities.

Sinyavskaya and Billingsley (2015) highlighted the important role of workplace flexibility in Russia. Their study showed that the ability to work from home is a significant

predictor of fertility intentions for both first and second births. On the other hand, flexible working schedules did not appear to influence intentions to have a first child but were positively associated with the intention to have a second. We hence formulate our first hypothesis:

H1: Fertility intentions are highest among employees who have access to flexible working arrangements compared to employees who do not.

Workplace-based family-friendly benefits and fertility

Lee and Yu (2011) investigated how various workplace family provisions—such as maternity leave, childcare leave, on-site childcare centers, breastfeeding rooms, family allowances, flexible working arrangements, and day-care allowances—affect fertility in South Korea. They found no significant association between the number of these provisions and fertility or fertility intentions. More recently, Choi et al. (2018) found that women under 35 years of age were more inclined to express the intention to have a(n additional) child when family-friendly workplace policies, such as parental leave (one year of paid leave for the care of children under age 8), family allowances (a monthly stipend for families with children) and workplace daycare facilities were available. Kim and Parish (2022) explored the association between family-friendly workplace policies and working women's fertility intentions by parity. Specifically, the authors consider seven benefits: maternity leave, parental leave, on-site childcare centers, family allowance, childcare cost-related subsidies, flexible working hours, and school expense subsidies. The association between each of the seven workplace policy measures and fertility intentions varies by parity. Childcare leave and on-site childcare are positively associated with increased first-birth intentions, while flexible working arrangements are negatively associated with first-birth intentions. All in all, in South Korea, female employees whose companies provide family-friendly policies are more inclined to have children than women whose companies do not (Kim & Parish, 2022).

This literature hence suggests that workplace-based childcare services and, more generally, family-friendly benefits, may be positively associated with fertility, mimicking the positive association found between national policies and fertility reviewed in Sect. "Family-friendly Workplace Policies and Fertility". Following this literature, we develop our second and third hypotheses:

H2: Fertility intentions are highest among employees who have access to workplace-based early childhood educational services or receive subsidies from the employer to cover its associated costs compared to employees who do not have access to such benefits.

H3: Having access to at least one workplace-based family-friendly benefit is positively associated with fertility intentions.

Italy: the context

Italy has had one of the world's lowest fertility rates for decades now. According to the most recent estimates, the Italian fertility rate is currently 1.18 children per woman (Istat, 2025).

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is organised in two levels: services for children (servizi educativi per l'infanzia) aged 0 to 3 and pre-schools for children (scuola

dell'infanzia) aged 3 to 6 (Eurydice, 2023). While both are non-compulsory, they differ in their coverage and costs. ECEC (0–3) is provided by municipalities and private or public entities, and costs vary across and within regions. Publicly-subsidized ECEC is scarce, with an offer able to accommodate only 30% of resident children as of 2022/23 (Istat, 2024), one of the lowest enrolment rates in Europe (OECD, 2023). Private alternatives are costly and also scarce. As a result, 68% of public nurseries have children on a waiting list, as have 49% of private nurseries (Istat, 2024). In contrast, services for children aged 3 to 5 are considerably cheaper (free or with the payment of fees for lunches and extra hours of service, depending on the parents' disposable income) and widely available, hence coverage reached 94.7% of children aged 3–5 in 2023 (Istat, 2024).

Given the little availability and affordability of childcare for children aged 0–3 and given the reduced opening hours of public schools for children aged 6 to 18 years old, maternal employment is low and grandparental childcare is a pillar of support for working parents (Fiori, 2011; Zamberletti et al., 2018; Zanasi et al., 2023): 60% of grandparents provide regular childcare for their grandchildren up to age 5 when both parents are employed (Pasqualini et al., 2021).

According to the latest work-family reconciliation report (Istat, 2018), almost 39% of employees aged 18 to 64 declared they provide care for children or other adult dependents. Among these employees, one-third reported having regular flexibility in their work – defined as the ability to modify the start or end times of the workday and to take a full day off for family reasons without using vacation days –, while 28.4% could do so only in exceptional cases. Unsurprisingly, employees in public administration and defence, as well as in financial and insurance activities, enjoy greater flexibility compared to those in other economic sectors, such as construction, hospitality, and transportation (Istat, 2018).

The burden of unpaid care work in Italy significantly affects female employment and work-life balance. Italian women spend an average of 5 h daily on unpaid care work, compared to 1.8 h for men, with women handling 74% of this burden (International Labour Organization, 2018). According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2022), 20.5% of Italian women aged 25–49 spend over 10 h a day on childcare, compared to just 6% of men. This gender disparity is reflected in employment rates in 2023: at ages 25-54, fathers have higher employment rates than childless men, while women's employment drops from 68.7% to 57.8% for mothers of two young children (Freguja et al., 2025). In 2022, Italy experienced a 17.1% increase in voluntary resignations among parents of children aged 0–3, with 72.8% of these resignations from mothers. The main reasons for resignations are difficulties in balancing work and childcare, with 41.7% attributing it to a lack of childcare services and 21.9% to work organisation issues (Save the children, 2024).

In this context, we anticipate that the association between family-friendly workplace policies and fertility intentions will vary by gender and, specifically, that women's fertility intentions will be significantly higher when they are employed in a family-friendly workplace compared to when they are not, whereas we expect little influence of family-friendly workplaces on men's fertility intentions.

Finally, following previous literature (e.g., Adsera, 2011; Vignoli et al., 2012), we expect the association between family-friendly workplaces and fertility intentions to be stronger among parents of one child than among childless individuals. Indeed, parents are more cognizant of the costs and logistical challenges associated with childcare, which may render family-friendly policies more salient and influential for the fertility decision-making process.

Data and empirical approach

We use data from the latest Italian Family, Social Subjects, and Life Cycle Survey (FSS), carried out by the Italian National Statistical Office in 2016. This dataset is one of the most complete and reliable nationally representative surveys on Italian individuals and their families. The FSS survey proves particularly useful to test our research hypotheses as it collects information on both reproductive intentions and workplace-related characteristics, areas that have not been explored for Italy in the existing literature. For this reason, the data provides unique insights into the association between family-friendly workplaces conditions and fertility, offering a relevant baseline for understanding these dynamics.

Dependent variable

Our dependent variable measures the intention to have a(n additional) child in the next three years ('Do you intend to have a child in the next three years?'), a measure that previous literature identified as a suitable proxy for actual fertility (Ajzen & Klobas, 2013). We group answer categories 'certainty yes' and 'probably yes' together, as well as answer categories 'certainty not' and 'probably not'.

Main explanatory variables

Measures of family-friendly workplace arrangements

FSS collects information on workplace benefits among respondents who are employed in paid work as employees (i.e., subordinate workers who, as a result of a contract and in exchange for remuneration, provide their intellectual or manual work under the direction of an employer).

We measure family-friendly workplaces via three explanatory variables based on information collected in FSS. The first explanatory variable refers to the availability of flexible working arrangements in the workplace. The original question asked: "Does your company permit flexible working hours for personal reasons, such as adapting to one's children's requirements?". We group responses "yes, but in exceptional cases" and "yes, with some regularity" into a unique category measuring flexible working arrangements, and the remaining category 'no' identifies non-flexible working arrangements. This decision was made to ensure robustness due to relatively small sample sizes: for women, N = 729 (exceptional cases) and N = 455 (some regularity); for men, N = 905 (exceptional cases) and N = 506 (some regularity). Separating these categories would reduce the reliability of the results due to the limited number of respondents in each subgroup (robustness check not shown, available from the authors).

While information on family-friendly workplaces are only available for employees, we retain temporary workers, i.e., workers who are occasionally employed during the year (coordinated and continuous collaboration/project-based collaboration, occasional work/service), and self-employed individuals into the analysis. While we do not develop hypotheses regarding the difference in fertility intentions between employees, self-employed and temporary-employed individuals, the comparison of these groups is of interest. Indeed, self-employed individuals may have greater autonomy in organising their work schedule compared to employees and enjoy more flexibility. Yet, if self-employment is involuntary, it can lead to postpone childbearing (Matysiak & Mynarska, 2020). Recent research found no association between women's self-employment and fertility in Poland (Matysiak & Mynarska, 2020). Similarly, temporary workers are employed only during certain periods of the year, hence may have an easier work-family reconciliation compared to employees. Our first explanatory variable is hence a cross-classification between respondent's employment status and, if employed as employees, whether their workplace is flexible or not. The variable takes the following values: not-employed (i.e., unemployed or inactive), self-employed, temporary worker, employee with non-flexible working arrangements, and employee with flexible working arrangements.

Our second explanatory variable measures corporate benefits in the form of childcare provision from the employer encompassing presence of nursery and/or kindergarten services in the workplace or monetary compensation (total or in part) from the employer for the costs associated with it. The original survey question asked: "Does your company provide the following services or reimburse total or part of the cost?". The list comprised six services: 'Nursery (i.e., for ages 0 to 3 years old) or kindergarten (i.e., for ages 3 to 5 years old)', 'Medical care, health insurance', 'Education and training', 'Free or discounted accommodation', 'Summer stays, study holidays for workers or their children', and 'Subsidized loans'. For each service listed, possible response categories were "no", "yes", and "do not know". Again, we cross-classify this survey item with the employment status. The resulting second explanatory variable takes the following values: not-employed (i.e., unemployed and inactive), self-employed, temporary worker, employee whose employer provide childcare facilities or pays at least part of the costs for childcare – in short, 'employer provides/pays for childcare'–, and employee whose employer does not provide childcare facilities nor pay any costs for childcare. We further include a separate category for employees who do not know whether the employer provides/pays for childcare or not.

We also run a model distinguishing between employees whose employer provides/pays at least for one of the six benefits listed above (childcare, medical care, education, accommodation, summer holidays and subsidized loans) vs. employees whose employer does not provide/pay for any of them – our third main explanatory variable.

Control variables

The following demographic and socioeconomic characteristics are included as controls in the model: respondent's age (in classes: 18–24, 25–29, 30–34, 35–39, 40- 44 and 45–49 years), number of children (0, 1 child), educational level (low, medium and high),

partnership status (partnered and cohabiting, partnered but not cohabiting, unpartnered), place of birth (Italy vs. abroad), sector of activity ("agriculture and forestry", "industry and construction", "services", "public administration, health, education", and "not applicable" (i.e., unemployed, inactive) and region of residence (North West, North East, Centre, South, Islands). While not included in the main models, we also considered the type of employment sector (public, private, and mixed) as an additional robustness check. The "mixed" category refers to employment in companies with both public and private ownership. Including this variable in alternative model specifications did not change the main results. Full estimates are available upon request.

Table A1 in the Appendix presents the descriptive statistics of the main variables by gender. A majority of respondents (65.03%) do not plan to have children in the next three years, with women (35.95%) exhibiting slightly higher intentions than men (34.10%). Regarding employment, 44.60% of women and 33.66% of men are not employed, while self-employment is more prevalent among men (15.97%). Temporary employment is rare for both genders. Only a small proportion of respondents receives workplace-based childcare service provision/payment (1.53% of women and 1.69% of men). Interestingly, the share of employees who do not know whether their employer provides or not such benefits is higher than the share who answer positively to this question. About a third of the sample is employed with flexible working arrangements, which is slightly more common among men than women (33.57% vs. 31.61%).

Analytic strategy

We examine the association between family-friendly workplaces and fertility intentions through binary logistic regression. We run three distinct models. In Model 1 (M1), we test whether workplace flexibility is associated with fertility intentions (H1). In Model 2 (M2), we test whether the employer's provision of childcare facilities or contribution to the costs of childcare is associated with fertility intentions (H2). Model 3 (M3) tests whether the employer's provision or payment of at least one benefit (childcare, medical care, education, accommodation, summer holidays and subsidized loans) is associated with employees' fertility intentions (H3).

We run separate models for women and men because we expect the association between family-friendly workplaces and fertility intentions will be stronger for women than for men. Because the influence of family-friendly workplaces on fertility intentions may differ depending on the number of children, we also run Models 1 and 2 including an interaction term between the main explanatory variables and the number of children (0 vs. 1 child). We expect that family-friendly workplace policies will have a more significant impact on the fertility intentions of parents with one child compared to those with no children. We exclude individuals with two or more children to focus on the distinct fertility intentions of those with zero or one child.

After deleting cases with missing information on key variables, our analytical sample comprises 3,679 women and 4,034 men aged 18 to 49 (i.e., in potentially fertile age).

Results

Figure 1 (and Table A5 in the Appendix) presents the average marginal effects (AME) of workplace flexibility on fertility intentions based on Model 1 (estimates available in Table A2 in the Appendix). The Figure is organised into four panels: men and women, each divided into two subgroups based on the number of children (childless vs. one child). The reference category is being employed as an employee with a non-flexible employment. The estimates show that fertility intentions are significantly higher among employees who have flexible working arrangements compared to those who do not, thereby supporting our first hypothesis for both men and women (H1).

The number of children moderates the association differently across genders. Among women, fertility intentions are not statistically different across those temporary employed, self-employed, not employed or employed with non-flexible working arrangements. Point estimates suggest that the intention to have a child is highest among women employed with flexible working arrangements and this result holds for mothers and childless women alike. Among mothers, the association is statistically significant: mothers of one child who are employed with flexible working arrangements are 6 percentage points ($p < 0.05$) more likely to intend having another child in the near future compared to mothers who are employed with non-flexible working arrangements. Among childless women, the AME, despite being positive – hence suggesting higher fertility intentions compared to childless women in inflexible jobs, is not statistically significant (though only marginally).

Similar patterns are observed for men: childless men employed with flexible arrangements are 5 percentage points ($p < 0.05$) more likely to intend having a child compared

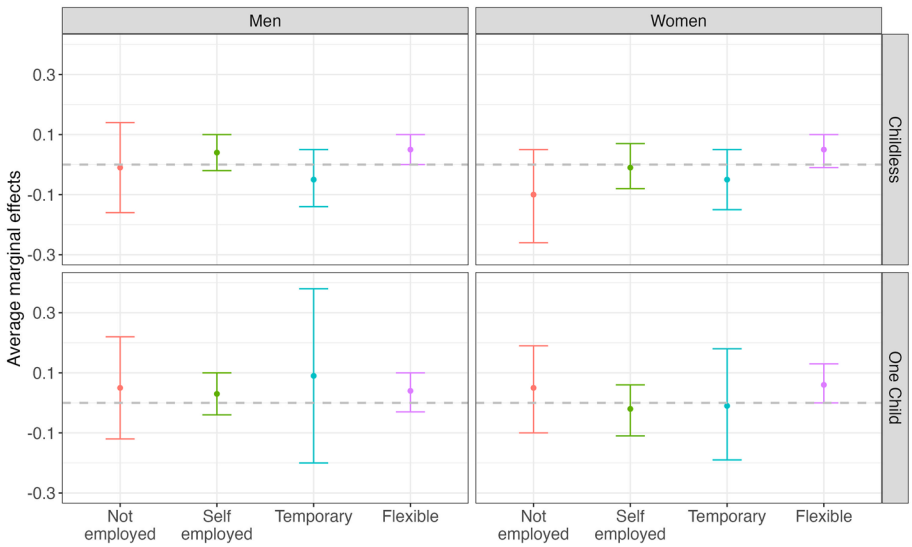

Fig. 1 Average marginal effects of workplace flexibility on fertility intentions (reference category: employed as an employee with non-flexible working arrangements), by gender and number of children (0 vs. 1) (Model 1). Source: Family and Social Subjects Survey (2016). Author's calculations. *Note:* Regression results available in Table A2. 'temporary': employed only during certain periods of the year; 'flexible': employed as an employee with flexible working arrangements

to those employed with non-flexible working arrangements. Among fathers of one child the difference is smaller (AME = 0.04) and not statistically significant. Interestingly, and unexpectedly, also non-employed fathers exhibit higher fertility intentions compared to those employed with no flexibility (AME = 0.05). These differences, however, are not statistically significant.

In additional analysis (not shown), we further distinguished flexible working arrangements by employment sector (public, private, and mixed). We found that the positive association between flexible working arrangements and fertility intentions is driven exclusively by employees in the public sector. Results for private and mixed sector employees showed no significant association.

Figure 2 (and Table A6 in the Appendix) illustrates the average marginal effects of receiving childcare-related benefits from the employer (in the form of workplace-based nursery/kindergarten or total or partial reimbursement of childcare-related expenses) on fertility intentions based on Model 2 (estimates available in Table A3 in the Appendix). The reference category comprises employees whose employers do not provide any childcare-related benefits. Results indicate that access to childcare services is not significantly associated with fertility intentions for either men or women, leading us to reject our second hypothesis (H2). Fertility intentions for respondents who are employed with workplace-based childcare benefits are not significantly different from all other employment statuses, net of other controls, for both men and women and for both childless respondents and parents. However, the point estimates suggest that for childless men, those with access to workplace-based childcare benefits are 4 percentage points more

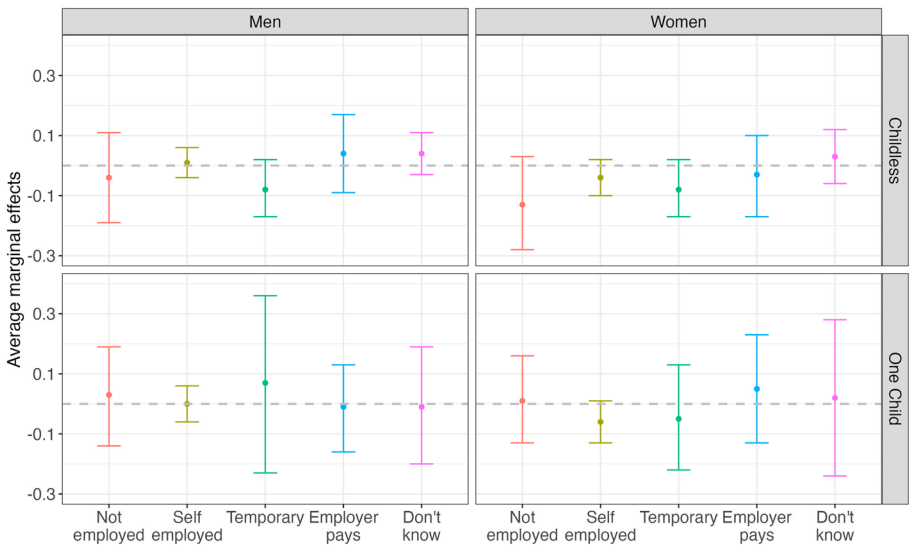

Fig. 2 Average marginal effects of workplace-based childcare benefits on fertility intentions (reference category: employed as employee with no workplace-based childcare benefits), by gender and number of children (0 vs. 1) (Model 2). *Source:* Family and Social Subjects Survey (2016). Author's calculations. *Note:* Regression results available in Table 3. 'temporary': employed only during certain periods of the year; 'employer pays': employed as an employee with no workplace-based childcare benefits. Workplace-based childcare benefits encompass availability of nursery or kindergarten at the workplace of reimbursement of all or part of related costs

likely to intend having a first child. For childless women, point estimates are negative (AME = -0.03, $p > 0.05$), while the association turns positive, yet still non-significant, for mothers (AME = 0.05, $p > 0.05$).

Finally, Fig. 3 shows the average marginal effects from Model 3, which explores the relationship between working for an employer who provides at least one type of family-friendly benefits (among: childcare, medical care, education, accommodation, summer holidays and subsidized loans) and fertility intentions. The results underscore that the employer's contribution toward at least part of the cost of family-related benefits influences childless men's fertility intentions. For childless men, the probability of intending to have another child is 0.05 points higher for those receiving family-friendly benefits compared to those without such benefits. This result is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). For childless women, the coefficient is positive but statistically insignificant (AME = 0.01, $p > 0.05$). These findings partially confirm our third hypothesis (H3).

The estimates for the control variables are consistent across Models 1, 2, and 3. They confirm previous studies (e.g., Vignoli et al., 2020) that temporary employment tends to be associated with lower fertility intentions, highlighting the importance of job stability as a critical factor influencing family formation decisions. Fertility intentions are lower among parents compared to childless respondents, increase with age during one's late 20s and 30s and decline afterward, and are higher among partnered and cohabiting respondents compared to those who are non-partnered or partnered but not cohabiting.

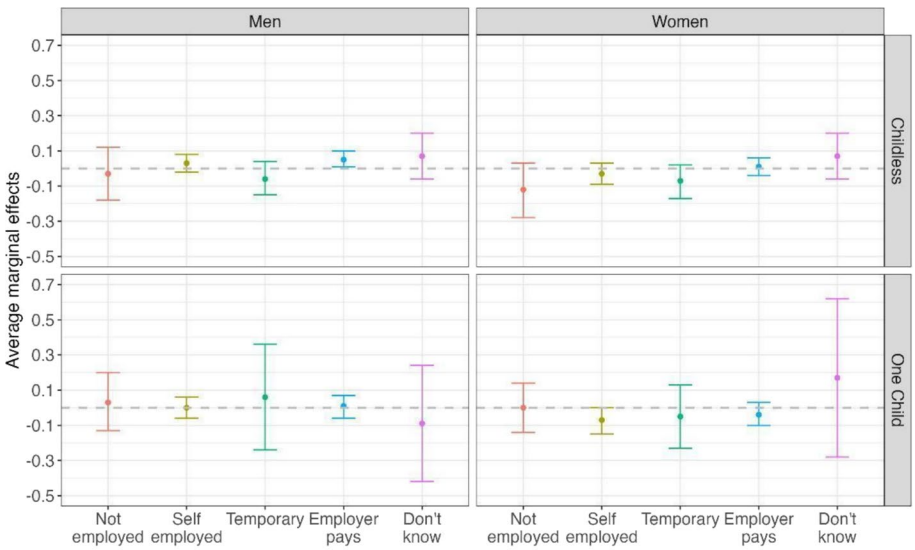

Fig. 3 Average marginal effects of workplace-based family-friendly benefits on fertility intentions (reference category: employed as employee with no workplace-based family-friendly benefits), by gender and number of children (0 vs. 1) (Model 3). *Source:* Family and Social Subjects Survey (2016). Author's calculations. *Note*: Regression results available in Table 4. 'temporary': employed only during certain periods of the year; 'employer pays': employed as an employee with an employer who offers at least one form of workplace-based family-friendly benefits. Workplace-based family-friendly benefits encompass: availability of nursery or kindergarten at the workplace of reimbursement of all or part of related costs; reimbursement of medical care, health insurance, education and training, free or discounted accommodation, summer stays, study holidays for workers or their children, and subsidized loans

Additionally, fertility intentions are higher among respondents in the Centre, the South, and the Islands of Italy. Place of birth is also relevant: being born abroad is significantly and positively associated with fertility intentions for men in both Model 1 and Model 3. Educational attainment and sector of activity are unrelated to fertility intentions, net of other controls included in the model.

Discussion and conclusion

Recent literature has documented how family policies can contribute to reducing work-family conflict and, as a result, affect fertility (e.g., Luci & Thévenon, 2013; Bergsvik et al., 2021). We know little about whether and how family-friendly workplace policies affect employees' reproductive decisions. The few existing studies on this topic have explored selected contexts such as South Korea, Russia and the UK. We contribute to this literature by examining how family-friendly workplace policies are associated with women's and men's fertility intentions in Italy, a context characterised by one of the lowest provisions of formal childcare in Europe, amidst one of the lowest female employment rate and fertility rate.

We hypothesised that fertility intentions would be highest among employees who have flexible working arrangements. Unlike findings from previous studies in South Korea (Choi et al., 2018; Kim & Parish, 2022) and the United Kingdom (Wang & Tan, 2024), where no relationship between access to flexible work and fertility intentions was observed, our data reveal that flexibility in the workplace is positively association with the intention to have a second child for women in Italy. This aligns with Harknett et al. (2014) and Sinyavskaya and Billingsley (2015), who found that work flexibility is linked to a higher likelihood of planning a second child. We further find that flexible working arrangements is positively associated with fertility intentions among childless men.

We also hypothesised that having workplace-based childcare benefits would be positively associated with the intention to have a(n other) child. Contrary to our expectations and differently from previous studies documenting an association between workplace daycare facilities and fertility intentions (Choi et al., 2018; Kim & Parish, 2022), our findings show that the provision of nursery or kindergarten services in the workplace or contribution to the costs of childcare by the employer is not significantly related to fertility intentions. While we cannot rule out that null results are masked by the low sample size of respondents who benefited from the employer's contribution to childcare costs (N = 124), results could also be attributed to the fact that having access to benefits does not always translate into being able to use them effectively.

Our third hypothesis proposed that access to at least one form of workplace family-friendly benefit (childcare, medical care, education, accommodation, summer holidays and subsidized loans) would be positively related to fertility intention. Unexpectedly, results suggest that this measure is positively associated with fertility intentions for childless men but not for women. This finding deviates from previous research from Kim and Parish (2022) on South Korea. A possible explanation for the observed gender differences could be explained by gendered theories of fertility. In a gender-conservative context such as Italy, men, who typically are the main or sole breadwinner (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2021), may perceive monetary benefits as reducing a child's financial burden, which, in turn, drives the intention to transition to fatherhood. Women, on the other

hand, might not find provision of at least one workplace family-friendly benefit sufficient to offset the direct or indirect costs of childbearing that they face disproportionally compared to their male partners. Another explanation for our gendered findings may relate to self-selection mechanisms – which will be further discussed as a limitation of our study below: individuals planning to have children may be more likely to seek out family-friendly workplaces which will allow them higher flexibility. Such self-selection mechanisms may be particularly prevalent among women, given that they may expect to revert to the main parent role upon childbirth, at least in the Italian gender-conservative context. We expected that women's fertility intentions would be more responsive than men's to generous workplace-based family-friendly policies in general across all three hypotheses. However, our results show that men, particularly childless men, are also responsive to family-friendly benefits. Taken together, our findings suggest that family-friendly workplace policies may play a role in shaping fertility intentions for both genders. This supports the broader notion that perceptions of constraints related to parenthood, such as time and financial costs, influence fertility decisions for both women and men. Although the gender gap has narrowed over time, it remains evident regarding employment opportunities (Liefbroer, 2005). This issue is especially pronounced in the Italian context, where the negative association between fertility and employment instability has intensified in recent decades, particularly for women (Scherer & Brini, 2023).

The association between workplace family-friendly benefits and fertility intentions varies depending on the number of children. Flexible working arrangements are positively associated with fertility intentions of childless men and mothers of one child, while access to at least one family-friendly benefit is positively associated with childless men's fertility intentions. Our initial expectation that family-friendly workplace policies would have a greater influence on fertility intentions of parents with one child compared to those without children is hence only confirmed for women and in relation to flexible working arrangements.

Regarding other employment situations, self-employed individuals—particularly mothers—are less inclined to intend having a second child, while temporary employment is associated with a reduced likelihood of intending to have a child among childless women. Overall, these findings highlight that reproductive decisions are closely tied to economic and employment circumstances, aligning with previous studies (Adserà, 2011; Alderotti et al., 2021; Vignoli et al., 2012, 2020).

Policy implications

Our findings have important policy implications. First, in designing family and fertility policies, flexible working arrangements are crucial. This measure can help alleviate the challenges faced by working parents who often juggle career aspirations with family responsibilities. Employers should be incentivized to implement flexible working hours, particularly during lifecourse phases requesting care towards children – as well as other dependants –, to better accommodate employees' caregiving duties without compromising their employment.

Second, although workplace-based childcare services (or reimbursement of related costs) did not show a significant association with fertility in our study, point estimates

suggest that the intention to have an additional child is higher among both mothers and fathers who have access to childcare benefits, suggesting that expanding access and affordability of childcare services may positively contribute to fertility decisions.

Also, policies should consider gender differences and the specific needs of parents and non-parents. While policies related to parenthood and the world of work have traditionally been targeted to mothers in the Italian context (Vallauri, 2020), our results show that men's flexible working arrangements and workplace-based family-friendly benefits may have a positive influence on fertility intentions, too. In other words, fathers are more likely to intend having a child if their working arrangements are flexible compared to when they are not. This result joins a growing body of literature on men and masculinities documenting the emergence of 'engaged fathers' (Grau Grau et al., 2022), particularly among younger generations of fathers who are progressively more engaged in unpaid labour (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016), express more egalitarian attitudes, and prefer a reduction in work hours upon fatherhood compared to older cohorts (Pollmann-Schult & Reynolds, 2017). National and workplace policies have then a crucial role in encouraging shared responsibility between (prospective) parents and should foster a gender-neutral approach to work-family balance.

By facilitating better work-life balance, such policies could also contribute to reducing social inequalities, as they may enable women to remain in the workforce while managing motherhood. On the other hand, workplace-based family-friendly policies may also foster social inequalities as access to such benefits is generally available to a selected, small number of highly-skilled employees in professional/managerial occupations whose employer are large corporations, leaving ineligible all other employees, the self- and temporary-employed and, obviously, the unemployed and inactive who already may face constraints to reach their fertility aspirations. Also, company-sponsored family-friendly policies increasingly include fertility benefits such as subsidies for costly medically assisted reproduction treatments. While such benefits may have an obvious, direct impact on employees' fertility, commentators warn that they may be aimed at inducing female employees to postpone childbearing in order to avoid employment interruptions, e.g., via payment of social freezing (Mackenzie et al., 2024). The interrelation between workplace-based benefits and employees' fertility, hence, is not without criticisms.

Limitations and future research directions

We acknowledge that our study presents some limitations. First, whereas almost a third of our sample is employed with access to flexible working arrangements, only less than 2% of the sample has access to workplace-based childcare or reimbursement of related expenditures. The lack of a statistically significant association between workplace-based childcare provision and fertility intentions may hence be related to the small sample size rather than to the fact that the two variables are independent. Similarly, the sample size of temporary employed men and women is small, hence preventing us from adequately evaluating the statistical significance of differences between the temporary employed, self-employed and employees.

Second, our study does not establish causal relationships. Since our findings are based on cross-sectional data, we are unable to ascertain causality between family-friendly

workplace policies and fertility intentions. Also, we cannot rule out reverse causality: individuals planning to have children might self-select into family-friendly workplaces. Future longitudinal studies are needed to evaluate any cause-and-effect relationships.

Third, our data lacks information on other types of workplace-based family-friendly policies such as maternal and parental leave schemes as previous studies have done. Also, we acknowledge that the mere existence of family-friendly workplace policies is no guarantee for their actual utilization: organizational culture, including "ideal worker" norms, may influence whether employees feel comfortable using these policies. Future research with richer company-level data should incorporate organizational culture into studies of corporate welfare and fertility.

Also, we fail to implement the recommendation to take a couple's perspective on the analysis of fertility and employment-related characteristics (Alderotti et al., 2021), as our data does not collect information on the partners' workplace policies nor their fertility intentions. Future research should consider family-friendly workplace policies for each partner and investigate more thoroughly eventual gender differences (e.g., whether intended/realized fertility is higher for couples where workplace policies are available for a partner of a specific gender or for both partners).

Finally, our data was collected in 2016: it is possible that the association between flexible working arrangements and fertility intentions changed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as flexible working arrangements have become more widespread. Further research on the role of corporate welfare on fertility decisions is a promising avenue for study. Future research should analyse the association between realized, in addition to intended, fertility, especially so in Italy after the implementation of the 'Code of self-regulation for companies in favour of maternity' in 2023.

Appendix

See Table 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the main variables used in the analyses

	Women		Men		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Fertility intentions						
No	64.05	2,326	65.90	2,658	65.03	4,984
Yes	35.95	1,353	34.10	1,376	34.97	2,729
Main Explanatory variables						
Not employed	44.60	1,547	33.66	1,213	38.79	2,760
Self-employed	9.61	372	15.97	684	12.99	1,056
Temporary	2.58	90	1.94	93	2.24	183
Flexible working arrangements						
Employed with non-flexible arrangements	11.60	486	14.85	633	13.33	1,119
Employed with flexible arrangements	31.61	1,184	33.57	1,411	32.65	2,595
Workplace-based childcare provision/payment						
Employer provides/pays	1.53	59	1.69	65	1.62	124
Employer does not provide/pay	39.46	1,513	42.65	1,800	41.15	3,313
Does not know	2.22	98	4.08	179	3.21	277
Workplace-based family benefits						
Employer provides at least one	16.29	629	18.63	795	17.53	1,424
Employer does not provide any	26.10	1001	28.69	1,1097	27.48	2,198
Does not know	0.82	40	1.11	52	0.97	92
Number of children						
Childless	68.99	2,564	77.26	3,116	73.38	5,608
One child	31.01	1,115	22.74	918	26.62	2,033
Age						
18–24	24.82	918	23.44	989	24.08	1,907
25–29	17.47	626	17.94	677	17.72	1,303
30–34	16.22	571	16.03	634	16.12	1,205
35–39	12.88	503	15.50	607	14.27	1,110
40–44	15.60	551	14.39	574	14.96	1,125
45–49	13.02	510	12.72	553	12.86	1,063
Place of birth						
Italy	86.03	3,258	87.15	3,643	86.62	6,901
Abroad	13.97	421	12.85	391	13.38	812
Education level						
Low	23.99	764	32.34	1,131	28.43	1,895
Medium	50.99	1,893	51.11	2,237	51.06	4,130
High	25.02	1,022	16.54	666	20.52	1,688
Sector of activity						
Agriculture, forestry	1.17	45	3.63	182	2.48	227
Industry and construction	5.65	195	20.38	859	13.47	1,054
Services	22.57	878	25.14	1,041	23.94	1,919
Public administration, education, health	25.17	984	16.23	708	20.43	1,692
Not applicable	45.44	1,577	34.61	1,244	39.69	2,821
Region of Italy						
North-West	26.36	741	26.40	751	26.38	1,492
North-East	19.56	876	19.66	1,008	19.61	1,884
Centre	19.86	612	23.64	693	19.66	1,305
South	22.93	1,087	19.49	1,204	23.31	2,291
Islands	11.29	363	10.81	378	11.03	741
Partnership situation						
Partnered and cohabitating	38.78	1,363	30.64	1,238	34.45	2,601
Partnered non-cohabiting	22.97	891	22.95	919	22.96	1,810
Unpartnered	38.26	1,425	46.42	1,877	42.59	3,302
N	100	3,679	100	4,034	100	7,713

Table 2 Coefficients of logistic regression of employment and flexible working arrangements on the intention to have a child in the next three years (Model 1)

	Women		Men	
	Coef	Std. Error	Coef	Std. Error
Flexible working arrangements (ref.: Employed with non-flexible working arrangements)				
Not employed	− 0.32	0.45	− 0.02	0.42
Self-employed	− 0.09	0.17	0.19	0.12
Temporary	− 0.18	0.27	− 0.18	0.26
Employed with flexible working arrangements	0.27*	0.13	0.25*	0.10
Number of children (ref.: Childless)				
One child	− 0.91***	0.11	− 0.48***	0.11
Flexible working arrangements#number of children				
Not employed—1 child	0.91**	0.29	0.37	0.32
Self-employed—1 child	− 0.11	0.37	− 0.05	0.26
Temporary employed—1 child	0.22	0.73	0.78	0.87
Flexible working arrangements—1 child	0.11	0.29	− 0.04	0.23
Age (ref.: 18–24)				
25–29	1.39***	0.12	1.09***	0.12
30–34	1.58***	0.14	1.44***	0.13
35–39	1.12***	0.14	1.33***	0.13
40–44	− 0.18	0.15	0.55***	0.14
45–49	− 2.16***	0.24	− 0.49**	0.16
Place of birth (ref.: Italy)				
Abroad	0.18	0.13	0.25*	0.12
Educational level (ref.: Low)				
Medium	0.11	0.11	0.02	0.09
High	0.23	0.12	− 0.03	0.11
Sector of activity (ref.: Agriculture, foresty)				
Industry and construction	− 0.38	0.41	− 0.28	0.18
Services	− 0.42	0.37	− 0.23	0.18
Public administration, education, health	− 0.34	0.37	− 0.21	0.19
Not applicable	− 0.32	0.57	− 0.52	0.43
Region of Italy (ref.: North-West)				
North-East	0.16	0.12	0.18	0.11
Centre	0.29*	0.13	0.22	0.12
South	0.63***	0.12	0.51***	0.11
Islands	0.60***	0.15	0.43**	0.15
Partner (ref.: Partnered and cohabitating)				
Partnered non-cohabiting	− 0.80***	0.12	− 0.69***	0.12
Unpartnered	− 1.60***	0.12	− 1.55***	0.11
N	3,679		4,034	

*p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 3 Coefficients of logistic regression of employment and workplace-based childcare service provision/payment on the intention to have a child in the next three years (Model 2)

	Women		Men	
	Coef	**Std. Error**	**Coef**	**Std. Error**
Workplace-based childcare provision/payment (ref.: Employer does not provide/pay)				
Not employed	− 0.72	0.44	− 0.22	0.42
Self-employed	− 0.19	0.17	0.05	0.12
Temporary	− 0.43	0.27	− 0.41	0.27
Employer provides/pays	− 0.19	0.39	0.20	0.34
Does not know if the employer provides/pays	0.18	0.26	0.22	0.18
Number of children (ref.: Childless)				
One child	− 0.16***	0.14	− 0.49***	0.13
Workplace-based childcare services provision#number of children				
Not employed—1 child	0.81***	0.19	0.37	0.28
Self-employed—1 child	− 0.21	0.30	− 0.06	0.21
Temporary employed—1 child	0.12	0.70	0.78	0.85
Employer provides/pays—1 child	0.51	0.67	− 0.26	0.56
Does not know—1 child	− 0.05	0.88	− 0.25	0.62
Age (ref.: 18–24)				
25–29	1.39***	0.12	1.09 ***	0.12
30–34	1.58***	0.14	1.43 ***	0.13
35–39	1.13***	0.14	1.32 ***	0.13
40–44	− 0.18	0.15	0.55 ***	0.14
45–49	− 2.16***	0.24	− 0.49 ***	0.16
Place of birth (ref.: Italy)				
Abroad	0.18	0.13	0.23	0.12
Educational level (ref.: Low)				
Medium	0.12	0.11	0.03	0.08
High	0.23	0.12	− 0.02	0.11
Sector of activity (ref.: Agriculture, foresty)				
Industry and construction	− 0.36	0.41	− 0.28	0.18
Services	− 0.40	0.37	− 0.22	0.18
Public administration, education, health	− 0.35	0.37	− 0.21	0.19
Not applicable	− 0.35	0.57	− 0.53	0.44
Region of Italy (ref.: Northwest)				
North-East	0.15	0.12	0.17	0.11
Centre	0.29*	0.13	0.21	0.12
South	0.61***	0.12	0.49***	0.11
Islands	0.58***	0.15	0.42**	0.15
Partner (ref.: Partnered and cohabitating)				
Partnered non-cohabiting	− 0.80***	0.12	− 0.69***	0.12
Unpartnered	− 1.60***	0.12	− 1.55***	0.11
N	3,679		4,034	

Table 4 Coefficients of logistic regression of employment and workplace-based family benefits on the intention to have a child in the next three years (Model 3)

	Women		Men	
	Coef	Std. Error	Coef	Std. Error
Workplace-based family-friendly benefits (ref.: Employer does not provide any)				
Not employed	− 0.69	0.45	− 0.14	0.42
Self-employed	− 0.16	0.18	0.14	0.13
Temporary	− 0.40	0.28	− 0.32	0.27
Employer provides at least one	0.07	0.15	0.28*	0.12
Does not know if the employer provides	0.39	0.38	0.35	0.33
Number of children (ref.: Childless)				
One child	− 1.03***	0.17	− 0.42**	0.15
Workplace-based family-related benefits#number of children				
Not employed—1 child	0.68**	0.21	0.31	0.29
Self-employed—1 child	− 0.35	0.31	− 0.12	0.22
Temporary employed—1 child	− 0.00	0.71	0.71	0.86
Employer provides at least one—1 child	− 0.32	0.26	− 0.22	0.22
Do not know if the employer provides—1 child	0.65	1.34	− 0.97	1.29
Age (ref.: 18–24)				
25–29	1.38***	0.12	1.09***	0.12
30–34	1.58***	0.14	1.42***	0.13
35–39	1.12***	0.14	1.31***	0.13
40–44	− 0.19	0.15	0.54***	0.14
45–49	− 2.16***	0.24	− 0.50***	0.16
Place of birth (ref.: Italy)				
Abroad	0.18	0.13	0.24*	0.12
Education level (ref.: Low)				
Medium	0.12	0.11	0.03	0.09
High	0.24	0.13	− 0.04	0.11
Sector of activity (ref.: Agriculture, foresty)				
Industry and construction	− 0.36	0.41	− 0.28	0.18
Services	− 0.40	0.37	− 0.22	0.18
Public administration, education, health	− 0.34	0.37	− 0.22	0.19
Not applicable	− 0.34	0.57	− 0.51	0.44
Region of Italy (ref.: North-West)				
North-East	0.16	0.12	0.16	0.11
Centre	0.30*	0.13	0.22	0.12
South	0.62***	0.12	0.51***	0.11
Islands	0.59***	0.15	0.43**	0.15
Partner (ref.: Partnered and cohabitating)				
Partnered non-cohabiting	− 0.80***	0.12	− 0.68***	0.12
Unpartnered	− 1.61***	0.12	− 1.55***	0.11
N	3,679		4,034	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5 Average marginal effects of employment and flexible working arrangements on fertility intentions (reference category: employed as an employee with non-flexible working arrangements), by gender and number of children (Model 1)

Flexible working arrangements	Number of children	Women AME	Men AME
Not-employed	Childless	− 0.10	− 0.01
	1 Child	0.05	0.05
Self-employed	Childless	− 0.01	0.04
	1 Child	− 0.02	0.03
Temporary	Childless	− 0.05	− 0.05
	1 Child	− 0.01	0.09
Flexible	Childless	0.05	0.05*
	1 Child	0.06*	0.04

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 6 Average marginal effects of employment and workplace-based childcare provision/payment on fertility intentions (reference category: Employed as employee with no workplace-based childcare benefits), by gender and number of children (Model 2)

Workplace-based childcare provision/payment	Number of children	Women AME	Men AME
Not-employed	Childless	− 0.13	− 0.04
	1 Child	0.01	0.03
Self-employed	Childless	− 0.04	0.01
	1 Child	− 0.06	− 0.00
Temporary	Childless	− 0.08	− 0.08
	1 Child	− 0.05	0.07
Employer provides/pays	Childless	− 0.03	0.04
	1 Child	0.05	− 0.01
Does not know if the employer provides/pays	Childless	0.03	0.04
	1 Child	0.02	− 0.01

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 7 Average marginal effects of employment and workplace-based family-friendly benefits on fertility intentions (reference category: Employed as employee with no workplace-based family-friendly benefits), by gender and number of children (Model 3)

Workplace-based family-friendly benefits	Number of children	Women AME	Men AME
Not-employed	Childless	− 0.12	− 0.03
	1 Child	0.00	0.03
Self-employed	Childless	− 0.03	0.03
	1 Child	− 0.07	0.00
Temporary	Childless	− 0.07	− 0.06
	1 Child	− 0.06	0.07
Employer pays at least part of the cost	Childless	0.01	0.05*
	1 Child	− 0.04	0.01
Do not know if the employer pays	Childless	0.07	0.07
	1 Child	0.18	− 0.09

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

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Author contributions
MJ conducted the data analysis, under the supervision of AV. AV contributed the development of the study aim. MJ was responsible for writing the first draft of this manuscript, while AV provided ongoing supervision to the revisions and final editing of the manuscript All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Data availability
The dataset analysed during the current study are available in the Italian "Istituto Nazionale di Statistica" (ISTAT) repository at the following link: https://www.istat.it/en/microdata/multipurpose-survey-on-households-families-social-subjects-and-life-cycle/

Declarations

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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