

INVITED ARTICLES

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MOVERS OR STAYERS? HETEROGENEITY OF OLDER ADULTS' RESIDENTIAL PROFILES ACROSS CONTINENTAL EUROPE

Abstract: Traditionally, the emotional attachment older adults have to their homes and the economic and health burden caused by residential moves have had a deterrent effect on mobility during old age. In spite of this static general trend, 20% of older Europeans change their residential location after the age of 65. Some studies point out that this percentage will increase in the coming decades along with the onset of baby-boom cohorts reaching older ages. The main objective of this article is to describe the residential mobility trends during old age in some European countries and identify the main features of those elderly that move after 65, using data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE).

Key words: residential mobility, older adults, Continental Europe.

1. INTRODUCTION

Population ageing, due to life expectancy increase, is one of the most significant demographic features of western societies. According to Eurostat data, population older than 65 years old residing in EU15¹ reached 17% in 2004. In view of the projections made by Eurostat, this figure is expected to almost double by 2025. By then, individuals over 65 will represent 32% of the total population of EU15. However, it is important to point out that the changes in the older population have not only taken place in a structural sense, but also in a qualitative way (Harper, 2006). According to Arber and Evandrou (1997), improvements in four life spheres

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¹ Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxemburg, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

(economic, residential, physical and mental health and socio-emotional) have contributed to transform the living context at older ages. Thus, the life expectancy extension and the living conditions and resources improvements have triggered transformations in the behaviour traditionally associated with older adults (Bloem *et al.*, 2008; González Puga, 2004; Grundy and Jitlal, 2007; Tatsiramos, 2006). Regarding the housing dynamics, some authors have concluded that the changes undergone by older population will be strongly determined by the growth of older adults' residential mobility over the next decades (Bonvalet and Ogg, 2008) and the increase in the length of the time that older adults live independently in their own dwellings (Tomassini *et al.*, 2004; Oswald and Wahl, 2005). In addition, the progressive increase of population aged 80 and over has been also accompanied by increased probability of living in a nursing home during the last stages of old age (Castle, 2001), a circumstance that also will affect the transformation of the residential pathways during old age.

This article compares the residential behaviour of the older adults population in Europe in terms of mobility or stability. For this purpose, people who established their current dwelling after having reached the age of 65 will be called 'movers' and people who established their current dwelling before reaching said age will be referred to as 'stayers'. Given the huge diversity of residential structures in the European context, this study intends to be an initial approach to identifying the features of older adults' mobility profiles in the EU15. This article also aims to highlight the distinctive features of the older adults population who change their residence during old age, examining the similarities and differences among European countries.

2. HOME AND WELLBEING LINKAGE DURING OLD AGE

The meaning of home is not the same throughout the life course. Each life stage involves a specific housing demand and implies a particular need of living conditions (Oswald and Wahl, 2005). Specifically during old age, the influence of the residential context on the wellbeing is higher than during other life stages such as early adulthood. The reason for that is, firstly, that older adults stay at home more compared with the rest of the population (Butler, 1986). Due to the decline of physical functions or changes in their routines after retirement, they tend to reduce their social networks and daily habits to the domestic sphere. These transformations can unleash negative effects on older people's wellbeing in a psychological and physical sense, such as isolation, dependence on relatives or loneliness (Boyce *et al.*, 2003). As Evans *et al.* (2002) have shown, housing quality has a positive effect on the perceived wealth and life satisfaction of older adults.

At the same time, the residential dynamics are shaped not only by individual needs, but also by household or family needs (Dykstra and van Wissen, 1999).

The relocation choices of older individuals are closely linked with their kinship living decisions. Because of that, it is necessary to consider the ties established between family members as a determinant factor in the mobility paths, both to provide or to limit the movement.

Secondly, the importance of housing at older ages lies in the emotional attachment that older people have to their homes. This emotional attachment arises from the fact that most important life events take place in the domestic sphere, especially in the family dimension, such as the birth and bringing up of children (Clapham, 2005). The preference of the vast majority of older adults is to remain in their own private dwelling until some disability or chronic disease forces them to move to an institution (Costa-Font, 2009). Also in a psychological sense, at old ages the dwelling symbolises independence and autonomy which determine older people's wellbeing (Gurney and Means, 1997). Nevertheless, the emotional attachment that older people have to their homes can lead to an imbalance between the residential needs and the real conditions of the dwelling they reside (Cortés and Laínez, 1998). This imbalance results from many older adults living in dwellings acquired in previous life stages, when their needs were different. The mismatch between housing conditions and residential needs at older ages occurs in three different ways; a mismatch in the dwelling (lack of bathroom or shower, shortage of space, number of rooms), a mismatch in the building (no elevator or stairs, age of the building, number of dwellings, access), and a mismatch in the neighbourhood (noise, pollution, parks in the area) (Cortés and Laínez, 1998). In consequence, a dissatisfactory housing context can affect the wellbeing of older people, increasing their vulnerability and causing a worsening of their life quality.

Regarding the macro level factors that encourage older adults to remain at home, public policies in Europe, with different implementation degrees depending on the country, have been structured to benefit 'ageing in place'. 'Ageing in place' consists of different socio-economic measures addressed to support older people at home until it is absolutely necessary for them to move. At this point, the 'ageing in place' is the widely promoted residential way of ageing in western societies.

Based on this, some authors have suggested new hypotheses about the residential behaviours of elderly Europeans. On the one hand, some consider that mobility rates of elderly Europeans are increasing. For instance, Bonvalet and Ogg (2008) carried out a research on residential mobility patterns of the French older population to find out if they will continue to be the same in the future or if increased mobility can be expected. In their research, the authors concluded that over the coming decades the current baby-boom group will reach older ages and this will lead to higher rates of mobility for this life stage. Higher divorce rates among people over the age of 60 or wide-spreading secondary residence ownership are some of the identified factors that might promote mobility during old age if we compare them with the mobility patters of previous generations.

On the other hand, a different hypothesis considers the effect of this mobility increase on the residential dynamics of the whole population. As Kendig (1984) and Malmberg (2010) have shown, the study of mobility and old age connection is very useful in understanding the effect that the duration of older adults' households can have on the housing consumption of other age groups, especially its influence on the housing stock and prices. Thus, the importance of the study of residential paths of older adults' households lies both in new mobility patterns and the consequences that these patterns can have for the entire residential system, i.e. the rest of the population (Myers, 1990).

Now, the question is: are these residential mobility patterns shared by all the European countries?

3. DATA AND METHODS

This analysis draws on data that come from the first wave (2004) of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). The total sample is composed of 31,115 European households of individuals aged 50 over.² Each wave is composed of thematic modules recording information about diverse aspects of older adults' life such as demographic characteristics, financial situation, family composition and residential context. The sample of older adults analysed in this paper comprises households headed by one person aged 65 and over (N = 6,454 individuals).

For the specific purpose of this paper, it was necessary to make some adjustments. Firstly, the number of analysed countries was reduced to eight. Following the response criteria, regions with higher percentages of answers in the selected variables were used, i.e. the Scandinavian region (Denmark and Sweden), Central Europe (France, Germany and the Netherlands) and the Mediterranean region (Greece, Italy and Spain).³ Countries with many missing responses for some variables, namely Austria, Switzerland and Belgium, were deleted. The dependent variable that measures the mobility of the older adults is not specified in the questionnaire, so it has been constructed through the question *how long have you been living in the current dwelling?* Then, the analysis assumes that the people who started living in their current accommodation after 65 made their last residential move during old age.

² For the 2004 wave, SHARE was developed in Austria, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden.

³ Note that the countries are identified in the figures and tables by the ISO code abbreviation, except for Greece: Denmark (DK), France (F), Germany (D), Greece (EL), Italy (IT), Spain (E), Sweden (SE), the Netherlands (NL).

To model the older adults' transition rates the Cox Proportional Hazard Model has been used. The observed sample comprised the older adults who made their last residential change after 65. This type of statistical model assumes that the covariates shift the baseline hazard function and has the advantage that the model does not make any assumption about the shape of the hazard over time.

4. OLDER ADULTS MOBILITY TRENDS IN EUROPE

The data analysis reveals that most elderly Europeans (80%) established their current home before they reached 65 years of age. The remaining 20% of the older population have started to live in their current dwelling after 65. As shown in table 1, there are remarkable differences between European nations. The analysed countries can be sorted in two groups based on the percentages of residential mobility during old age. The first one is formed by Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands. These countries present the highest percentages of residential movements made during old age, exceeding 30% in all cases. The second group includes the countries with the lowest rates of mobility of population aged 65 and above. In all cases these rates reach 15%, half of the previous group rates. France, Germany and the Mediterranean countries, Italy, Greece, and Spain are included. Especially Italy presents lower residential mobility rates during old age.

Table 1. Last residential move by country (65 and over households) (in %)

Age	D	SE	NL	E	IT	F	DK	EL	Total
Before 65	85	69	69	86	91	86	65	87	69
After 65	15	31	31	14	9	14	35	13	31

Source: SHARE, wave 1.

With regard to average age at which the last residential change took place, we observe that for the individuals who established their last domicile before the age of 65, the average age is 40, though with some important variations among countries. In line with table 1, table 2 shows that the highest average ages for the last residential change after 40 can be found in those countries that evidence more mobility during old age (Denmark, France, Sweden and the Netherlands). However, the difference in average age is smaller in the case of residential moves of those who changed their residence after the age of 65. Only in Italy this average age does not reach 70. For Spain and Greece, for instance, which are countries with low residential mobility rates, the average age for these changes – after 65 years old – is similar to countries with higher mobility rates.

Table 2. Mean age at the last residential move (65 and over households)

Age	D	SE	NL	E	IT	F	DK	EL	Total
Before 65	39.2	44.0	44.2	38.2	37.0	41.7	44.1	39.6	40.6
After 65	70.7	72.5	72.1	72.2	68.4	71.1	72.2	72.0	71.7
Total	43.8	52.8	52.9	42.8	39.9	45.9	53.8	43.6	46.6

Source: SHARE, wave 1.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the ages at which older people established their current residence. As shown, for most of them it was in two moments of their life course. These moments coincide with a change in life stage. The first one corresponds to transition to adulthood – at this age they left the parental home and established their own households; normally, this transition implies a residential move.

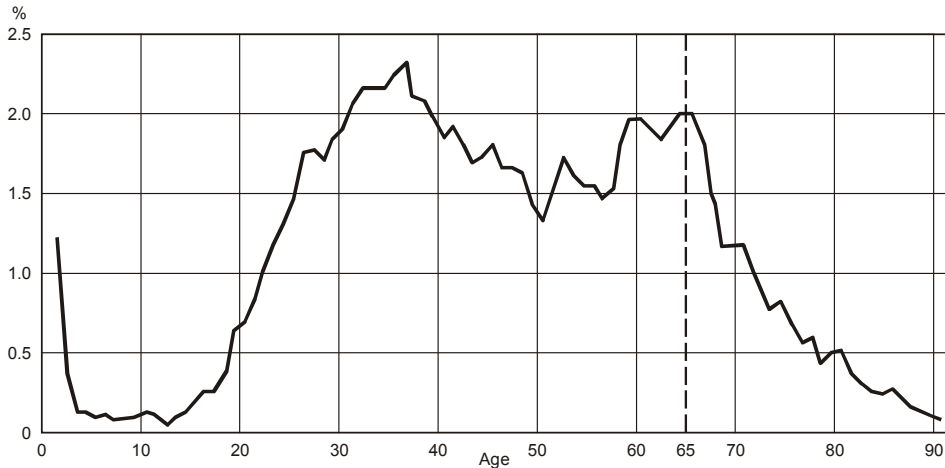


Fig. 1. Age of the last residential move (65 and over households)

Source: SHARE, wave 1

The second moment at which the older cohorts established their current residence was around the beginning of the older age life stage. These residential changes start at 55 and decrease at the age of 66–67. This life stage coincides with the retirement period that has been commonly identified with the beginning of old age and with emancipation of the children.

Figure 2 presents two age distribution values for people more than 65 years old who made their last residential change. Spain has been selected as a country representative of the group of countries with lower levels of mobility during old age, and the Netherlands has been chosen as a representative of the countries where the domicile changes during old age are more frequent. This way,

the graph shows that while older adults in Spain established their current home mainly between the ages of 30 and 40, in the Netherlands this move was generally made at a more advanced age. Regarding the other countries, Denmark and Sweden's distribution patterns are similar to those of the Netherlands, even surpassing the peak observed around the age of 65. The Mediterranean countries, Italy and Greece, present a curve which is very similar to the curve presented by Spain, with highest residential mobility indicators during the first stage of adulthood. France and Germany both represent a mixed pattern with high percentages of older people changing their residence between the ages of 30 and 40, similarly to the Mediterranean countries.

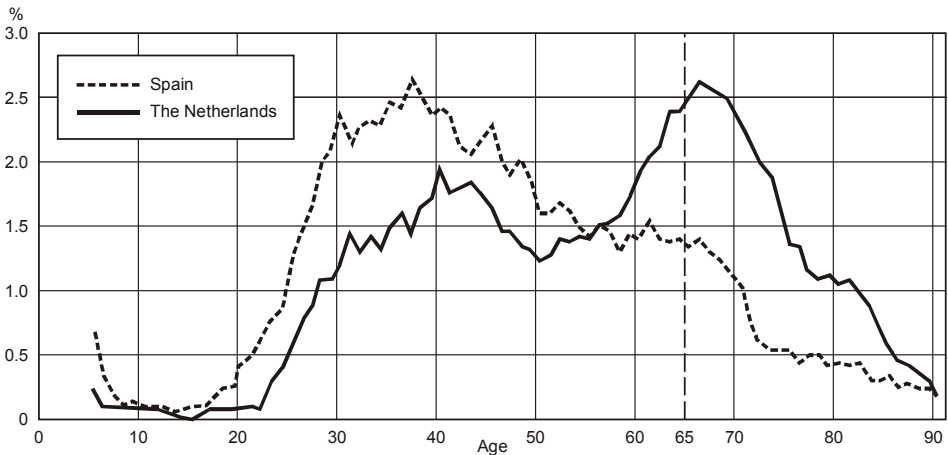


Fig. 2. Age of the last residential move (selected countries)

Source: SHARE, wave 1

Figure 2 shows the age distribution for the last residential move of older adults aged 65 and above. Although the trend varies depending on the territory, most of the last residential movements were made after the age of 65. After these years of mobility increase, around the age of 65, the percentage of older adults that made their last residential move at older ages decreases.

Figure 3 illustrates relevant regional differences within the European context. These variations can be divided into two main groups in respect of the mobility profiles: those with high mobility rates and those with low mobility rates. According to the results presented in the first table, the differences between the two groups of selected countries remain also for older ages. Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands are territories with higher percentages of residential changes during old age. Between the ages of 65 and 70, 2.5–3% of these countries' elderly population made their last residential move. Some of the variations could be explained by differences in the retirement age depending on the territory.

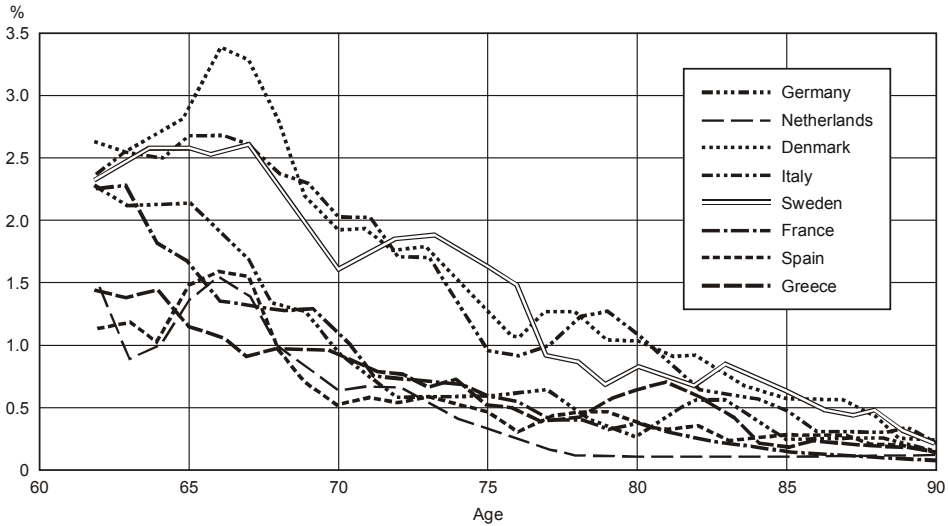


Fig. 3. Age of the last residential move after 65 (%)

Source: SHARE, wave 1

The second group shows some heterogeneity in the early years of old age, France and Germany being the countries with higher percentages of moves. After the age of 70, this trend in France and Germany declines and presents values that are similar to those of the Mediterranean territories. Italy, Spain and Greece have the lowest rates of mobility, and Italy is a country with less mobility in older ages. In the case of Spain, the population that has moved to their current dwelling at the age of 80 and above reaches the level of countries such as the Netherlands.

The differences in percentages for all countries tend to diminish as older adults exceed the age of 90. However, the Scandinavian countries, Denmark and Sweden, still remain as territories with a higher rate of mobility.

5. CHARACTERISTICS OF OLDER ADULTS IN EUROPE

This sample is composed of persons born in 1939 or before. In table 3 are summarised the percentages and numbers used in the analysis. Regarding the socio-demographic features, more than half of the elderly Europeans are married and 48% live in couples without other members of the household.

Figure 4 illustrates variations in older households composition depending on the pattern of mobility during old age and the territory they live in. They follow a structure very similar to the general distribution of households in each country.

In view of this, it is usual for homes to be formed only by older adults in the Northern and Western European countries, while in the Mediterranean region a higher rate of inter-generational cohabitation can be found.

Table 3. Description of the sample

Variable	Categories	N	%
Sex	Male	2,947	45.66
	Female	3,507	54.34
Marital status	Married	3,528	54.66
	Registered partnership	62	0.96
	Never married	394	6.10
	Divorced	324	5.02
	Widowed	2,146	33.25
Household type	One person	2,476	38.36
	Couple alone	3,092	47.91
	With family	798	12.36
	With others	88	1.36
Descendants	Children	6,164	95.50
	No children	290	4.50
Care role	Giving help	1,435	22.23
	Not giving help	5,019	77.77
	Receiving help	1,807	29.32
	Not receiving help	4,357	70.68
Health	Having long-term illness	3,818	59.16
	Not having long-term illness	2,636	40.84
Type of tenure	Owner	4,208	65.20
	Tenant / Subtenant	1,567	24.28
	Others types (Rent free and Member of a cooperative)	679	10.52
Type of dwelling	House	3,620	57.92
	Farm	249	3.98
	Building	2,231	35.70
	Special dwelling for elderly	150	2.40
Area	Big city	992	15.37
	Suburbs or outskirts of a big city	1,124	17.42
	Large town	1,373	20.99
	Small town	1,482	22.96
	Rural area or village	1,483	22.98
Groups of countries	Italy, Spain, Greece	2,450	37.96
	France, Germany	1,815	28.12
	Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands	2,189	33.92

Source: SHARE, wave 1.

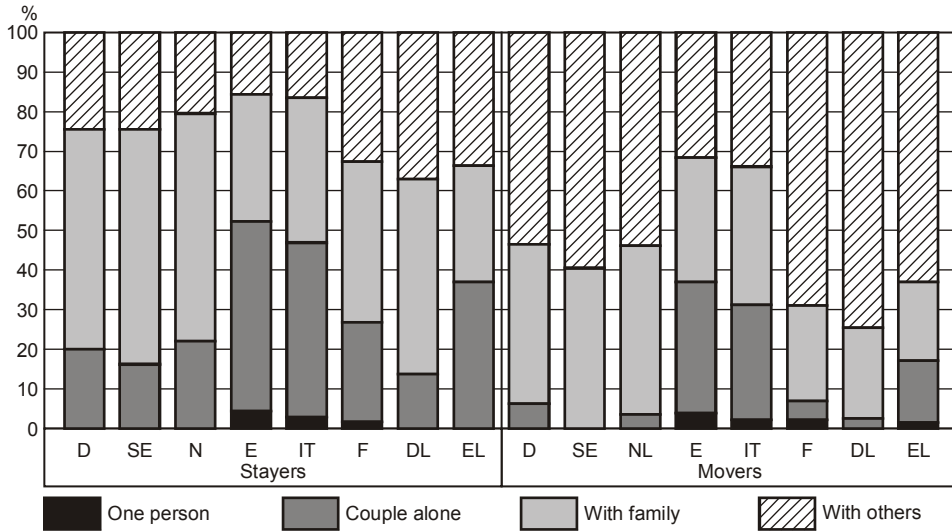


Fig. 4. Household composition by mobility status

Source: SHARE, wave 1

Taking into account the mobility status, in the case of stayers, i.e. households established in their current domicile at a young or mature age, there is a higher rate of people in single person households. However, the profile presented by non-mobile households during old age in the Mediterranean countries is slightly different. The proportion of households with families among the elders who have lived in their residence for longer periods is especially relevant. Children in the family usually emancipate at an older age, particularly in Spain, Italy and Greece, which causes different generations to cohabit in the same home.

Observing the results, the proportion of single person households among ‘movers’ grows in relation to the ‘stayers’ population. Many of those residential movements can be generated by biographic events such as divorce or death of the spouse, which trigger mobility. Moreover, the absence of spouse/family may be a motive for mobility due to lack of commitment with inter-generational relationships and bonds between members of the same household. Regarding the family features, practically all of them have children (95%).

As regards care role variables, 22% of the older adults declare giving help to someone inside their social network (family, friend or neighbourhood). In contrast, 29% of the elderly Europeans admit that they need to be helped by someone to develop their daily routines. The older adults that declare to suffer a long-term illness exceed 50% of the sample.

The most important finding from the structural variables is that the most common type of tenure is ownership. 65% of the elderly Europeans are owners of

their dwellings; 24% of the population aged 65 and over are tenants or subtenants. For those who do not show residential mobility during old age, ownership is the main tenure type. However, for households older than the age of 65, which have made residential changes during old age, rental is the most common form of tenure. An increase in other types of tenure can also be observed.

From the spatial perspective, the different tenure structures of each country can be visualised (figure 5). The Mediterranean countries, in spite of a slight decrease in ownership for those who established their current dwelling after the age of 65, still maintain the highest values in Continental Europe in the two mobility categories.

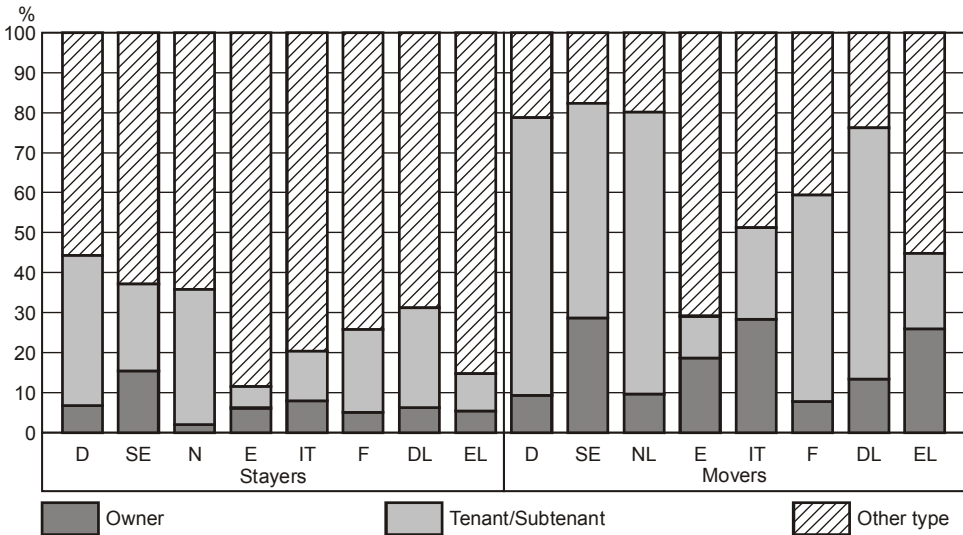


Fig. 5. Type of tenure by mobility status

Source: SHARE, wave

In Western European and Scandinavian countries the percentages of elderly people living under rental systems are much higher compared to the southern countries. Especially in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, people who rent during old age outnumber those living in the Mediterranean area. This trend is particularly significant in the population of older adults who established their current dwelling during old age. The category 'other types' also shows higher proportions of mobile elderly, mainly in Spain, Greece and Italy, where the rent free is a more common type of tenure, and in Sweden, where the proportion of older people living in cooperatives is higher.

Table 3 shows that percentages of elderly Europeans living in different areas are very similar, but slightly higher in small towns and rural areas.

6. THE PARAMETRIC MODEL

The results of the parametric model of the possibility to make a residential change after the age of 65 are presented in table 4. As it shows, gender is an important factor for relocation at older ages; the possibility of females to make a move after 65 is 21% higher than in the case of males. Regarding the marital status, the older population that has never been married is more likely to change their dwelling than those married. Widowed older adults also have more possibilities to change their location during old age. The type of household, with the exception of those older people who are living with family members other than their spouse or children, does not seem to have significant effect on the relocation choices.

Table 4. Proportional Hazard Model

Variable	Categories	Hazard Ratio	Std. Err.
Sex (Ref: Male)	Female	1.2155***	0.0585
Marital status (Ref: Married)	Never married	1.9841***	0.5009
	Divorced	1.1797	0.1418
	Widowed	0.6755***	0.0669
Household type (Ref: One person)	Couple alone	1.1578	0.1179
	With family	0.8739	0.0776
	With others	1.6237**	0.4133
Ref: having children	Not having children	1.0260	0.0191
Ref: to give help	Not give help	1.0981***	0.0136
Ref: to receive help	Not receive help	0.9219***	0.0121
Ref: to have a long-term illness	Not have long-term illness	1.0083	0.0112
Type of tenure (Ref: Owner)	Tenant / Subtenant	1.1878***	0.0469
	Others types of tenures	1.0926***	0.0481
Type of dwelling (Ref: House)	Farm	0.4169***	0.0650
	Building	1.0745	0.0583
	Special dwelling for elderly	0.4116***	0.0451
Area (Ref: Big city)	Suburbs	1.0196	0.0750
	Large town	0.9925	0.0686
	Small town	0.8093***	0.0601
	Rural area/village	0.8781	0.0724
Group of countries (Ref: Spain, Italy, Greece)	France, Germany	1.3143***	0.0835
	Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands	1.3528**	0.0640

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. $N = 6,545$.

Source: SHARE, wave 1.

The model also shows that inter-generational exchange of support could affect the possibility to move during old age. On the one hand, when older people assume

the role of caregiver, they are less likely to make a change of dwelling. Thus, giving help to someone, mainly to relatives, appears as a constraint on mobility during old age. On the other hand, if older adults need to receive care the transition rate is higher compared with those who do not need any help in their daily routines. The results for those that have a long term illness are not significant.

The next variables examine the effect that macro level circumstances have on the moves after 65. As some studies have shown, the type of tenure has a significant influence on residential mobility (Rossi, 1955; Clark and Dieleman, 1996; Clark *et al.*, 2003; Feijten, 2005). Some studies point out that owners are less mobile than tenants or subtenants. These results confirm this trend; older adult tenants are 18% more likely to make a residential transition after 65. The results also show that older people living on farms or in dwellings with special features for the elderly are less likely to make a residential transition after 65 compared with those living in houses. People who live in residential complexes for older people, too, are less likely to move. The reason probably is that the residential move had already made to settle there. The model also shows that older adults living in small towns change residence more often than older adults living in a big city.

Regarding the spatial variable, the possibility of moving after 65 is higher in Northern or Western European countries than in the Mediterranean region; especially in Denmark, Sweden or the Netherlands, where the transition rate coefficient is 35% higher.

7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

As the results have shown, the socio-cultural context of each country influences the residential patterns of older adults. One of the most relevant features of older adults' residential profiles in Continental Europe is diversity of behaviours depending on the reference region. At this point, it is correct to say that there are two main residential mobility trends in Continental Europe. Furthermore, a mixed trend can be identified as a third mobility pattern. There are countries which have a high rate of mobility. This group includes the population of over 65 years old in Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands. These countries feature housing markets with a high level of rental systems, apart from a developed welfare state, which fosters a more dynamic residential behaviour for the elders (Boelhouwer and van der Heiden, 1993). Secondly, there is an intermediate trend including countries like France and Germany, which in spite of not having such high levels of residential changes like the above mentioned territories, have greater rates of mobility than the Mediterranean countries, especially around the stage of retirement.

Finally, the last trend is represented by Mediterranean countries, which show a profile of low mobility during old age. As a general conclusion, it could be

asserted that residential stability during old age is the main feature of residential dynamics of the elderly in the south of Europe. As Allen *et al.* (2004) pointed out, a combination of features is essential to understand this residential immobility trend of the elderly in Southern Europe. On the one hand, it is the importance of family when taking decisions on relocation choices, especially during old age, and on the other hand, the widespread extension of home ownership as a main tenure type in the residential systems of Southern Europe. Moreover, there is also an important lack of public policies exclusively addressing this population, which translates in the absence of residential alternatives to the private housing market.

At the same time, there is initial evidence to point out that the exchange of support among family members influences the mobility decisions of older people. As noted by Mulder (2007), the fact that family is the largest care provider at older ages amplifies the intensity of the linkage between older adults and their relatives to make decisions about mobility. Moreover, this connection between household members can not only generate mobility but can also limit it. According to the results, the care role that older people assume inside the household, as provider or recipient of care, affects the possibility to make a move in later life. As the literature supports, the residential behaviours of older adults are determined not only by their own preferences and needs, but also depend on their links with their family members.

The transformation of the socio-demographic profile experienced by the population of older adults in the last decades has encouraged researches seeking a more accurate understanding of the residential choices during old age and their effect on wellbeing. The study of older adults' residential patterns can serve as a relevant support to public policies that help improving the living context of those groups. Based on these findings, the general assumption that older adults rarely move must be questioned, at least in some European territories. At this point, it is fundamental to take into account the socio-cultural context of older population when analysing the mobility during old age, and therefore international comparisons become particularly useful. Such comparisons will help to relate the factors at macro level, such as the demographic structure or the housing market of each territory, and the processes at micro level which have an influence on decision-making, inter-generational relationships and biographical events. Another important future line of research is to deepen the knowledge of the factors that promote residential stability or residential mobility during old age with special attention on family relationships and the role of the welfare systems depending on the national context.

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