



Review paper

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EUROPEAN PICTURE OF THE ELDERLY PEOPLE: RESEARCH ON THE MAIN SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND TRENDS IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

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Abstract: The paper deals with the demographic topics of ageing, age and the elderly people in Europe. Seeing as these topics still take up marginal space in most research fields except gerontology, the aim of the paper is to deepen the thematic framework. Because of that, but also because it is difficult to reach more detailed data on generations over 65 in Europe, this paper will present the results of the research on the basic socio-demographic characteristics of elderly people in 11 European countries. The data on which this research is based comes from the last waves of census; they were harmonized and obtained in the LIS center of the University of Luxembourg. The data show the basic socio-demographic characteristics classified into three groups: where do people over 65 live, with whom do older than 65 live, how do older than 65 live. The data also show that in northern and western countries, which are economically more developed, the elderly population lives in cities more. The number of households with one elderly member in rural areas increases in Central Europe, and the highest percentage of those older than 65 in rural areas live in Greece and Serbia. The connection between certain countries and the education level of the elderly is statistically meaningful. Therefore, in northern and western countries, which are more developed, there are more highly educated elderly people than in less developed countries in Central and South Europe.

Keywords: demography, elderly people, ageing, Europe, society

Introduction

The elderly population has been researched for a long time through topics such as the health care system, social security, retirement and the research of the development of certain diseases and medicine application. The topics which connect the elderly population and the media, culture, art, law or politics have only recently started entering different research fields. However, in order to write about these topics, demographic and socio-demographic data are necessary. The general data, about the number and the projections of the representation of older people in the total population, can be easily found in

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various reports. For instance, according to the data of the United Nations Population Fund (2016), there are 12.3% of people older than 60 in the world. Moreover, if we take the old age limit of the World Bank (2016) into consideration, there are 8.3% of people over 65. Together with these, in the report of the UN World Population Ageing (2015), it is listed that the number of people older than 80, that is, those belonging to the oldest group, amounts to 125 million in the world, with the projection that the number will have risen to 434 million by 2050. Also, the World Report on Ageing and Health (World Health Organization, 2015) lists projections on the drastic lifespan extension in certain countries: “A child born in Brazil or Myanmar in 2015 can expect to live 20 years longer than one born in those countries just 50 years ago” (p. 3).

It has also been written about the number of the elderly in Europe, considering the fact that by 2030, this continent will have around 25.6% of people older than 65. By 2060, it is predicted that elderly Europeans will make up around 29.5% of the total population (European Commission, 2014) (Figure 1).

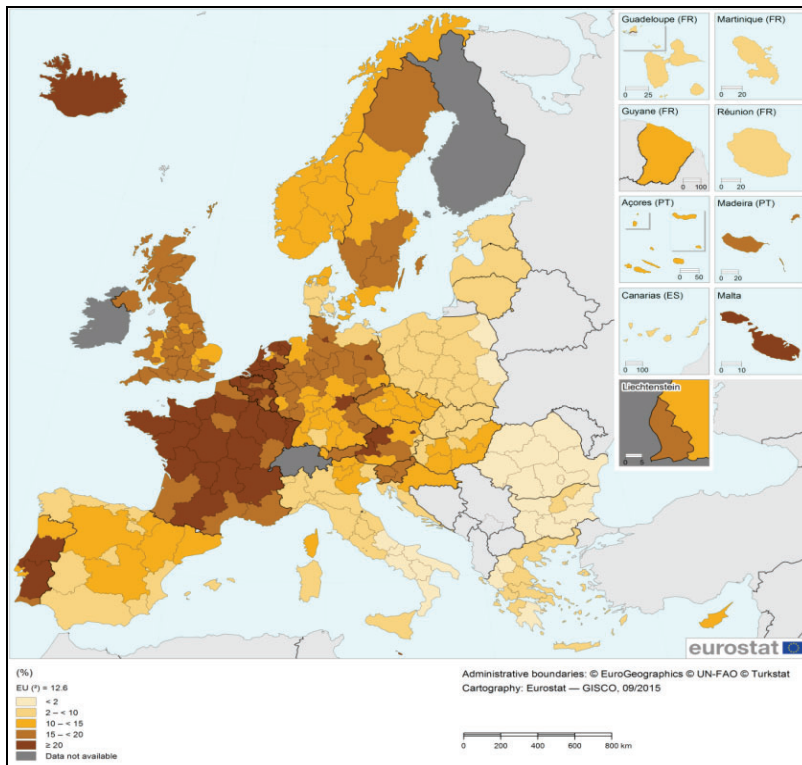


Figure 1. Share of population aged 85 years and over living in an institutional household (Source: Eurostat, 2015b)

Now the share of people over 65 in the European Union, which consists of 28 member-states, amounts to 19.2% and it is expected that, on average, men of this generation will live for another 17.9 years, while women will live for another 21.3 years (Eurostat, 2015a). The average age of EU citizens on 1st January 2016 is 42.6. The number of people older than 80 will have risen by 12.7% by 2060 (Eurostat, 2017b). Today, there are 27.3 million people aged 80 and over in EU (Eurostat, 2017a).

This group of elderly people known as the ‘old-old’ needs more care and long-term inhabitation. For the most part they are members of some institutional household. In almost all available reports, the lower fertility rate and the extended lifespan are listed as reasons for the constant trend of the growing share of the elderly in the total population on the global level. However, the consequences are apparent in all social practices on the individual, local, national as well as the global level. It is important to point out here that, even though no one has dealt with population ageing in a long time, the paper from 1945 by J. D. Durand, *The Trend toward an Older Population*, offers a nice and detailed explanation for the reasons and consequences of this great social transformation (Durand, 1945). Although published in 1945, when WWII ended and after many countries had lost a large number of mostly male population, this paper is significant because it points to a very important problem of the increase of the elderly population, which the entire world is facing now. Precisely that is the conclusion of the report, which was published much later:

Population ageing can no longer be ignored. Globally, the proportion of older persons is growing at a faster rate than the general population. This reflects tremendous and welcome advances in health and overall quality of life in societies across the world. But the social and economic implications of this phenomenon are profound, extending far beyond the individual older person and the immediate family, touching broader society and the global community in unprecedented ways (United Nations Population Fund, 2012, p. 11).

Starting with the fact that this topic cannot be ignored anymore and that the 21st century has become a century in which the elderly population is growing fast, it is necessary to ascertain the personal and household characteristics of those older than 65 on the European continent. Therefore, by using the comparative perspective, it is necessary to consider whether there are similarities among these generations in different states, or if there are completely evident incongruities. Europe has been chosen because the authors’ home country Serbia belongs to this continent, and we can more easily reach conclusions about the position of our elderly citizens when we compare them to their counterparts in other European countries. That can serve as the basis for further research in this area, especially research which uses the interdisciplinary approach. A significant

motive to write this paper has been the possibility to use data which are not so easily available to researchers in Serbia, which were obtained through a research visit grant at the LIS Centre of the University of Luxembourg.

Methodology

The *Luxembourg Income Study* (LIS) Database is the largest available income database of harmonized microdata collected from about 50 countries in Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, Asia and Australasia spanning five decades (Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Database, 2016). The data at the LIS Centre are completely protected. The computers which store them are not connected to the Internet, nor is it possible to transfer data from them to a CD or a flash drive. Depending on the goal and methodology of research, it is possible to choose some of the offered data processing software: SAS, SPSS, Stata. The data analyzed in this research came from the last two waves (Wave VIII: 2009–2011 and Wave IX: 2012–2014) from 11 European countries with the help of IBM SPSS 22.0 software. The chosen countries are: the UK, Germany, Luxembourg, Denmark, Finland, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Spain, Greece and Serbia. The reason why these two waves were chosen lies in the possibility to represent current data, which would later lead to reaching adequate conclusions on the position of the elderly in Europe today. And there are two reasons why these countries were chosen: the first one is technical, while the other is territorial/economic/political. Namely, the data LIS stores have to be harmonized before they are available to researchers, because they come from many different countries. That process is complicated and long, so the data from certain countries were unavailable at the moment of the research. That is why we have attempted to compensate for the lack of profile of certain countries by taking into consideration the territorial, geographic order, economic development and EU membership. Therefore, the goal was to choose countries according to three criteria:

- The geographic relations east-west and north-south;
- Economic development (lower or higher, that coincides with geographic space); and
- Political (old EU members — the UK, Germany, Luxembourg, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Spain, — new EU members — Poland, Hungary, Slovenia — and Serbia: A Western Balkan country which is not a member).

Based on these criteria, the research was reduced to 11 countries. It is necessary to observe what influence the listed criteria have on the socio-demographic characteristics of the elderly population. In order to achieve that, we needed to

separate the 64– population from the 65+ population because the data were consolidated in the personal P-file. A special variable which only referred to the population 65+ was made. Aside from the P-file, we observed the household H-file in order to make the image on the elderly Europeans clearer.

Results and discussion

In all researched countries we noted an increase of the older population, which is in accordance with all prior listed reports. The number of women was larger than the number of men. A disbalance between the population in urban and rural areas was noted. There are more elderly people in cities, which represents an urbanization trend present for several decades. This is completely in accordance with the multidecadal trend of urban area expansion on the global level, so today the percentage amounts to more than 40 in Africa and Asia and 81.5 in North America. In Europe, 73.4% of the population lives in urban areas (United Nations, 2014). In order to see all characteristics more clearly, we will present them in several subsections.

Where do people over 65 live?

The smallest percentage² of elderly people who live in rural areas is in countries of North and Western Europe. In Finland, the percentage of the population which has at least one elderly member amounts to 5.2 in rural areas, mostly in the Uusimaa region. In densely populated areas, that percentage amounts to 3.8, whereas in the intermediate area — 4.6. The percentage of households which have no elderly members amounts to 24.1 in rural areas. In Denmark, the percentage of households with at least one elderly member is 1.7% in rural areas and such households are primarily located in Kobenhavn og Frederiksberg and Kobenhavns amt areas. In urban areas, the share of such households is 17.5%, whereas 4% belong to the territory of the capital city Copenhagen. It is interesting to note that there are almost no households with 3 or more elderly members either in rural or in urban areas in Denmark. In Germany, the highest percentage of households with at least one elderly member is in the North Rhine-Westphalia region — 3.7%. We need to take into consideration that Germany is divided into 16 regions, federal units, that is, NUTS. However, this region also holds the largest number of households without any elderly members. Most households with two elderly members are in the Baden-Württemberg area. The

² All percentages are represented not only through the observation of the statistically isolated population older than 65, but in relation to the total population, to make the image more realistic and whole. All data were extracted in September 2016 from LIS database.

smallest percentage of households with at least one elderly member is in the Bremen region.

When we look at the bigger picture, 13.9% of households with one elderly member are located in urban areas, whereas in rural areas that percentage is 4.6. In the UK, the total percentage of households which have one elderly member amounts to 14.5%. When we take regions into account, the highest percentage of households with one elderly member is in Scotland — 3.1%. In Luxembourg, which is the smallest of the analyzed countries, the percentage of households which have one elderly member in urban and rural areas is quite similar (6.9 to 7.7%, respectively). In Central European countries, the percentage is higher than 10%. For instance, in urban areas in Hungary, the number of households with one elderly person amounts to 19.8%, and in rural to 10.2%. According to the population size of the locality of residence, we can see that in villages in Poland (Figure 4), there are 9.6% of households with one elderly member, in places with less than 20,000 inhabitants — 2.5%; in places with 20,000–100,000 inhabitants — 3.6%; in places with 100,000–200,000 inhabitants — 1.3%; 200,000–500,000 inhabitants — 1.9%; and, in places with more than 500,000 inhabitants — 2.4%. In Slovenia, there are data on 3.5% of farm households with at least one elderly member and 18.2% of no farm households with at least one elderly member. In Spain, the number of households with one elderly member in urban areas is similar to the number in western and northern countries and it amounts to 14.9%, but the number of such households in rural areas is somewhat higher when compared to those countries — 7.2%. Households with at least one elderly member are located mostly in Andalusia and Catalonia. It is interesting to know that the highest number of elderly persons living in the EU (among NUTS level 3 regions) was recorded in the Spanish capital of Madrid (Eurostat, 2017b). On the other hand, in Greece, the percentage of households with one elderly member in rural areas is larger than the percentage of such households in urban areas (17.6 to 10.4%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Greece: Number of household (hh) members of 65 or older — Rural and not rural area

	[0] No hh members 65 or older		[1] One hh member 65 or older		[2] Two hh members 65 or older		[3] Three hh members 65 or older	
	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %
[0] not rural area	1612	26.7%	627	10.4%	306	5.1%	6	0.1%
[1] rural area	1670	27.7%	1062	17.6%	737	12.2%	9	0.1%

Source: According to the official LIS data (2016).

The highest number of households with elderly members is in the Central Macedonia region and the lowest in the Ionian Islands region. In Serbia, the total percentage of households with an elderly member amounts to 34%, whereas the percentage of households with two elderly members amounts to 13.2%. As in Greece, the percentage of households with one elderly member in rural areas is quite large — 15.4%, but it still is not larger than the number of households with one elderly member in urban areas, which is 19%. The highest percentage of households with one and two elderly members can be found in the following regions: Šumadija, Western Serbia and Vojvodina Region. Therefore, the data show that in northern and western countries, which are economically more developed, the elderly population lives in cities more. The number of households with one elderly member in rural areas increases in Central Europe, and the highest percentage of those older than 65 in rural areas lives in Greece and Serbia.

With whom do older than 65 live?

In Finland, 13.9% of people older than 65 do not live with their children. The data show that 10.8% of them are married, 2.0% widowed, and 1.6% divorced. Also, 0.9% of them have never been married. In Denmark, 23.1% of elderly citizens do not live in households with their children, and the percentages of those who live with a partner and those who do not have a partner at all are similar (9.6 to 7.1%) There are 9.4% of elderly people married in consensual union, 4.7% are widowed and 2.1% divorced. The data from Eurostat (2015b) show that the highest proportion of elderly persons living alone in the EU — 28% was recorded in the Danish capital region of Hovedstaden in 2011 (42.4%). The next map shows population aged 65+ over living alone (Figure 2).

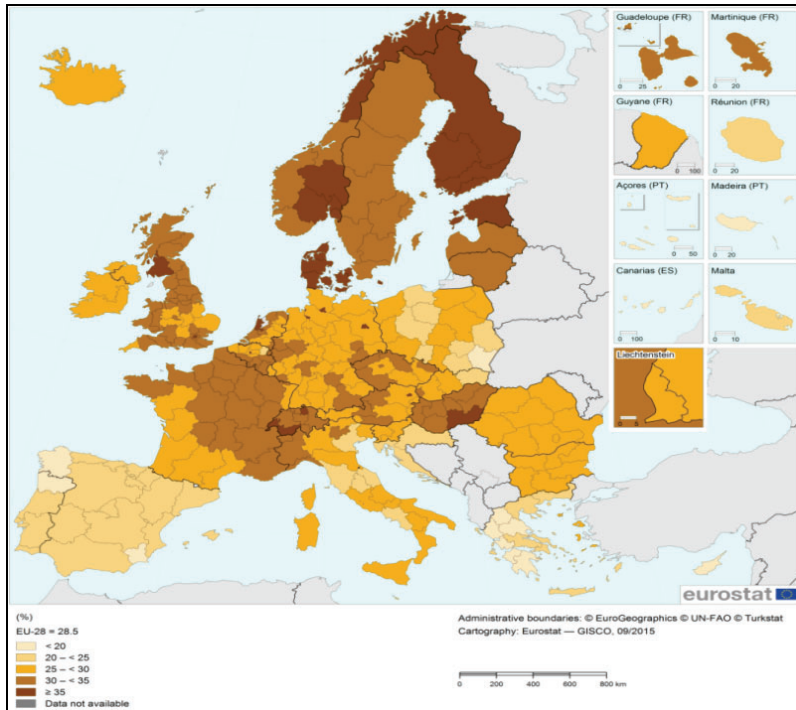


Figure 2. Share of population aged 65 years and over living alone (Source: Eurostat, 2015b)

In Germany, 18% of elderly citizens live with a partner. There are 17.5% of those married in consensual union, 5.5% widowed and only 0.8% divorced. In the UK, there are 17.6% of elderly citizens who do not live with their own children, 15% are married and 1.2% have never married and are not in a union. Furthermore, 6.2% of them are widowed and only 1.8% divorced. In Luxembourg, 10.1% of the elderly population is married, 3.4 percent is widowed and 1.2% divorced. Over 10% of them do not live with their children. In Hungary, 24.8% of elderly citizens do not live with their own children, and 9.4% are married, whereas 9.9% are widowed. The next map shows elderly people who live alone.

In Slovenia, the number of people not living with their own children is 16.5%, whereas 0.5% of them live with one child. There are 10% of those married, and 4.5% widowed, while 8% of elderly citizens do not live with a partner. In Spain, there are 13.8% of elderly people who do not live with their own children, whereas 5.2% of them live with only one child. There are 14.6% of those married and 7% widowed. In Greece, the number of elderly people not living with their own children is 19.3% and 5.1% of them live with one child. When it comes to this country, 19.5% of elderly people are married, whereas 9.4% are

widowed. In Serbia, there are 12.8% of those married. Out of all analyzed countries, the highest percentage of widowed elderly people can be found precisely in Serbia — 10.1% (Table 2). In Serbia, 22% of elderly citizens do not live with their own children, whereas 9% live with one child.

Table 2. Serbia: Marital status — elderly people

		Age Categories			
		64–		65+	
		Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %
Marital status	Married/In union	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Married	4865	42.9%	1452	12.8%
	In consensual union	245	2.2%	23	0.2%
	Not married/Not in union	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Never married/Not in union	2617	23.1%	60	0.5%
	Formerly married/In union	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Separated	42	0.4%	9	0.1%
	Divorced	442	3.9%	90	0.8%
	Widowed	346	3.1%	1150	10.1%

Source: According to the official LIS data (2016).

The data show that there are no large differences among the analyzed countries which pertain to the life of elderly citizens in a community. In all countries, the percentage of elderly citizens who do not live with their own children is twice or three times the number of those who live with at least one child. It is evident that there has been an increase of the number of divorced people in comparison to previous decades. The same goes for those who have never married. Marital status is one of the factors of higher or lower degree of loneliness of the elderly. Certain factors of loneliness in Europe have been widely discussed in recent time (Van der Pers & Mulder, 2013; Grundy & Murphy, 2017; Wilson, 2017).

If an elderly person is not married or does not have a partner and lives alone (even without children), he or she will feel lonelier. That is especially important when it comes to the unfavorable position of the elderly people when their health is jeopardized, and they are in need of assistance, especially in rural and mountain areas of Europe.

How do older than 65 live?

Aside from analyzing where and with whom the elderly live, it is important to analyze how they live. That is why this part presents data on their labor income, subjective health status, disability, education, employment and retirement. Those

are essential data which give the first image on the position of the elderly in European countries; data which can provide the basis for more thorough research later on.

In the UK, there are 20.2% of retired elderly people, while 2.2% of them are still employed. There are 22% of elderly people who are not employed. About 5.3% of them have the highest completed education level, and 11.8% have a low education level. Education here is presented through 3-category recode. There are 19.8% of people without high education degrees. When it comes to household members with labor income, 3.1% of households have one member with labor income and one elderly member over 65, while 1% of households have two members over 65 with at least one member with labor income. However, there are 16.3% of households which do not have labor income, but do have at least one elderly member. Elderly people in the UK give these evaluations to their health: very good — 4.9%, good — 10.1%, fair — 8.4%, bad — 3.1%, and very bad — 0.8%. In Germany, there are 3.6% of households which have one member with labor income and one elderly person over 65. In addition, 1.2% of households have two members over 65 with at least one member with labor income and 13.6% of households have one elderly member, but no members with labor income. 2% of elderly people are still employed and 24.6% of them are retired. When it comes to the elderly people in Germany, 20.2% of them are not disabled and 4.8% are disabled. Unlike the British, a small percentage of German citizens evaluate their health as very good — 0.8. Most of them claim their health is satisfactory — 10.4%. In Germany, the highest percentage has a medium education level — 14.4%. Education here is presented through 18, not 3 categories. Around 4.7% of them have a bachelor degree or some similar education. In Finland, there are 4.2% of households with one member with labor income and one member over 65. However, when compared to England and Germany, the number of households that have one elderly member but no members with labor income is much smaller — 7.1%. Only 0.8% of them are employed, whereas 18.2% are unemployed; 18.3% retired, and 0.9% not retired. There are 3.9% of elderly citizens with high, 4.1% with medium and 7.3% with low education levels. Finland's elderly citizens speak Finnish in 17.3% of the cases, whereas 1.6% of them speak Swedish. The disability status of elderly people in Finland is as follows: not disabled, capable to work — 13.6%, partially disabled but capable to work — 1.7% and disabled and incapable to work — 3.7%. In Luxembourg, 2.8% of households have one member with labor income and one member over 65. 10.5% of households have one elderly member, but no members with labor income. In this country, only 0.4% of the elderly are employed, and 11.2% are retired. There are 6.3% of those with low, 4.6% with medium and 2.3% with high education levels. They evaluate their subjective health status as good and fair, and only 0.4% evaluate their health state as very bad (Figure 3).

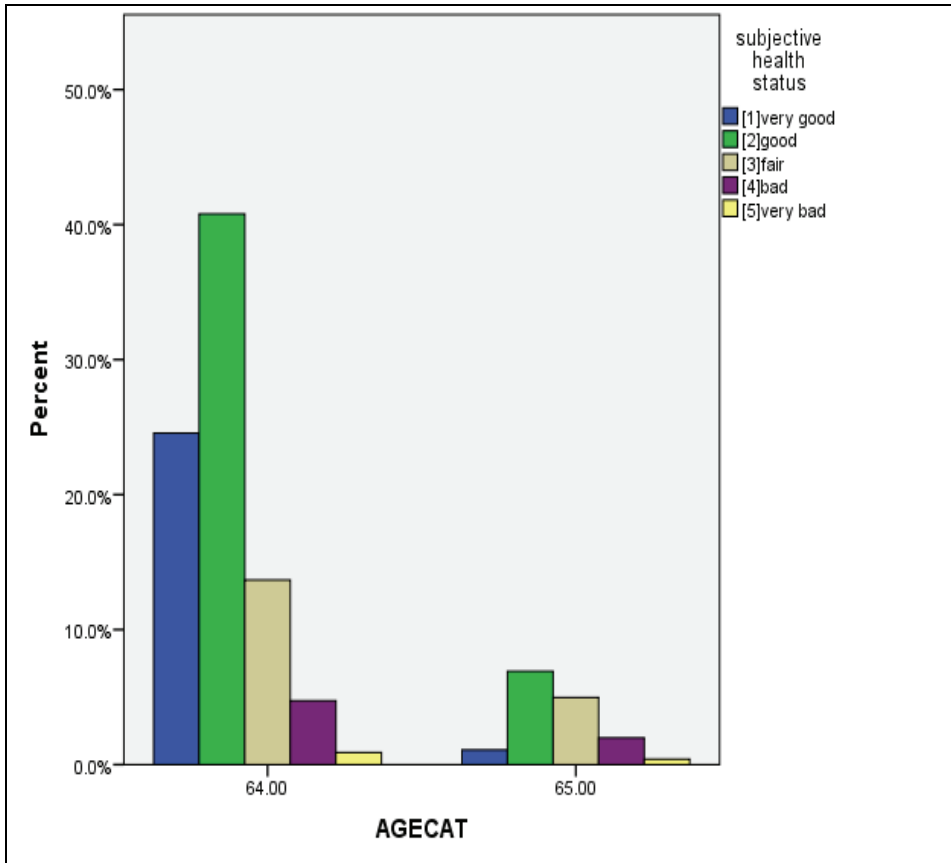


Figure 3. Luxembourg: Subjective health status (Source: According to the official LIS data, 2016)

The data also show that 13.1% of elderly people are not disabled, while 2.2% of them are disabled and they need special care. In Denmark, the situation with labor income is similar to Germany and the UK. Namely, 3.5% of households have one member with labor income and one member over 65. There are many households which have one elderly member, but no members with labor income — 14.4%. While 20.3% of elderly people are retired, 1.7% are not. Only 1.8% of them are employed, whereas 15.3% are not employed. When it comes to labor income, the situation is also similar. There are 4.3% of households with one member with labor income and one member over 65. In this country, 14.9% of households have one elderly member, but no members with labor income.

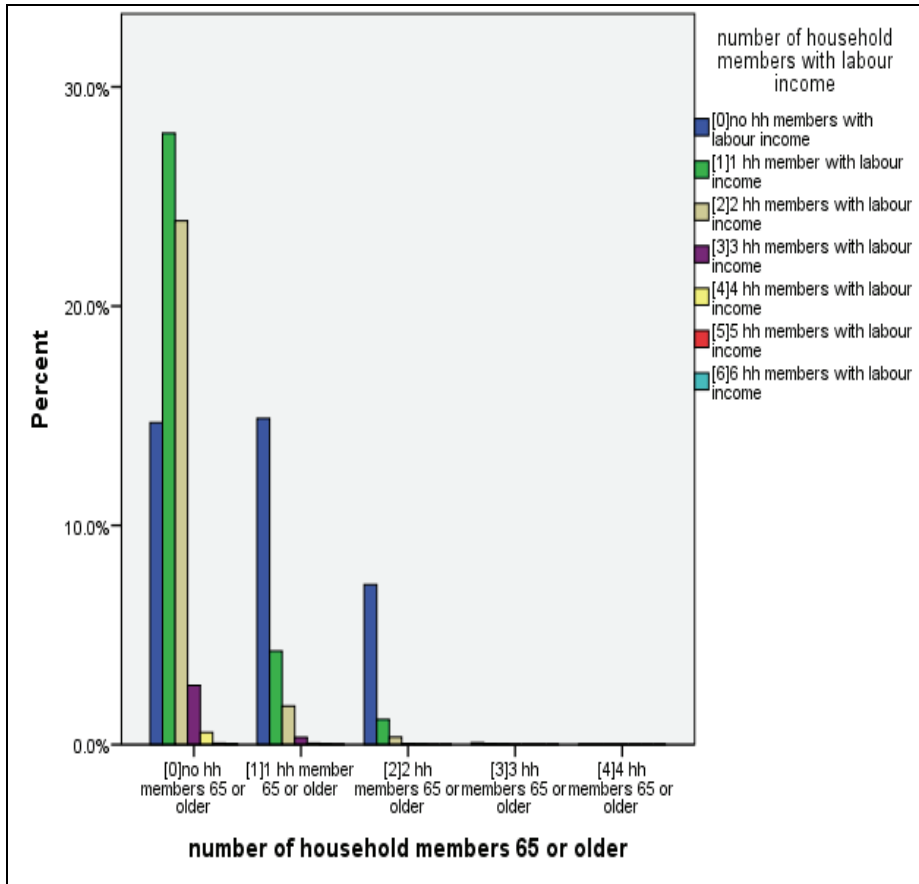


Figure 4. Poland: Number of household member with labor income — Household member 65+ (Source: According to the official LIS data, 2016)

There are only 0.7% of employed people and 16.3% of retired people. As much as 7.3% of them have a low education level, and the same percentage applies to those with medium education, whereas 2.1% of them have a high education level. Also, 11.4% of them are not disabled, and 2.8% are disabled. In Hungary, the number of households which have one elderly member, but no members with labor income is much higher — 27.7%. That is the highest percentage in all analyzed countries. Here, 4.5% of households have one member with labor income and one member over 65. While 24.8% of elderly people are retired, 0.5% of them are employed. In Hungary, the education of the elderly is interspersed in the following manner: low — 11.3%, medium — 4.7%, high — 3.2% and indistinguishable — 5.3%. When it comes to their subjective health state, 6.6% of the elderly in Hungary evaluate it as very bad, which is a much higher percentage than in Luxembourg. There are only 0.1% of those disabled. In Slovenia, there are 11% of households which have one elderly member but no

member with labor income. As in Hungary, the number of those who cannot work due to their disability status is 0.1%. There are 17.45% of retired elderly citizens, while 0.5% are employed, just like in Hungary. However, unlike Hungary, there is an extremely low percentage of the elderly who evaluate their health as very bad (0.8%). There are 2.2% of those with high education levels. Spain is characteristic since it has the lowest percentage of elderly people who are employed — only 0.3%.

Table 3. Spain: Employed — Not employed

		Age Categories			
		64–		65+	
		Count	Table N %	Count	Table N %
Employed (dummy)	[0] Not employed	9400	35.4%	6250	23.6%
	[1] Employed	10790	40.7%	91	0.3%

Source: According to the official LIS data (2016)

There is a large percentage of elderly people who have low education levels — 19.7%. About 3.6% of elderly people are disabled, 15.8% retired and 1.5% of them evaluate their health state as very bad. In Spain (Table 3), there are 12.9% of households which have one elderly member, but no members with labor income. In Greece, that percentage is higher — 19.9%; and it is closer to the situation in Hungary. There are 24.4% of retired elderly people, while 0.8% are employed. Greece is characteristic because it has the highest percentage of elderly people with a low degree of education — 24.9%. The highest percentage of the elderly evaluate their health as fair — 11.1%. Here there is also the highest percentage of the disabled in all analyzed countries — 7.8%. Youth labor migrations are a common occurrence in almost all countries. That has great consequences on the life of families in rural areas, which are not well covered by the health protection system due to their inaccessibility and remoteness. In such areas, disabled persons are at a disadvantage if they do not live with their children. They are often forced to rely on the help of their closest neighbors or volunteer services. In Serbia, the percentage of elderly people with a high education level is the lowest — 0.5%. There are 24.4% of those who are not unemployed. In Serbia, there are 14.4% of farm households with one elderly member.

It is evident that in all European countries there are households which have at least one older member and no members with labor income, which points to the conclusion that the financial situation in those households is difficult. That certainly influences the needs of the elderly, which increased with age. The Anglo-Saxon capitalist tradition means that there is a somewhat higher percentage of those who are still employed in the UK, whereas there are fewer employed elderly people in the countries of Central and South Europe, which

used to be communist. In those countries, people follow the pattern of early retirement. When it comes to the position of the elderly, the heritage of the welfare state is felt in Denmark and Finland. However, there are newly conclusions based on random intercept regression analysis of people aged between 55 and 64 years in 22 European societies: “Instead of merely facing people with monetary punishment for early retirement, future pension policy should aim to change both the institutional framework regarding the transition to retirement and the work–retirement cultures” (Jansen, 2017, p. 25).

The governments of the analyzed countries have made efforts to make the category of the elderly recognized in various strategies and action plans. That specifically refers to poverty decrease, health protection, social security and inclusion of the elderly in different activities. Much has been done at the level of the European Union regarding the increase of the elderly in the total European population. The UK is at the forefront in its detailed strategies and plans at the local level. Serbia, which is not an EU member, has also had a National Strategy on Aging from 2006 to 2015, but many goals have still not been reached. This is especially evident in media representations and securing the participation of all age structures in the creation of policies in local communities.

Conclusion

When we compare data from the last waves with data from the previous decades, the increase of the percentage of elderly people in the total population is evident. In all analyzed countries, except Hungary, there are more women than men in that age group, which opens numerous gender research perspectives. Everywhere, except Greece, the number of people who live in urban areas is higher than the number of people who live in rural areas. Some regions are more populated with elderly people. That also opens a wide number of angles to study the difference between the life of the elderly in cities and in villages, or in different regions.

The percentage of those who are disabled and who need special care and health care systems in cities and villages is not insignificant. It is also important that the data show how the connection between certain countries and the education level of the elderly can be statistically meaningful. So, in northern and western countries, which are more developed, there are more highly educated elderly people than in less developed countries in Central and South Europe. That percentage is lowest in Serbia, which is the only analyzed country that is still not a member of the EU. As we head further towards the north and west of Europe, the number of those satisfied with their health increases. The citizens of Hungary are the most dissatisfied with their health.

This paper did not have any overly ambitious goals, but wanted to offer a modest contribution and present the basic data on the elderly in 11 European countries so that other researchers could use them in deeper, comparative and interdisciplinary research. This work also contributes to the expansion of work in the thematic framework — old age, the elderly and ageing.

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