

Multigenerational households in Southern Europe – new forms of solidarity or traditional living arrangements? An approach based on census micro data

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The cohabitation of more than one generation of adults in a same household is a specific form of intergenerational relations that might reflect traditional forms of the organization of family life. The situations leading to intergenerational cohabitation can be the results of life course events, specific personal circumstances or choices, or they can be linked to shortcomings of the political, social or economical system. This type of living arrangement might be a response to the vagaries of modern life (divorce, unemployment, mobility, care needs of elderly persons ...) by sticking together to face either a difficult temporary situation or more permanent difficulties. It can also reflect particular circumstances such as the economic and socio-cultural context. This form of cohabitation can be a voluntary choice or it can be imposed. It can also be seen as an outcome of poverty and precariousness without any link to family solidarity. One can even wonder whether sharing lodging is a way to face poverty or a sign of poverty.

In any case the socio-demographic characteristics of the household and its members play an important role for distinguishing different types of multigenerational households. The sex, age, marital status, health status, the employment status of the different members, the size of the family and the size of the housing unit as well as being owner or tenant helps to identify different types of multigenerational cohabitation.

For instance, intergenerational co-residence can take place at various ages. It can provide solidarity towards young single adults who do not yet have the capacities (psychological and financial) to leave the parental home. It can also help to back up couples or single parents at specific points in their life cycles (divorce, unemployment, lack of housing). Or it can be a form of assistance to elderly people whose health has deteriorated, who have lost spousal

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support or/and who do not have the means to support themselves financially. Thematically, cross-country analysis of co-residence is generally concentrated on the initial phase of the adult life cycle (young adults and their parents) or on the last one (elderly people and their children). But studies including three generations or more are rare, especially in a multinational context. Verifications of the similarities, or differences in the structure and the determinants of multigenerational households especially across time and space are still amiss.

Traditionally, multi-generational households have been considered as a specificity of southern countries because of their agricultural past, the strong influence of the Catholic Church and the weakness of the welfare state and its institutions. Southern European countries are seen as more family oriented and therefore more likely to have multigenerational households, for traditional and for support reasons, than northern countries. Social solidarity favoured by the most generous welfare states is most often opposed to private solidarity which remains highly active in “familialistic” countries.

But is this still the case today? How has this household type evolved regarding its importance and its structure in these southern European countries? Did the globalisation process with its diffusion of ideas and attitudes, the liberalisation of the economic and labour market, the loss of importance of the agricultural sector and the increasing mobility have an impact on the “traditional” multi-generational household and the emergence of new types?

For the moment, only census data allow to measure the frequency of the different types of intergenerational co-residence and the trends of the recent decades cross-classified by a few simple but compulsory factors: gender, age, marital status, social category, place of residence. Furthermore, census micro data offer a national coverage and the samples are sufficiently large to allow the analysis of these relatively rare forms of cohabitation. The use of censuses as data source also allows the introduction of a time dimension because of their periodicity and their high stability in content, as well as a spatial dimension through the contrasting of rural areas and urban centres of different sizes.

For our study we use census micro data for Portugal (1981, 1991, 2001), Spain (1981, 1991, 2001), France (1982, 1990) and Greece (1981, 1991, 2001) which is made available through the Integrated European Census Micro (IECM) database. This database has been built in cooperation of the Minnesota Population Center and the Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics of Barcelona and it is still under construction. It provides census micro and meta data and allows

the elaboration of a detailed inventory of the structures of multigenerational households and their evolution during the last 20 to 30 years.

In this context it is important to consider differences between countries concerning the methodology, the questionnaires and, above all, the definitions and concepts used in the censuses and their change over time on the national level. Some of these differences can have a strong impact on the comparability of the results of the identification and the description of the structure of the multigenerational households. For instance, in Portugal young adults who are not living most of the year in the household of their parents because of their studies are nevertheless considered to be part of this household if they don't earn a salary of their own. It is therefore important to know for each country how these students have been enumerated, if there are double counts, and if the available information allows their identification in the household structure.

By taking into account these differences, we first identify multi-generational households in each country before we try to develop a typology based on the characteristics of the household as a whole, but also of its members and of the housing unit. This typology will then serve as a base to compare multigenerational cohabitation in the three southern European countries by residential context (urban, rural), the characteristics of the reference person of the household and of the other members. France will be used as a benchmark, representing western European household types, in order to verify the hypothesis of a higher incidence of multi-generational households in southern countries. But perhaps, for the French Mediterranean regions a certain similarity with the living arrangements in the other southern countries will appear?