

Migration trends at older ages in England and Wales

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Information on the behaviour and characteristics of our rapidly growing older population is of increasing importance to policy makers, who want to ensure a good quality of life for our elderly.

This article uses data from the Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study (1971–2001) to illustrate trends in migration at older ages. It shows how the propensity to migrate differs by age, sex, marital status, living arrangements, economic resources and health in later life, amongst people aged 50 and over in England and Wales. Results show that moves at older ages are associated with changes in health and living arrangements, but also that these associations are inter-related with other factors such as age.

Introduction

High fertility in the 1950s and falling mortality rates have raised the proportion of the population aged over 50 in Great Britain and in other developed countries.¹ This trend will continue as the 1960s baby boomers age and are replaced in the older working population by smaller numbers of people born since the 1960s. Even though fertility has risen recently, the number of people being born is still fewer than was the case in the 1960s. By 2031 it is projected that 39 per cent of the total population in England and Wales will be aged 50 and over, compared with 34 per cent in 2006.²

As more people than ever before are reaching older ages, numerous discussions about the possible social, economic and behavioural impacts have emerged. Some see the impacts of this changing age structure as a positive phenomenon where older people will contribute more to society through the third sector (comprising charities and other non-profit making organisations). Others see it as an additional burden on the state and resources.

Concerns about population ageing centre around financing pensions and the provision of healthcare and welfare services to older people as the ratio of the economically active to the economically inactive falls.¹ In order to make policy decisions that will ensure the impact of an increasingly ageing population is largely positive, more information is needed on the transitions people make throughout their later life, and the socio-demographic factors associated with them.

There is also interest in the age distribution of local area population as studies in England and Wales have shown that the proportion of older people differs across geographical areas.^{3,4} The main reason for these differences is the migration of people aged between 20 and 59, however

migration at older ages, regional variations in fertility and mortality rates also affect the age distribution of local populations. Older people are the biggest consumers of health and social services, so this redistribution has important implications for the planners and providers of these provisions.

Migration behaviour is closely associated with events occurring during the life course.^{5,6} Although migrations amongst older people are considerably fewer than for younger age groups, the motivation for migration can be very different from those of younger migrants.

This article provides descriptive analyses of internal migration patterns amongst the population aged 50 and over, in England and Wales, using the Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study (ONS-LS). It reviews migration trends over the 30 years leading up to the 2001 Census and assesses whether the propensity to migrate amongst older people has changed over time. In addition, it will reconsider factors shown to be associated with migration at older ages in previous studies, to establish whether they are still important.

Data sources

In the UK there is no legal obligation to register a change of address,⁷ therefore limited data are available to measure internal migration, particularly over a long time series. In recent decades, questions on migration have featured in national surveys such as the Labour Force Survey and the General Household Survey, but these sources only provide an annual snapshot of general trends. In addition, only a small number of older people sampled would have migrated in each year. Therefore, the use of these sources is limited when examining migration trends of specific groups or their characteristics.

Eventually the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing may become the main source for similar studies, but it is currently in its infancy and analyses of trends over time are not yet possible. A further limitation is that any analysis would be restricted to England, as there are no equivalent studies for the rest of the UK.

In each census taken from 1961 onwards, respondents have been asked whether they have moved in the last 12 months (and in 1961 and in 1971, whether they had moved in the last five years). This allows analysis of migration in the year prior to census for the whole population of England and Wales, by an array of social, demographic and economic characteristics.

In addition to census data we also have the ONS-LS which links decennial census information for one per cent of the population in England and Wales since 1971, along with their registration data. Information from the 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 Censuses is linked with life events information (births, deaths and cancer registration). The ONS-LS is a dynamic sample, as some members are lost to the study through emigration (moving to another country and settling) and death, and new members enter the study through birth and immigration.⁸ Sample selection is based on birth dates, using four dates (day and month) to create a sample which is representative of the population of England and Wales.⁹ The ONS-LS provides a rich data source, with coverage that supports research into the life course and inter-generational transitions. The ONS-LS has been used to investigate a range of outcomes including health and employment, as well as internal migration.¹⁰

The ONS-LS enables migration patterns to be analysed over the 10 years between each census and also for the year prior to each census from 1971 onwards. Measuring migration over a 10-year interval produced larger samples than migration over a single year prior to each census. With larger samples it is possible to analyse specific groups of the population and their characteristics. One of the problems with one-year migration is that it can be influenced by other factors, such as short term fluctuations in the housing

market. Limitations of the 10-year indicator include the propensity to introduce bias, as this measure only includes those people enumerated at the beginning of the period who are still there 10 years later. Thus people who died, emigrated or immigrated between censuses or whose data were not linked in the ONS-LS⁸ are excluded from the analysis. In addition it is not possible to determine the number of moves a person has taken during the 10-year period. One person may have moved several times, whereas another may have moved only once. Similarly, any moves taking place in the decades between the 1981 and 2001 Censuses that resulted in the individual living in the same Enumeration District (ED) will not have been picked up.

Previous studies of the migration of older people in England and Wales have used data from the census⁵ and the ONS-LS.^{3,11} This article provides a descriptive analysis of 10-year migration patterns of people aged 50 and over from 1971 onwards, using the ONS-LS. Migration was indicated by whether an individual had changed address between successive censuses. More information on how this measure was derived can be found in **Box one**.

The results provide insight into migration patterns for different social and demographic groups within the population between successive censuses. These analyses include separate but overlapping populations who were present at each (or all) of the censuses.

Table 1 shows the number of ONS-LS members aged 50 and over at the time of each census. There is a large difference between 1991 and 2001 in the number of people aged 50 and over. This is due to growth in the 50 to 54 and 55 to 59 age groups, which is the result of ageing of the post-Second World War baby boomers. While the largest absolute increases have been for the 50 to 54 and 55 to 59 age groups, the largest percentage increases occurred in the 50 to 54 and 80 and over age groups. The large percentage increase in the population aged 80 and over in the ONS-LS is partly a result of the peak in fertility after the First World War and partly due to continuing declines in mortality.

Box one

Ten-year migration indicator

The 10-year migration indicator identifies whether an ONS-LS member changed address between two censuses.

Migration between 1971 and 1981: The addresses recorded on the 1971 and 1981 Census forms were compared by hand, when the addresses were different a migrant flag was added to the LS member's record. Migrant flags were created for movers to and from communal establishments as well as movers between private households. Many studies have used these migrant flags to study migration.^{11,12}

Migration between 1981 and 1991: The migration indicator was derived by measuring the straight line distance between the centroids of Enumeration District of usual residence at each census. Where this distance was greater than 500 meters the LS member was assumed to have moved. Only people living in private households in both 1981 and 1991 were given migration codes.¹³

Migration between 1991 and 2001: Postcodes of usual address at each census were compared. The National Statistics Postcode Directory was used to check the dates of introduction/termination of postcodes and to allocate the usual address of LS members to a consistent geography for both 1991 and 2001. LS members who changed postcode were identified as migrants. All persons, including communal establishment residents, were assigned migration indicators.

Table 1 Number of people in the ONS Longitudinal Study aged 50 and over in 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001, by five-year age groups (age at census), England and Wales

Age group	1971	1981	1991	2001
50-54	31,580	30,664	29,835	38,099
55-59	33,229	31,399	28,364	31,658
60-64	30,429	27,797	27,836	27,476
65-69	25,960	26,982	26,796	25,033
70-74	18,962	22,261	21,641	22,429
75-79	12,505	15,803	18,288	18,950
80+	11,719	14,202	19,735	22,998
Total	164,384	169,108	172,495	186,643

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

Results

Migration trends at older ages, 1971-2001

The analyses in this section are based on longitudinal data, and compare the migration experiences of people aged 50 and over between three time periods: 1971-81, 1981-91 and 1991-2001. The age groups refer to the ONS-LS member's age at census at the beginning of each period. It is important to note that these populations only include ONS-LS members who were enumerated at both the start and end of each decade, thus the migration estimates exclude all moves of people who had died or were lost to follow-up.

Information was collected and recorded slightly differently in each census. For comparability, unless otherwise stated, visitors and people living in communal establishments, such as residential and nursing homes, at the beginning and end of each intercensal period, have been excluded from the analyses. The adjustments are explained in further detail in **Box two**. Excluding the residents of communal establishments means that a large proportion of moves that are often associated with declines in health are not included. For this reason moves from private residences to communal establishments are examined separately in the health and care section.

Figures 1(a) and 1(b) show the migration rates for each of the three decades, for males and females respectively. For each inter-censal period, around two thirds of people aged over 50 years of age were reported to be living at the same address as 10 years previously.

For all decades, migration rates were highest in the population aged between 55 and 65. These are most likely to be moves associated with retirement from paid employment, whereby the mover hopes to gain improvements in their lifestyle (social life and access to amenities).⁵

Overall the migration rates for men and women aged 50 and over were very similar in each decade. However, when broken down by age, some differences were evident. For 1971-1981 and 1991-2001 in particular,

Box two

Census enumeration

- Census data prior to 2001 were collected based on enumeration districts. In 2001 individual addresses were recorded using grid referencing.
- In 1991 migration indicators were not available for residents in communal establishments.
- In 2001 individuals were enumerated at their place of usual residence only; therefore, for consistency, only usual residents are included in the data for 1971, 1981 and 1991 (all records for visitors are excluded from the analyses).

Figure 1a Percentages migrating between censuses, among the population aged 50 and over, according to age, males only, 1971-2001, England and Wales

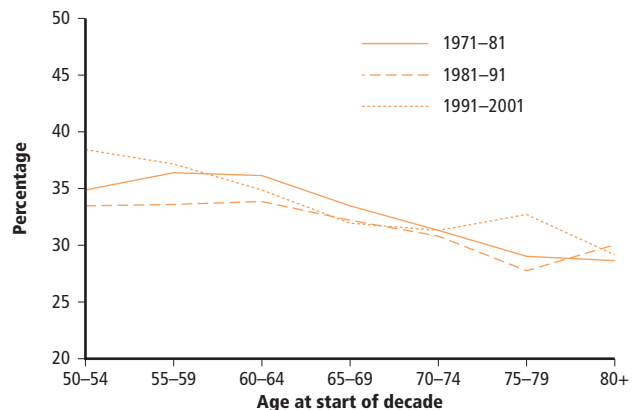
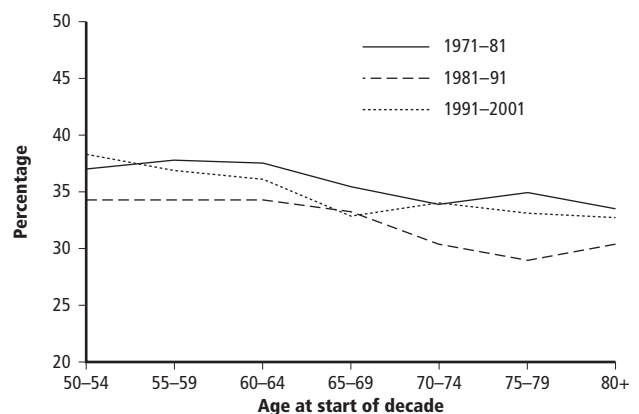


Figure 1b Percentages migrating between censuses, among the population aged 50 and over, according to age, females only, 1971-2001, England and Wales



Note: Minimum sample size 196.
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

males and females in the younger age groups have similar rates, but females aged 80 and over are substantially more likely to migrate than males. This could be explained by women's higher life expectancy and the tendency for men to marry younger women. Thus women are more likely to be widowed first and are therefore more likely to need to seek care outside of the household, which can result in a move to be closer to a relative or other carer.^{14,15}

Migration and the geographical distribution of older people

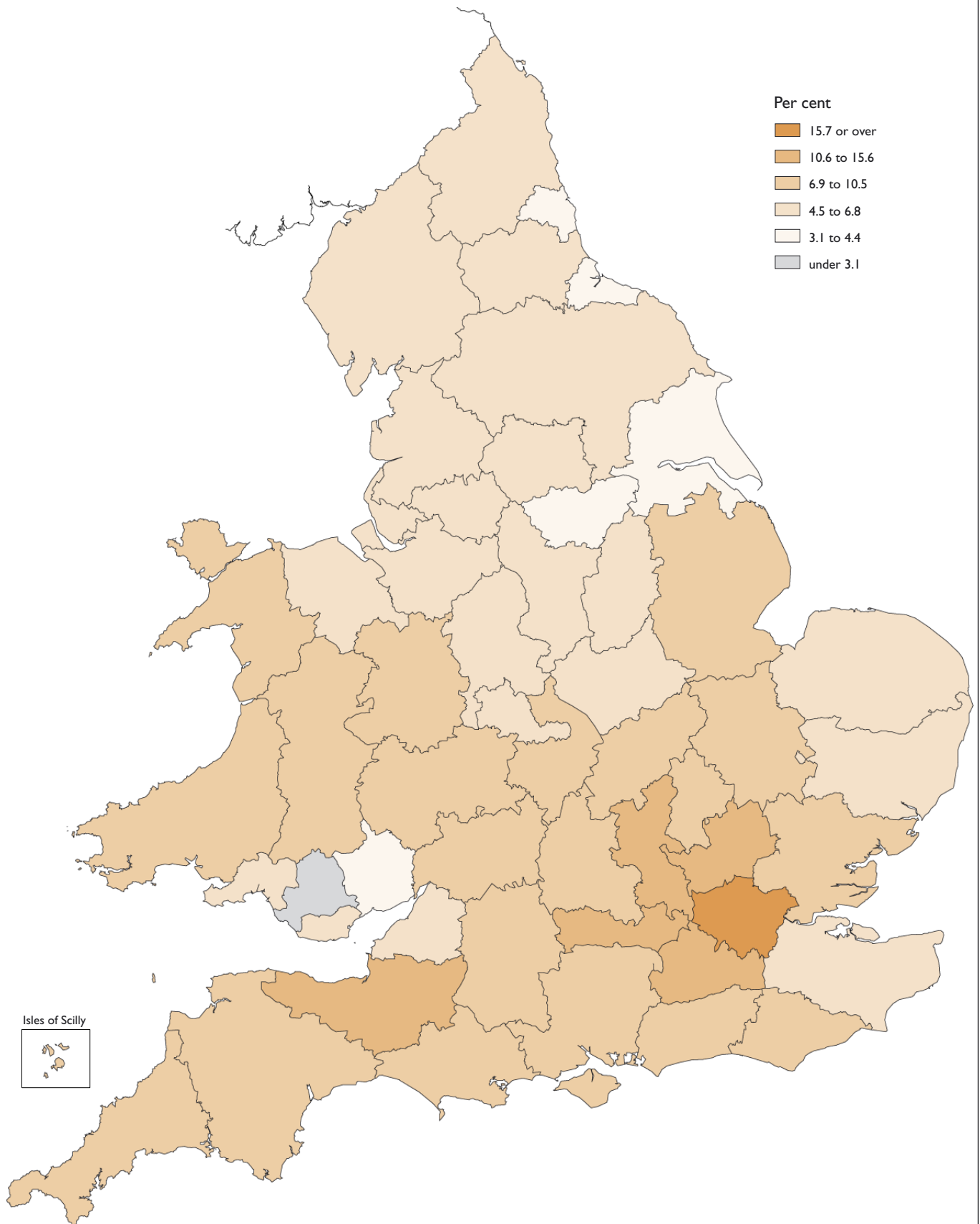
Studies carried out in the UK and other developed countries have shown that the age structure of a population varies by geography. Three main processes have been identified that result in higher proportions of older people in regional and local populations:

- Out-migration of younger people;
- In-migration of elderly people; and
- In-migration of non-elderly people who then 'age in place'.⁴

The majority of migratory moves take place between 20 and 40 years of age and indicate the importance of 'ageing in place' as a driver of

Figure 2

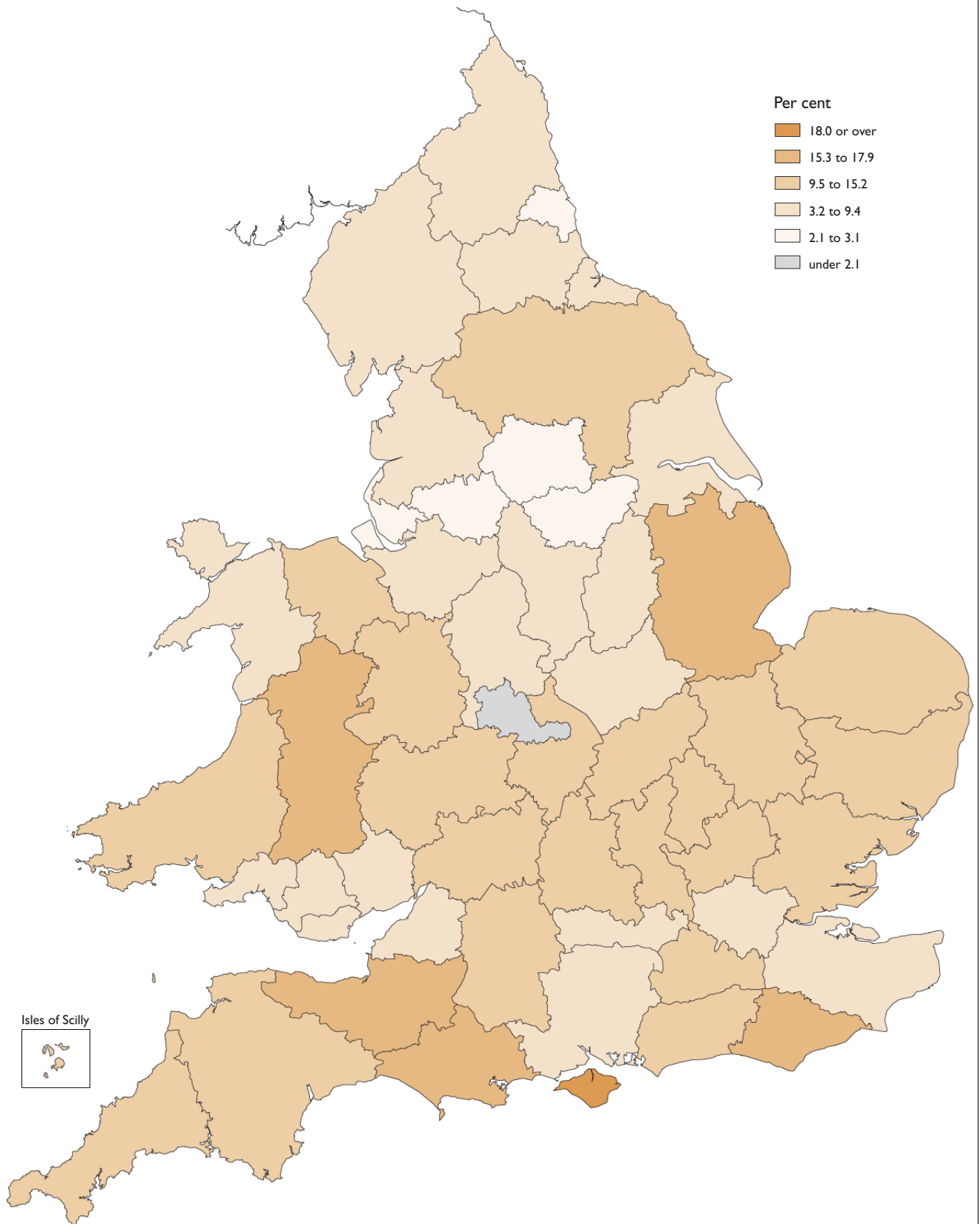
Migration by county of departure, 1991 – 2001¹
England & Wales



¹ Data refer to the percentages of the 1991 ONS-LS population in a county, aged 50 and over at the time of the 1991 Census, who migrated to another county between 1991 and 2001

Figure 3

Migration by county of destination, 1991 – 2001
England & Wales



1 Data refer to the percentages of the 2001 ONS-LS population in a county, aged 50 and over at the time of the 1991 Census, who migrated from another county between 1991 and 2001

local population ageing. However, as our ageing population grows at an increasing pace with the baby-boomers starting to reach retirement, the migration of elderly people will take on greater importance.

Previous studies have shown the highest proportions of older people in England and Wales tend to be found in coastal areas.¹⁶ The percentage of the population aged 50 and over is highest in the South West and Wales (at 38 per cent and 37 per cent respectively, compared with 34 per cent for England and Wales as a whole). Similarly, the percentages aged 85 and over are highest in the South West, South East and also Wales (all four per cent compared with two per cent for England and Wales as a whole). The lowest proportions of older people can be found in and around London and the North East.

With the ONS-LS it is possible to analyse geographical variation in migration using information on postcode of enumeration at 1991 and 2001. Much of the variation in the proportions of older people residing within a region results from migration.

The counties that experienced the largest percentages of people aged 50 and over moving to other counties (out-migrants) between 1991 and 2001 are concentrated in and around London; Inner and Outer London (20 per cent and 15 per cent of moves made by those aged 50 and over respectively), Surrey (15 per cent), Berkshire (14 per cent), Hertfordshire (13 per cent) and Buckinghamshire (12 per cent) (Figure 2). These findings support those of other studies, highlighting that London is not a desirable destination for retirement, with its large overall net exodus of older migrants.⁴

The counties with the highest percentages of people aged 50 and over migrating from other counties (in-migrants) include those areas traditionally associated with retirement migration. These are the Isle of Wight (18 per cent of moves were attributable to people aged 50 and over migrating into the county); Lincolnshire, Dorset, East Sussex, Powys (all with 17 per cent); and, Cornwall, Devon and West Sussex (all with 15 per cent).

The composition of the population in an area is affected by migration throughout the life course, not just at old age. Migration rates between regions in England and Wales between 1991 and 2001 were highest for those aged between 45 and 59. Although high proportions of longer distance migrants aged 60 and over moved to areas such as the South West, their numbers were dwarfed by the equivalent number of 30 to 44 year-olds moving there. Therefore differences in the proportions of older people residing in different regions are mainly the result of people migrating earlier in their life course rather than at older ages.

For moves between 1991 and 2001, an indicator of how far individuals have migrated has been devised. It was constructed by comparing the addresses of ONS-LS members in 1991 and 2001, and indicates whether the addresses are the same, or if not, whether they belong to the same postcode, administrative ward, local authority district or county. Figure 4 shows the proportion of the older population that moved by age, sex and distance (moved). For this analysis, moves within district have been classified as short distance and moves between districts have been classified as long distance.

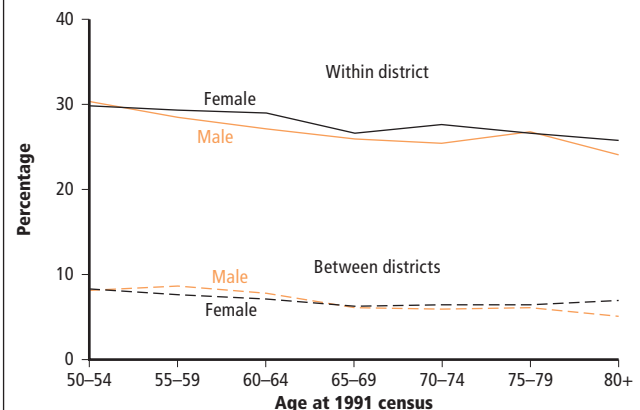
The majority of older migrants only move short distances. Among migrants aged over 50, overall 70 per cent moved within the same district compared with 30 per cent moving between districts within England and Wales.

Migration rates generally decrease with age for both women and men over 50 years of age. Both males and females are more likely to move when they are between 50 and 65, and for the majority, these moves will be short distance.

Moves at late middle age (ages 50 to 65) tend to be motivated by the attraction of amenities and maintenance of social life; these moves are often over longer distances. Previous studies have shown these long-

Figure 4

Percentages migrating between 1991 and 2001 among the population aged 50 and over, according to age, by distance and sex, England and Wales



Note: Minimum sample size 492.

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

distance migrations are more likely to be made by married couple households with above-median income.^{6,17} Therefore, we would expect similar numbers of males and females migrating long distances in early old age. However, long-distance migration at older ages tends to be motivated by the onset of a chronic illness which leaves the older person unable to carry out every-day tasks. It may also be compounded by the loss of a spouse/partner, who may have provided help and motivation for carrying out these daily tasks.⁶

Characteristics of older migrants, 1991–2001

Previous analyses have shown how social, demographic and economic factors influence migration patterns in older people.^{5,11} The following sections provide information on the migration of older people between 1991 and 2001, and for selected social, demographic and economic characteristics in 1991: marital status, household type, economic position, housing tenure and health status.

Marital Status

Changes in marital status (or relationship status), in terms of divorce, second marriage, cohabitation and bereavement, are all considered life-course transitions that can drive decisions to migrate.⁵

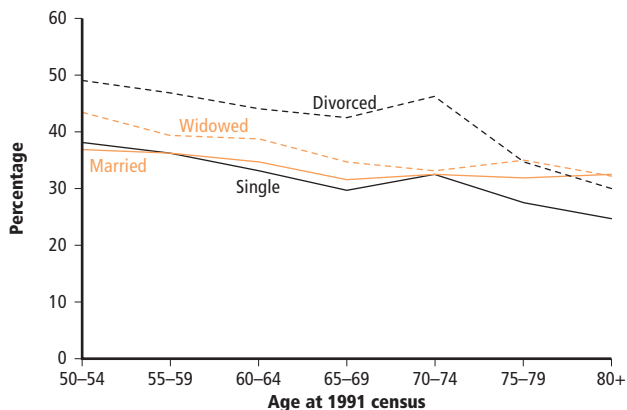
Figure 5 shows that people who were married or single in 1991 were more likely than those who were divorced or widowed to have lived at the same address between 1991 and 2001. In contrast, divorced individuals are the most likely to have changed address, and further analysis showed they were more likely to have moved between districts as opposed to within districts.

It has been noted that the majority of elderly moves into existing households are to the households of a child. In addition, these elderly migrants are less likely to make a move into a son or daughter's household if they still have a partner.¹⁴

Widowhood has been shown to be an important factor in prompting migration in old age, especially among women.¹¹ Migration rates for 1991–2001 were generally higher for widowed ONS-LS members than for those that were single or married in 1991. Similar trends were found for males and females.

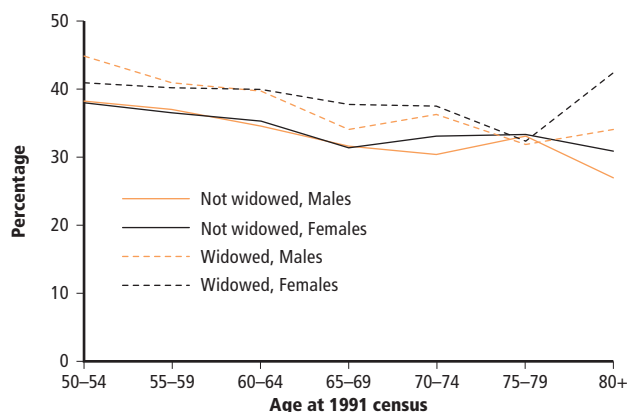
The ONS-LS includes information about the death of an ONS-LS member or their spouse. This enables examination of the migration patterns of people who were widowed during the decade. It is not possible to tell if these migrations occurred before or after the death of

Figure 5 Percentages migrating between 1991 and 2001 among the population aged 50 and over, according to age, by marital status, England and Wales



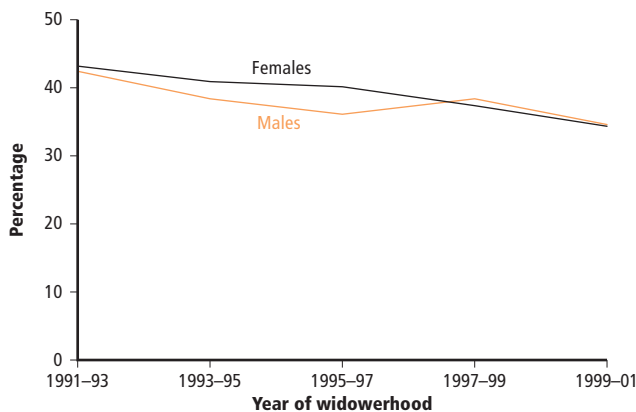
Note: Minimum sample size 20 (for the 80+ divorced group), next smallest 104.
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

Figure 6 Percentages migrating between 1991 and 2001 among the population aged 50 and over, according to age, by widowerhood status, by sex, England and Wales



Note: Minimum sample size 141.
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

Figure 7 Percentages migrating between 1991 and 2001 among the population aged 50 and over, according to most recent year of widowerhood, by sex, England and Wales



Note: Minimum sample size 432.
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

the spouse, or whether the relationship between the two is causal. **Figure 6** shows the migration rates of ONS-LS members that were widowed between the 1991 and 2001 Census. Perhaps unsurprisingly, people who were widowed over the period were more likely to have changed address than those people who were not. This relationship holds true at all ages and for both males and females.

Figure 7 shows the migration rates by year of widowhood. For females there is a distinct pattern, showing migration rates are highest for those who were widowed earlier in the period, as opposed to those who have been widowed more recently. Earlier studies have suggested that widowhood is a highly influential push factor for migration, particularly among women.¹ It is suggested that this is partly because women are more likely to suffer economic consequences than men.

Living arrangements

Changes in living arrangements associated with transitions during the life course, such as children leaving home, divorce, separation and widowhood, can be important factors in prompting migration at older ages.

Tables 2(a) and **2(b)** show the percentages of people aged 50 and over who changed their living arrangements between 1991 and 2001, according to whether they migrated within England and Wales during the period.

The majority of those living alone or married in 1991 remained in that state at 2001. This highlights the fact that even though bereavement, divorce and separation have been shown to be important triggers of migration at older ages, they are minority events.

Interestingly, the movement of a child from the family home is associated with migration among the over-50's. The percentages of people over 50 that started the decade as part of a lone family or as a couple with children but who were without children in 2001 (i.e. living alone and as part of a couple, respectively) were 46 and 57 per cent for migrants compared to 39 and 53 per cent for non-migrants. Correspondingly, the percentages living as lone parents with children or as a couple with children in 1991 who were still in those respective living arrangements in 2001 were higher for non-migrants (50 and 33 per cent, respectively) than for migrants (22 per cent in both cases).

Although the data does not allow us to tell whether a move follows a change in living arrangements, previous studies have shown that a child leaving home can increase economic pressures for the remaining parent(s), resulting in a need to downsize. Or for those in better economic positions, a child leaving the household can enable a life-style oriented move to optimise local amenities and/or social networks. Previous studies have shown that for couples with children, moves around retirement age (55 to 65) can often be driven by a combination of withdrawal from the work force and also children leaving home.^{1,17,18}

People living alone in 1991 were more likely to experience a move into a communal establishment than those in any other type of living arrangement in 1991. These people are most likely to be the oldest old (aged 80 and over), who may experience the onset of a chronic illness that prevents them carrying out ordinary daily tasks and for whom care from relatives is insufficient or unavailable.¹⁹ This is of particular importance given that the proportion of older people living alone has increased greatly in the post-war period, reflecting the undesirability of living and depending on kin and increases in economic resources allowing older population to live alone.¹¹

Housing tenure

Housing tenure in England and Wales is strongly associated with variables such as social class and income and has been widely used as an

Table 2a

Living arrangements for migrants (aged 50 and over), 1991–2001, England and Wales

	2001						Total (N)
	Communal establishment	Alone	Lone parent with children	Couple	Couple with children/ others	Other complex household	
1991 Alone	24.0	60.0	1.5	7.9	0.6	5.9	100% (6,491)
Lone parent with children	9.5	46.3	22.3	12.1	1.9	7.9	100% (1,178)
Couple	7.6	21.1	0.6	65.2	2.1	3.4	100% (13,915)
Couple with children/others	1.8	11.9	3.9	57.1	21.7	3.7	100% (6,562)
Other complex household	13.4	33.9	3.6	19.0	4.3	25.9	100% (2,274)

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

Table 2b

Living arrangements for non-migrants (aged 50 and over), 1991–2001, England and Wales

	2001						Total (N)
	Communal establishment	Alone	Lone parent with children	Couple	Couple with children/ others	Other complex household	
1991 Alone	—	93.5	1.5	2.6	0.2	2.1	100% (12,277)
Lone parent with children	—	39.2	50.2	2.6	1.8	6.1	100% (2,765)
Couple	—	19.8	0.7	76.2	2.4	1.0	100% (35,712)
Couple with children/others	—	6.3	5.4	52.5	32.9	2.8	100% (19,102)
Other complex household	—	29.0	6.2	14.0	6.0	44.8	100% (4,310)

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

indicator of social status.²⁰

In all of the over-50 age groups, owner occupiers in 1991 were the least likely to move. Legislation implemented in the 1990s (the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act) has resulted in older people being given greater opportunity to remain in their own homes until later in life through the provision of various at-home care packages. For all age groups those in privately rented accommodation in 1991 were the most likely to move. It has been suggested that socio-economic disadvantage is associated with decreased likelihood of co-residence with relatives, and therefore an increased need for institutional care at older ages.²⁰

Figure 9 shows the percentage of all moves made from a private residence in 1991 to either a private residence or a communal establishment by 2001, by age. The patterns are similar to those shown in **Figure 8**, but as one would expect there are sharp increases in the percentage of moves for all tenure types at ages 80 and over. Of all moves experienced by those aged 50 and over, between 1991 and 2001, from private residences, eight per cent were into communal establishments.

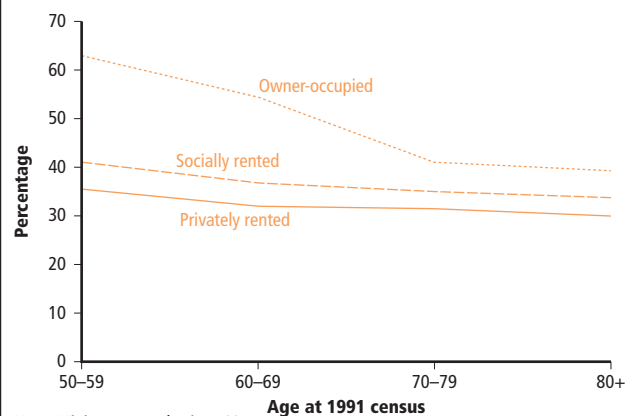
In contrast 57 per cent of all moves from private residences between 1991 and 2001, for those aged 80 and over, were from private residences into communal establishments. This reflects the increased likelihood of needing care due to the onset of long-term illness at older ages.

Health and care

Migration at very old ages is often associated with the onset of a chronic illness. A question was asked in both the 1991 and 2001 Censuses relating to whether an individual had a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limited their fulfilment of daily activities or work.

Figure 8

Percentages migrating (aged 50 and over) between private residences, in the decade to 2001, according to age, by tenure, England and Wales



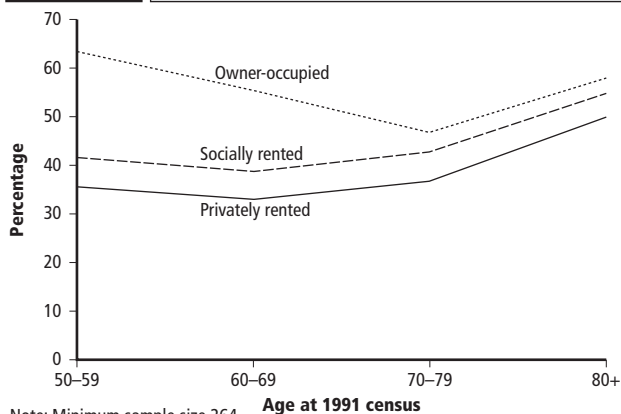
Note: Minimum sample size 183

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

Table 3 shows the percentage of moves between private residences made by those aged over 50 between 1991 and 2001, by whether or not they experienced the onset of a long-term limiting illness during the same period. A chi-squared test showed that the onset of a limiting long-term illness was positively associated with migration for those aged 50 and over. Further analysis showed that there was no significant variation in the propensity to migrate by long-term illness and gender.

Table 4a shows that the propensity to migrate is stable with age for those aged over 50, if no limiting long-term illness is experienced. However,

Figure 9 Percentages migrating between private residences in the decade to 2001 (including moves into communal establishments) among the population aged 50 and over, by tenure and age, England and Wales



Note: Minimum sample size 264
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

Table 3 Percentages migrating among the population aged 50 and over by onset of long-term illness in the decade to 2001, England and Wales

Onset of long-term illness	Migration indicator 1991-2001		
	Same address	Moved address	Total (N)
Yes	68.9	31.1	100% (30860)
No	73.6	26.4	100% (51677)

Note: Chi-square for onset of long-term illness, significant at $p < 0.001$, $N = 82,537$.
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

Table 4a Percentages migrating among the population aged 50 and over who didn't experience the onset of long term illness over the decade to 2001, England and Wales

Age	Same address	Migrated	Total (N)
<80	73.6	26.4	100% (51,279)
80+	74.4	25.6	100% (398)

Note: Chi-square for age insignificant at $p = 0.734$, $N = 51,677$.
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

Table 4b Percentages migrating among the population aged 50 and over who experienced the onset of long term illness in the decade to 2001, England and Wales

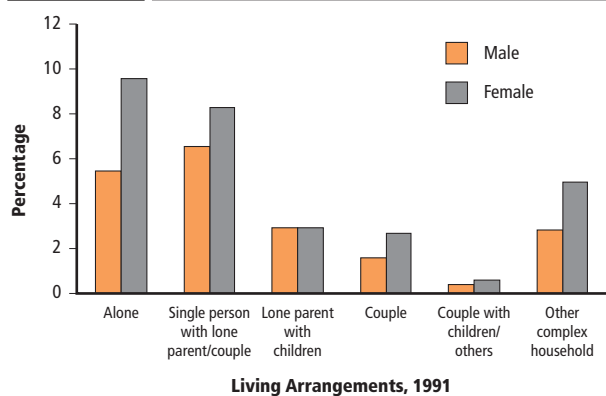
Age	Same address	Migrated	Total (N)
<80	69.7	30.3	100% (29,547)
80+	52.2	47.8	100% (1,313)

Note: Chi-square for age significant at $p < 0.001$, $N = 30,860$.
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

if the onset of a long-term limiting illness is experienced (table 4b), those aged 80 and over are significantly more likely to migrate than those aged 79 and under. The increased likelihood of people aged 80 and over being widowed means it is probable that the onset of a long-term limiting illness will result in the need to seek care outside the household.

Despite declines in intergenerational co-residence there have also been decreases in the proportion of people living in communal establishments.¹⁵ This is partly due to the implementation of improved care services enabling older people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible (a result of the 1990 NHS and Community Health Act).

Figure 10 Percentages migrating from private households in 1991 to communal establishments in 2001 among the population aged 50 and over, by living arrangement in 1991, England and Wales



Note: Minimum sample size 382
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

For many the move into a communal establishment is the final migration stage and happens as a result of the onset of a limiting long-term illness or the loss of a partner. The propensity for women to move into communal establishments is greater than for men, mainly due to differences in marital status composition at older ages. However, research has also shown that higher proportions of women report having a disability than men at any given older age.¹⁵

The ONS-LS shows that 94 per cent of older people (aged 50 and over) who moved from a private residence to a communal establishment between 1991 and 2001 experienced the onset of a chronic illness during the same period.

Figure 10 shows that people aged 50 years and over living alone in 1991 were most likely to be residing in a communal establishment by 2001. Women were generally more likely than men to be residing in a communal establishment regardless of previous living arrangements. This is to be expected for those living as part of a couple, as women are more likely to outlive their partners due to greater life expectancy and the tendency for female partners to be younger than their male counterparts in the relationship. Similar findings have been made in research relating to previous decades.¹²

Key findings

- The popular retirement destinations of older people in England and Wales are still dominated by seaside towns and rural-coastal areas. The most popular counties of departure are in and around London.
- In addition to bereavement and moving into an institution, moves among older people are associated with younger generations moving out of the household.
- The oldest old (aged 80 and over) were significantly more likely to migrate if they experienced the onset of a long term limiting illness than their younger (aged between 50 and 79 years) counterparts. This can be explained by differences in partnership status linked with age.
- Consistent with studies of earlier decades, single people living alone in 1991 were most likely to be residing in a communal establishment by 2001. Women were generally more likely than men to be residing in a communal establishment regardless of previous living arrangements.

Conclusion

This analysis of elderly migration by various characteristics of the population has helped to shed further light on the factors associated with migration at older ages. It supports previous studies carried out on earlier Longitudinal Study data that have shown that factors such as change in marital status, living arrangements and health are important triggers of elderly migration. However, further analysis of more qualitative retirement survey data would be necessary to establish and untangle the determinants of migration at older ages with any certainty. Further analysis of the factors associated with migration at older ages, using a multilevel modelling approach may allow quantification of the strength of these factors in determining whether or not a migration takes place. It has also been suggested that taking a longer-term look at migration throughout the life course may provide further explanation of the high concentrations of elderly people in certain areas. In addition, analysis of the characteristics of older migrants by area of destination may help to predict the likely impact of selective inward migration on the composition of an area. This will help policy makers to ensure adequate care and other services are available in these areas.

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