

# SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND TERRITORIAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF ONE PERSON HOUSEHOLDS IN SPAIN

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to analyze the evolution and composition of one-person households in Spain and account for their territorial distribution patterns.

Important demographic transformations have occurred as of the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Western developed countries and, among them, big changes in family behaviours which have diversified household structure and composition. The reduction in the average household size and the rapid rise in one-person household numbers have become two of the most outstanding features in this evolution.

In parallel, residential mobility has consolidated and attained the most prominent role in urban development processes. Residential mobility redistributes population, and households too, causing the territory to specialize in specific residence typologies.

In Spain, the fact of living alone - which has traditionally been regarded as a marginal way of residence, with heavy negative connotations related to loneliness, isolation, staying single and old age - is regarded today as another residential option in the course of life and not only at the end of it.

One-person households in Spain have spectacularly increased in number, have diversified their composition and are no longer exclusive to rural areas, having become typologies of great weight in big cities.

What has the increase in one-person households been like in Spain in the past thirty years? What are the sociodemographic features of people living alone and how has their profile been diversified? What kind of one-person households are experiencing a greater growth? How are the different types of one-person households distributed in the Spanish territory according to the type or size of the municipality? Which is the provincial distribution of one-

person households in Spain? Can a province typology in terms of distribution of one-person households be established by the type and size of municipality?

These are the questions this paper tries to respond: it tries to analyze the growth in one-person households in Spain; study the sociodemographic features and the profile diversification of people living alone; analyze and explain the territorial distribution patterns of one-person households according to their features and to the type and size of the municipality; study the distribution of one-person households in the Spanish provinces and establish a province typology in terms of distribution of one-person households by the type and size of the municipality.

The sources used for this paper have been the Spanish Population Censuses of 1970, 1981, 1991 and especially that of 2001 since it allows detailed knowledge of the sociodemographic features of people living alone at a municipal level.

This article is structured in three parts. Firstly, the evolution and composition of one-person households in Spain is studied; secondly, the territorial distribution of one-person households, considering their location in the capital or ring and the size of the municipality, is analyzed and thirdly, up to three different territorial models of province distribution are proposed based on the creation of a hierarchical cluster.

## **II. EVOLUTION AND FEATURES OF ONE-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS IN SPAIN**

In the last decades, the number of households have increased much faster than the size of the population and, in consequence, the average number of members per cohabitation unit has declined. Household growth follows a size reverse hierarchy in all orders: those of larger size decline with larger intensity, especially those of more than seven persons, followed by those of six and five members; up to four members, they start to grow steadily, with moderate increases in those of three and four members, somewhat higher in those of two members with an outstanding progression in those consisting of one person.

In 1970, only 66,353 persons lived alone in Spain, one-person households represented 7.47% of the overall residential units where 1.95% of the total population lived. In 2001, the number of solo living was quintuplicated: 2,876,572 persons lived alone, represented 20.78% of the overall households where 7.4% of the Spanish population lived. Together with this spectacular growth, there has been a profile diversification of people living alone. They no longer exclusively represent an aging population (unmarried men and widows) but they reflect the existence of new residence behaviours within the Spanish society; the increase of marriage breakups, the increase of elderly persons' residential independence and the triumph of the unmarried status are explanatory factors for the increase and shift in one-person household composition.

Having been faced with a resident profile in terms of one-person households of elderly widowed inactive women with a low level of education and socioeconomic status, new solo living models are now emerging: young-mature unmarried and separated or divorced men between 25 and 40 with an average-high level of education and socioeconomic status.

Up to three different categories of one-person household residents can be drawn from the analysis of one-person household composition in Spain by sex, age, marital status, level of education and socioeconomic status: 1) elderly widowed inactive women with a low level

of education; 2) Young unmarried men with an average socioeconomic status and level of education; 3) young-mature separated and/or divorced men who are qualified technicians and professionals with a high level of education; 4) complex situations.

2.1) *Elderly widowed inactive women with a low level of education:* The traditional profile of elderly people living alone continues to have a great weight in Spain. The increase in longevity and the improvement of life conditions have resulted in an increase in elderly persons' residential independence and, in consequence, in an increase in one-person households.

2.2) *Young unmarried men with an average socio economic status and level of education:* The emerging profile of solo living, which is consolidating, compared to the above-mentioned traditional one, is predominantly that of a young unmarried educated active male and qualified professional or technician.

2.3) *Young-mature separated and/or divorced men, who are qualified technicians and professionals with a high level of education:* The predominant profile of separated and divorced persons living alone is that of a male with secondary studies who works as a technician or professional.

2.4) *Complex situations:* The both absolute and relative increase of married people living alone is considerable. Various hypotheses can account for these situations: work migrations which lead some persons to register in the work place during the week; false registration of people in second homes or separations in fact, among others.

### III. TERRITORIAL ASPECTS OF ONE-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS IN SPAIN

#### 3.1. Household size and features by municipality size and type

The distribution and composition of one-person households is not homogeneous in the territory. One person households are unevenly distributed and their composition features vary depending on sex, age, level of education or socioeconomic status and where they are located: big capitals, their metropolitan rings, medium-sized cities or rural areas.

Municipality type and size has been defined according to the National Statistics Institute criteria, its classification being: Province's capital with more or fewer than 500,000 inhabitants; ring, understanding as such the municipalities bordering the province's capital; municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants; municipalities between 20,000 and 5,000 inhabitants; municipalities between 5,000 and 1,000 inhabitants and municipalities under 1,000 inhabitants. The concept of ring, as it is defined by the National Statistics Institute, refers to the province's capital adjoining municipalities. Such group- which can not be compared to an actual metropolitan ring – is certainly, as opposed to the capital, of use, despite its limitations, in order to study the differences between the centre and the outskirts with the same criteria in all Spanish provinces.

The largest variety between household size and municipality size is observed in one-person households. In rural areas they represent the greatest exponent whereas they occupy the fourth position in areas between 5,000 and 100,000 inhabitants and stand second of the distribution in big capitals.

Differences in the distribution of one-person households by municipality size are conditioned, to a great extent, by the population age structure. People living alone are better represented in the smallest municipalities and in big capitals due to the weight of aging. When main person rates in one-person households are standardised according to Spain's population age structure, differences decline but there remains a tendency to form one-person households in municipalities under 1,000 inhabitants and in capitals over 500,000 inhabitants. Two sides of the same coin: aging from the rural and urban side.

Men and women living alone follow differentiated territorial patterns depending on their age, marital status, level of education and socioeconomic status.

By age, big cities are specializing in solo living adults, between the age of 35 and 50 in case of men and up to the age of 65 in case of women. Young males living in one-person households are found in medium-sized cities and elderly people over 65 predominate in small municipalities.

By marital status, the proportion of widowers and widows is reversely proportional to municipality size: the bigger the municipality, the smaller the proportion of widowers and widows; on the contrary, unmarried, divorced and separated people follow a directly proportional relationship: the bigger the municipality, the higher the percentage of these categories, which is tempered by the fact that men and women living alone as a result of a relationship breakup are better represented in municipalities between 5,000 and 100,000 inhabitants.

The level of education is also proportional to municipality size: the bigger the municipality, the higher the level of education. In capitals, solo living persons with maximum level of education are the best represented.

There is a strong correlation between the socioeconomic status and the location of solo living: in big cities, professionals and technicians predominate whereas agrarian workers predominate in smaller municipalities.

Big cities are specialized in solo living unmarried adults with a high level of education and a high socioeconomic status (technicians and professionals); whereas one-person households in the smallest municipalities have an aging profile, widowed and, at a lesser extent, unmarried with an insufficient level of education and inactive (as it corresponds to their age) or agrarian employees. In rings and municipalities between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants there exists a better representation of separated and divorced people.

### **3.2. One-person households in Spanish provinces**

The dominant territorial model of one-person households has been rapidly modified in the past years: from a predominance in rural areas, typical of small-sized populations, to a higher concentration in big cities and province's capitals.

The increase in number of one-person households is taking place in all the Spanish provinces without exception, although with different intensity and composition. Provinces with a larger proportion of one-person households show a strong correlation with the most aging areas in Spain: Ávila, Soria, Guadalajara, Teruel, Burgos, Zamora, Teruel or Ourense; Illes Balears and Girona, which, despite not standing within the most aging provinces, have a great proportion of solo living; they are provinces with a high number of second homes

where the false registration of a household member in the second the home may lead to an overrepresentation of one-person households. Provinces with the fewest proportion of solo living are, in general, the youngest and among them, the andalusian provinces, Cádiz, Sevilla, Córdoba, Huelva ,together with Murcia and Pontevedra.

The most significant change in the past decade has been the relative loss of weight of households with over- 65- year-old residents in favour of younger solo living. This new scenario is given especially in the least aging provinces, as the ones in the Mediterranean coast and in the most dense and heavily developed provinces. The largest proportions of elderly solo living appear in the most affected by the rural exodus interior provinces.

### 3.3. One-person households in capitals, rings and municipalities by population size

Internal distribution of one-person households in Spain by municipality type and size in each province provides up to three big significant province groupings with different territorial features: the first, provinces with most developed urban and metropolitan features; the second, rural and old age-structured provinces and the third one provinces with a youngest demographic structure. Province groupings have been done from the production of a hierarchical cluster with the proportions of one-person households in each municipality by type and size: capital, ring, cities with over 2,000 inhabitants, municipalities from 5,001 to 20,000 inhabitants and municipalities under 1,001 inhabitants. This first classification has been subdivided into up to seven subgroupings.

- a) The *metropolitan model* approaches the model of some big European cities where there exists a big difference between the capital, characterized by a high proportion of one-person households, and the ring, which acts as a residential expansion area with a predominance of family households. Two subtypes can be identified in this model: One where the differences between the capital and the ring are very noticeable; in the other one, there exists a smaller difference in the proportion of solo living households between the capital and the ring.
- b) The *old age- structured* model assembles interior provinces with a relevant aging population and with high proportions of one-person households both in the capitals and in their rings. Up to three models can be identified: one where the capital is younger than the ring, there existing a larger percentage of one-person households in the ring than in the capital, a second one where the outskirts have become a capital expansion area and a third one with scarce internal differences.
- c) The *young age-structured* model assembles medium-sized provinces with young population and also young rings and low percentages of one-person households. As in the above models, two sub models can be identified: Young provinces with a rural ring and with larger or similar proportions of one-person households to the province's capital and young age-structured provinces but with a capital that has already formed suburban expansion rings with a more reduced proportion of solo living.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The general aim of this article is to analyse the evolution and composition of one-person households in Spain and account for their territorial distribution patterns.

The spectacular growth of single person's residential units, as opposed to plural households, and their different composition- by sex, age, civil status, level of education or socioeconomic status- in terms of their territorial distribution, combining old compositions from the past with new living styles, turn them into a most interesting study subject.

Today the growth of one-person households is accompanied by a diversification in their composition: the increase of relationship breakups, self-emancipation or the increase of elderly person's residential independence presents the fact of living alone as another residential option at different stages of life and not only at the end of it or caused by the death or emancipation of the rest of its members. Thus, family transformations account for the growth of one-person households and the diversified characteristics of people living in them. Having been faced with a profile of elderly widowed inactive women with a low or very low level of education, new solo living models are emerging; one-person households turn younger, solo living men tend to appear and the unmarried status triumphs. Young unmarried men or young-mature separated and divorced men with a high level of education and with an average or high socioeconomic status appear as an emerging profile.

The distribution and composition of one-person households is not homogenous in the whole Spanish territory. The dominant territorial model of one-person households has rapidly changed in the past years: from a predominance in rural areas, typical of small-sized populations, to a higher concentration in big cities and not only as a consequence of aging but as another residential option, above all, among the unmarried. One-person households are unevenly distributed and have a different composition depending on sex, age, level of education or socioeconomic status, on where they are located — capitals or rings —, and on municipality size.

Urban development and residential mobility processes account for population and household distribution and specialisation in the Spanish territory.

Big cities are specialized in solo living unmarried adults with a high level of education and a high socioeconomic status (technicians and professionals); whereas one-person households in the smallest municipalities have an older profile: either widowed and, at a lesser extent, unmarried with an insufficient level of education and inactive (as it corresponds to their age) or agrarian employees. In rings and municipalities between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants there exists a better representation of separated and divorced people.

One-person households distribution in provinces according to household location in capitals or rings allows to differentiate up to three significant models: *metropolitan model*, *old age-structured model* and *the young age-structured model*.