

Newly Available SHARE Data Provide Insights on European Ageing

New data from the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe, or SHARE, are now available for free download by researchers around the globe. SHARE answers the call of the European Council for a systematic data base for empirical research on population ageing in Europe.

SHARE includes microdata on health, socioeconomic status, and social and family networks for more than 40,000 persons at least 50 years of age. SHARE respondents include persons in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland, with Slovenia soon to join.

Because of its depth and breadth, SHARE offers unique insights on how institutional, economic, social, and cultural diversity across Europe affects individual and societal ageing processes across the region. More than 1,000 scientific users have already produced a wealth of findings on initial SHARE data releases. New SHARE data, available at www.share-project.org, will provide further insights on issues of health, employment, family and social networks, and economic status affecting older Europeans.

Regarding health, SHARE data show

- Northern Europeans are healthier and wealthier but those in the South (Greece, Israel, Italy, and Spain) live longer. This is particularly true for Northern men and Southern women. Research using the SHARE data can help determine whether these differences are genetic or societal.
- Education keeps us fit. Individuals with lower levels of education are 70 percent more likely to be physically inactive and 50 percent more likely to be obese than those with higher levels of education.
- Higher socioeconomic status prevents depression. Within all countries, but particularly in Northern Europe, persons with low income or low wealth suffer more frequently from depression.
- Improvement is needed in geriatric care. SHARE is the first survey to include comparable indicators of quality of care for older persons. Most of these indicators suggest there is a substantial lack of geriatric assessments and screening tests across Europe.

Regarding employment, SHARE data show

- Preventing ill health pays for itself. Individuals in good health retire about two years later than those in poor health. Spending 3 percent of labour income on preventing poor health pays for itself by preserving employability.
- Incentives to early retirement lead to large unused labour capacity. Different welfare systems generate different patterns in labour market participation and retirement by age. Early retirees are more prevalent in those countries that allow early retirement or have generous retirement benefits, including Southern Europe as well as Austria and France.
- Uptake of disability insurance is unrelated to health status. The prevalence of disability benefits among persons from 50 to 64 years of age ranges from 3 percent in Greece to 16 percent in Denmark. SHARE data, including those on internationally comparable health measures, reveal this variation is not linked to differences in health.
- Agreeable work supports later retirement. The quality of employment during the pre-retirement years—including how much control we have over our work and how much our efforts are rewarded—varies across Europe, with quality of work life being higher in the North than in the South. These differences lead to those in well-being, specifically in health and depression.

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On family and social networks, SHARE data show

- The demise of the family is a myth. About a third of persons at least 65 years of age help others or look after grandchildren on a daily basis, spending an average of 4.6 hours per day doing so. Because the varying generations of a family are geographically close, the potential for everyday support is high across all Europe.
- Parents give in the North, while children give in the South. Intergenerational money transfers are a major source of household income, but the direction of these transfers differs by area. In the North, younger individuals receive more from their parents, while in the South they provide more for their parents.
- Volunteering is frequent in some countries. Overall, 10 percent of those at least 50 years of age does volunteer work. The prevalence of volunteer work is highest in Scandinavia and the Netherlands and lowest in Spain and Greece.

On economic status, income, and wealth, SHARE data show

- Consumption inequality is lower than financial inequality. Inequality in consumption is lower than that in income, while that in income is lower than that in wealth.
- Poverty is alleviated by non-financial resources. High rates of owner-occupied housing in the South help reduce the effects of poverty there. Likewise, living with one's children guards against poverty not only in the Mediterranean but also in Germany.

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