

THE BOOMERANG GENERATION IN EUROPE

Returning to the family home in the European and Mediterranean context

1. Introduction and context

Difficult access to housing and employment insecurity have turned the return to the family home into a structural phenomenon in Europe. The so-called “boomerang generation” - young adults who return to live with their parents after a period of independence - has become especially relevant in recent years (Eurofound, 2025).

This report summarises the most recent data available (Eurostat 2023-2024, Eurofound, and the Spanish Youth Council’s Emancipation Observatory) in order to quantify and contextualise this phenomenon.

2. European overview: age of leaving home and return

2.1 Comparison of Mediterranean countries and the EU average

According to Eurostat, in 2024 the average age of leaving the parental home in the EU stood at 26.2 years, a figure that has remained practically stable since 2002. However, this average conceals a deep north-south divide, with Croatia (31.3), Slovakia (30.9), Greece (30.7), Italy (30.1) and Spain (30.0) recording the highest values, compared with Finland (21.4), Sweden (21.9) and Denmark (21.7).

Country	2022	2023	2024	TREND
Croatia	33.4	31.9	31.3	Slight improvement
Greece	30.7	30.6	30.7	Stable
Italy	30.0	30.0	30.1	Stable
Spain	30.5	30.4	30.0	Slight improvement
Portugal	30.1	29.0	28.9	Stable
EU average	26.4	26.4	26.2	Stable
Finland	21.3	21.4	21.4	Stable
Denmark	21.7	21.8	21.7	Stable
Sweden	21.6	21.8	21.9	Stable

Source: Eurostat (yth_demo_030), 2022-2024 data.

2.2. Returning after becoming independent (boomerang generation)

The phenomenon goes beyond never having left home. According to a study based on Eurostat data, 26% of young adults in Spain have returned to the family home after having enjoyed a period of independent living.

In the United Kingdom, 15% of adults aged 21 to 35 made at least one return to the parental home between 2009 and 2020, according to the UK Household Longitudinal Study (Mangiavacchi et al., Social

Science & Medicine, 2023). At European level, Tosi & Grundy (2018), from the LSE, documented this pattern in 17 countries between 2007 and 2015, confirming that housing costs and employment instability are the main drivers of return.

Among young people aged 25 to 29, more than 60% of residents in Croatia, Slovakia, Italy, Spain, Poland and Ireland still live with their parents or contribute to the family household (Eurostat, 2024). In Spain, only 17% of young people aged 16 to 29 were emancipated in the second quarter of 2023. It is observed that, for a young person to become independent and live alone, they would have to allocate 93.9% of their annual net salary to housing (Spanish Youth Council Emancipation Observatory, 2023).

3. Eurostat comparative table: all European countries

The following table brings together the four key indicators used in the analysis (2024 data). The colour code in the “Age” column visually identifies three groups: red (≥ 30 years), yellow (26-29.9 years) and green (< 26 years).

Country	Average age of leaving home, 2024	People living with their parents or contributing to/benefiting from household income (population aged 18 to 34)	Housing cost overburden rate ¹ (20-29 years)	Region
EU-27 average	26.2	49.1%	11%	EU
Croatia	31.3	76.4%	2.0%	South/East
Greece	30.7	67.3%	31.1%	Mediterranean
Italy	30.1	68.1%	4.2%	Mediterranean
Spain	30.0	67.2%	7.2%	Mediterranean
Portugal	28.9	62.4%	8.5%	Mediterranean
Malta	28.1	52.2%	3.5%	Mediterranean
Cyprus	27.2	57.3%	3.4%	Mediterranean
Slovakia	30.9	70.3%	7.5%	East
Bulgaria	28.8	58.7%	7.1%	East
Romania	27.3	52.3%	7.9%	East
Poland	26.7	68.3%	5.2%	East
Hungary	27.1	53.7%	10.9%	East
Slovenia	28.9	60.0%	3.3%	East
Czech Republic	25.8	46.0%	12.3%	East
Lithuania	23.6	36.4%	7.3%	East
Latvia	26.6	50.9%	7.4%	East
Austria	25.3	39.0%	8.5%	Central/West
Ireland	26.8	62.2%	5.2%	Central/West
Luxembourg	26.9	46.1%	9.5%	Central/West
Belgium	26.2	48.3%	8.2%	Central/West
France	23.5	39.9%	8.9%	Central/West
Netherlands	23.2	35.7%	20.4%	Central/West
Germany	23.9	31.2%	16.4%	Central/West
Estonia	22.4	35.2%	12.8%	North
Denmark	21.7	17.9%	37.7%	North
Sweden	21.9	23.8%	16.2%	North
Finland	21.4	17.1%	12.5%	North

¹ “Housing cost overburden rate by age, sex and poverty status” refers to a statistical indicator that measures the percentage of people or households that spend an excessive share of their income on housing, defined as allocating more than 40% of disposable income to housing.

Sources: Eurostat (1) yth_demo_030 - average age of leaving the parental home in 2024; (2) ilc_lvps08 - % of young people aged 18-34 in the parental home in 2024; (3) ilc_lvho07a - housing cost overburden rate.

Mediterranean countries concentrate the highest ages of leaving the parental home (30+ years), although, paradoxically, they show lower housing cost overburden rates than northern countries because young people avoid this expense by remaining in the family home (Eurostat, 2025). Greece is the exception: it combines late emancipation (30.7 years) with the highest housing cost overburden rate in the EU among young people (31.1%), reflecting its particularly severe housing crisis.

4. Explanatory factors in the Mediterranean

4.1 Housing crisis

Between 2015 and 2024, housing prices in the EU rose by an average of 53% (European Parliament, 2026). The housing cost overburden rate, defined as spending more than 40% of disposable income on housing, affects 31.1% of young Greeks (the highest value among Mediterranean countries in 2024) and 11% of young Europeans overall, compared with 8.2% of the general population (Eurostat, 2025).

4.2 Youth unemployment and employment insecurity

The youth unemployment rate (active population under 25) in Mediterranean countries is well above the EU average. In Spain it reaches 24.9% (2024) and in Italy 19.1%, compared with an EU average of 14.4% (Eurostat, 2025).

4.3 Cultural factors and the Mediterranean family model

Comparative research (Tosi & Grundy, LSE, 2018; Luppi, Rosina & Sironi, Demographic Research, 2024) shows that in Mediterranean countries, where families often provide support that the State does not fully cover, it is more common and more socially accepted for several generations to live together. This occurs both when young people have not yet fully become independent and when they return to the family home due to economic or personal difficulties.

5. The impact of the pandemic and subsequent recovery

COVID-19 accelerated the temporary return to the family home across Europe. A study by the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Luppi, Rosina & Sironi, 2024) analysed return trajectories in France, Italy, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom during the 2020-2021 period, documenting an intensification of boomerang moves in all the countries analysed, with a greater impact in Mediterranean countries due to higher labour-market insecurity.

The average age of leaving the parental home in the EU rose from 26.1 years in 2019 to 26.8 years in 2021, the highest level recorded, with a subsequent recovery to 26.2 in 2024. Spain reached 30.4 years in 2023 before falling to 30.0 in 2024.

6. Conclusions

The boomerang generation is not a one-off problem, but a structural phenomenon, especially pronounced in Mediterranean countries. Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal combine late emancipation,

high housing cost overburden² and high youth employment insecurity, generating a demand that conventional markets are unable to meet.

The figure of a 26% return rate to the family home in Spain, one of the highest in Europe, illustrates the scale of the problem. The data suggest that the problem will not be solved without acting simultaneously on housing supply (activation of empty housing stock), access costs (affordable rent) and employment stability.

² Although its scale is lower than that observed in northern European countries, the economic impact remains considerable for Mediterranean countries, especially when taking into account the specific economic conditions of each State and the interaction with other concurrent phenomena.

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