

Young people now take longer to join adult life

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A research study by the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), in collaboration with the State University of Campinas (Brazil), shows that young Spanish people were by 2001 taking six years longer than in 1981 to reach full employment, residential and family independence.

Spain considers itself to be a "family-centred" country, in other words, families are expected to take up the slack with regard to areas not covered by [social security](#). "The objective was to evaluate transformations in the trends of how young people gained their independence in [Spain](#) over the last decades of the 20th Century", Pau Miret Gamundi, a researcher at the UAB Centre for Demographic Studies, tells SINC.

The transition from youth to adult life can be broken down into three key stages – the passage from student life to the world of work (joining the labour market), from a dependent member of the household to a leading figure within it (residential emancipation), and from a position of being exclusively a child to being a parent (formation of family).

"Our results show there has been a significant change in the age at which the most intense status changes take place, which were six years later in 2001 than in 1981", says Miret, who is a co-author of the study, which has been published in the journal REIS.

This time lag has been the same for both sexes. In 1981, the average age at which young people gained full independence was 22 for females and 24 for males, while this age had risen by 2001 to 28 and 30, respectively. "These ages, in comparison with other geographical locations outside southern Europe, are considered to be extraordinarily late", the researcher explains.

No regional differences can be appreciated with regard to different autonomous communities "as we showed in the detailed study of particular cases in Catalonia – which is representative of an urban, industrialised setting – and Galicia, which is more rural". When the two regions were compared, the researchers found the results converged towards identical patterns of independence.

The study is based on data from the Spanish censuses for this period, which were provided by the University of Minnesota (USA), as part of a project that is attempting to collect census data from as many countries as possible. The next census that will allow further calculations to be made of the transition to [adult life](#) will be carried out in 2011.

Crises exacerbate the situation

The 1973 recession is considered to be one of the reasons for the growth in university education in the 1970s. "The constant sensation of instability makes it hard for young people to achieve full autonomy and residential independence", say the authors.

The experts say investment in education "is part of the dynamic of the labour market", in other words, young people prolong their studies in the hope of increasing their career opportunities, putting their other personal plans on the back burner.

"Policies regarding young people are not usually a priority and are the last to be implemented. The independence grants that the Government is providing are a favourable policy for helping resolve this problem, but it would also be interesting to be able to provide access to subsidised rent for housing, not necessarily for single-occupancy flats, but flats shared by three or four people", Miret concludes.

More information: Joice Melo Vieira, Pau Miret Gamundi.

"Transición a la vida adulta en España: una comparación en el tiempo y en el territorio utilizando el análisis de entropía", Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas 131, 2010.

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