

Around a million fewer people moved house in the 2000s than in the 1970s

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Around a million fewer people moved house in the 2000s than in the 1970s and it is mostly due to an ageing population, changes in the housing market and altered attitudes, a Queen's University Belfast researcher has found.

Dr Ian Shuttleworth, a leading researcher from the School of Natural and Built Environment at Queen's, discovered that the decrease predates the Great Recession and is not just explained by economic issues.

The international project lasted three years and the Queen's researcher worked in collaboration with Professor Tony Champion of the University of Newcastle and Professor Thomas Cooke of the University of Connecticut. The research, which has today been published in the journal *Population, Space and Place*, found that about a third of the fall of [internal migration](#) in England and Wales was due to population changes such as ageing but the remainder is down to a change in behaviour.

It also found that it is not just a British phenomenon, there has been a decrease in people moving house in countries across the globe such as Australia, Japan, the USA, Germany and Italy, with just one of the seven countries in the study - Sweden - seeing a rise.

Dr Shuttleworth commented: "There has been a decade-on-decade decrease in people moving home. Using statistics from the census we measured the proportion of people changing addresses and found that

this fell from 55% between 1971 and 1981 and to 45% between 2001 and 2011.

"The fall in migration has been most significant for moves of under 10km and it has been experienced by nearly all types of people. It is not just the elderly who are not moving as much as they did in the 1970s but all age groups, it is not only owner occupiers but also those in social-rented housing and falls are not just concentrated amongst the unemployed but have also been experienced by those in work."

Explaining the reasons for the decrease, Dr Shuttleworth said: "One cause of the decline in migration rates in England and Wales is the changing makeup of the population. Some people are more mobile than others, for example, older people tend to change address less than younger people, whereas those with more education tend to move more than those who lack it.

"Our analysis shows that the population changes between the 1970s and the 2000s explains about one third of the decrease. Most of this decline is due to the continuing process of population ageing and the decline in private renting that took place in the last century, which have outweighed the upward push of increasing education levels and participation in higher education."

However, changing attitudes also have a part to play. Dr Shuttleworth said: "The remaining two-thirds of the migration fall is attributed to changed behaviour; people now just move less than they did in the 1970s. The short-distance moving that has declined the most is usually for housing reasons and, in the UK, there is evidence of a shortage of housing stock and price pressures that have encouraged spatial immobility.

"The long duration of the fall in migration since the 1970s and the

similar experience of some other countries round the world also suggest other more general factors. Our analysis also points to extended lives and a delay in [people](#) moving from their parent's house to their own home. Workers also are commuting longer distances on a daily or weekly basis instead of moving home, and improved transport and communication technologies mean that there is less need to move."

Explaining that this could have an impact on the economy globally, Dr Shuttleworth said: "The slowdown in [migration](#) will have implications for social and labour market mobility. In the USA and Australia, the decline in longer-distance moves could have implications for economic productivity and the ability of regional labour markets to adjust to shocks. This is less likely to be the case in England and Wales as inter-regional moves have not dropped as much but the big decline in shorter-distance moves here may have implications for neighbourhood cohesion and social mobility."

More information: Ian Shuttleworth et al, Why did fewer people change address in England and Wales in the 2000s than in the 1970s? Evidence from an analysis of the ONS Longitudinal Study, *Population, Space and Place* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/psp.2167](https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2167)

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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