

Factors Influencing Transnational Mobilities in Old Age: Climate, Finances, Attachments, and Life Course Events

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Abstract: This paper presents a comparative analysis of the factors motivating transnational mobility in four categories of older adults. Qualitative data collected in 2020 and 2021 in Spain and Switzerland reveal three main reasons: climate, financial considerations, and feelings of attachment. Furthermore, the findings emphasise the importance of life course events in shaping transnational mobilities in old age. Finally, this study highlights the need to extend transnational ageing research to less permanent and multiple patterns of mobility.

Keywords: Retirement, transnationalism, transnational ageing, mobility, older migrants

Facteurs de mobilités transnationales dans la vieillesse : finances, attachements et événements du parcours de vie

Résumé: Cet article procède à une analyse comparative des facteurs de la mobilité transnationale de quatre catégories de personnes âgées. Les données qualitatives collectées en Espagne et en Suisse en 2020 et 2021 révèlent trois raisons principales: le climat, les considérations financières et les sentiments d'attachement. En outre, les résultats soulignent l'importance des événements du parcours de vie pour la mobilité transnationale au cours de la vieillesse. Enfin, l'étude met en évidence la nécessité d'étendre la recherche sur le vieillissement transnational à des modèles de mobilité moins permanents et multiples.

Mots-clés: Retraite, transnationalisme, vieillissement transnational, mobilité, migrant·e·s âgé·e·s

Faktoren für transnationale Mobilitäten im Alter: Klima, Finanzen, Verbundenheit und Lebensereignisse

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel analysiert vergleichend die Faktoren für transnationale Mobilität von vier Kategorien älterer Personen. Die qualitativen Daten, die 2020 und 2021 in Spanien und der Schweiz erhoben wurden, zeigen drei Hauptgründe auf: Klima, finanzielle Erwägungen und Gefühle der Verbundenheit. Zudem hebt der Artikel die Bedeutung von Ereignissen im Lebensverlauf für transnationale Mobilität im Alter hervor. Schliesslich verdeutlicht die Studie die Relevanz, transnationale Altersforschung auf weniger dauerhafte und multiple Mobilitätsmuster auszuweiten.

Schlüsselwörter: Pensionierung, Transnationalismus, transnationales Altern, Mobilität, ältere Migrant:innen

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1 Introduction¹

As a result of the increasing number of older adults deciding to spend part of the year in, or to relocate to another country (Casado-Díaz et al., 2004), it is not surprising that scientific interest in transnational ageing processes and practices is on the ascent. In the last decade, a great deal of knowledge has been gathered on the different processes, practices, and lifestyles that transcend national borders put in place by older adults (Ciobanu et al., 2017; Horn & Schweppe, 2017; Karl & Torres, 2016; King et al., 2021). Scholarship has focused primarily on the different motivations and reasons for such mobilities. In so doing, various studies have shown that, when considering transnational mobility, older individuals are guided by climate, financial considerations, cultural aspects such as lifestyle and feelings of homesickness, personal ties, and health-related issues (Bolzman et al., 2017; Bolzman et al., 2021; Buffel & Phillipson, 2011; Casado-Díaz et al., 2004; Ciobanu et al., 2017; Gehring, 2018a). However, scholarship differentiates between international retirement migrants' and older labour migrants' transnational mobility practices and their reasons for them (Näre et al., 2017). Thereby, a narrative has emerged, portraying international retirement migrants as affluent older individuals moving to another country to enjoy a gentler pace of life in a sunnier and milder climate (King et al., 2017); and older labour migrants finally free to return to their home country as the "link between place of residence and income is no longer self-evident" (Gehring, 2018a, p. 31). Recently, this narrative has become more nuanced with the help of eminent studies that have adopted a comparative approach (Bolzman et al., 2021; Gehring, 2018a; King et al., 2017). This paper enters this discussion by comparatively analysing the reasons for transnational mobility in older individuals. More precisely, it aims to identify the similarities and differences in the motivational factors influencing transnational mobility amongst first-time migrants, return migrants, onwards migrants, and bi-local older adults.

In so doing, this paper draws on qualitative data collected in the framework of a PhD project which looked at older adults' transnational practices, mobilities, and personal networks in a Swiss-Spanish context. In total, 43 semi-structured interviews were conducted between June 2020 and August 2021 with individuals of retirement age who were engaged in some form of transnational mobility since leaving work. Older individuals with diverse pre-retirement migration trajectories and post-retirement mobility patterns took part in the project, which resulted in the construction of the four categories presented in this paper. Drawing on the narratives of these bi-local older adults, first-time, return and onwards migrants, I was able to identify three recurring themes for transnational mobility: the enjoyment of a warmer and sunnier climate; financial considerations; and a sense of attach-

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ment brought about by return visits, tourism and family ties. By comparing the differences and similarities in the participants' narratives, this paper draws a more nuanced picture of the motivations for transnational mobility in old age. Moreover, this analysis illustrates how life course events such as unemployment, illness, disability, and separation from a partner can act as a catalyst for mobility in old age.

The paper starts with an in-depth discussion of the main reasons for international retirement migration and the return movements of older individuals. Following this, the analytical framework of this paper is presented along with how the qualitative data was collected and analysed. In the methodological section an illustration is given of the composition of the four different categories of older adults. Finally, the empirical evidence is discussed for the three main motivational factors and the importance of life course events in shaping transnational mobility decisions in old age.

2 Reasons for Transnational Mobility in Old Age: An Overview

2.1 International Retirement Migrants

Around the turn of the millennium, important surveys were carried out with the aim of understanding why Northern European older individuals were increasingly spending (part of) their retirement in Southern Europe (Casado-Díaz et al., 2004; King et al., 1998; Rodríguez et al., 2004). On the basis of these studies, the category of international retirement migrants was established. Generally speaking, these older migrants moved from Northern to Southern countries to benefit from lower living costs, a better climate and “greater possibilities for (outdoor) recreational activities” (Gehring, 2018a, p. 28, see also Gustafson, 2001). As a result, international retirement migrants were often referred to as lifestyle migrants (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Recently, this lifestyle lens has been challenged. On the one hand, the cost of living has increased in countries traditionally frequented by international retirement migrants (Giner-Monfort et al., 2016). Accordingly, the attractiveness of these destinations has decreased and new destinations, such as Turkey and Morocco, have gained in popularity (Bolzman et al., 2021; Gehring, 2018b). On the other hand, scholarship has demonstrated that older individuals use mobility as a strategy to circumvent financial precarity (Bolzman et al., 2021; Ciobanu et al., 2017; Repetti & Schilliger, 2021). Regardless of the financial situation of international retirement migrants, it can generally be said that a warmer and sunnier climate, as well as the more active and healthier lifestyle that go with it, are important reasons for transnational mobility in old age (Casado-Díaz et al., 2004; Gehring, 2018a; Gustafson, 2001; King et al., 1998; Repetti et al., 2018). Similarly, studies show that the “Mediterranean way of life” – usually perceived as more relaxed by international retirement migrants – is an

important factor in motivating older individuals to spend (part of) their retirement in a Mediterranean country (Casado-Díaz et al., 2004; Gehring, 2018a; Oliver, 2008). Often, individuals can enjoy a warmer climate, the environment, and a better quality of life before reaching retirement age during the course of, for example, holiday trips (Barbosa et al., 2021; King et al., 2021; Rodríguez, 2001). In the case of repeated holiday trips, individuals frequently acquired a second home, which can be “regarded as a first step before settling there permanently because [...] it provides an opportunity to get a better ‘feel for life’” (Casado-Díaz, 2006, pp. 1328–1329).

Such motivational factors can also be identified in older adults who do not relocate to another country but move back-and-forth between two countries. These “seasonal migrants” deliberately use this pattern of mobility to enjoy mild winters and avoid hot, crowded summers in, for example, Spain (Gustafson, 2001; Pickering et al., 2019). Moreover, a continuous mobility strategy allows older adults to balance their individual objectives for retirement with care obligations towards others, health care preferences, and their wish to maintain close personal ties (Bolzman et al., 2017; Gehring, 2017; Gustafson, 2008).

2.2 Mobile Older Labour Migrants

In the 1960s, the search for work and better employment opportunities abroad created a migratory movement (Zontini, 2015). Now that these labour migrants are reaching retirement age, “the sedentary constraint of participation in the labour market” no longer applies and, thus, the question of return arises (Hunter, 2011, p. 179; see also Bolzman et al., 2006). In the last two decades, much emphasis has been placed on understanding the return intentions and the factors influencing the decision to return. This literature has identified cultural, economic, social, and health-related factors as decisive elements for return decisions (Ciobanu & Ramos, 2016; Gehring, 2018a; Razum et al., 2005). Cultural factors refer to feelings of homesickness and nostalgia. Indeed, these feelings play an important part in return intentions, but also in actual return moves. Gehring (2018a) as well as Buffel and Phillipson (2011) demonstrate in their qualitative studies that “returning home” and “feelings of being homesick” were main themes in the narratives of such migrants. Another factor influencing return decisions is financial hardship. Economic difficulties mainly arise from a lack of insured years due to individuals’ migration trajectories which results in reduced pension rights (Bocker & Hunter, 2017). Furthermore, in some cases labour migrants had had unregistered jobs which meant that individuals had not been able to contribute to national pension schemes, thereby reinforcing financial precarity in old age (Gehring, 2018a). Migrants experiencing such economic difficulties tend to return to their home country in order to take advantage of the differences in the cost of living (Buffel & Phillipson, 2011). The social factors influencing the return decisions of older labour migrants are linked to significant and personal ties (Razum

et al., 2005; Tomás & Molina, 2024). Indeed, de Coulon and Wolff (2010) conclude that the probability of return is higher among migrants whose children live in the home country than among migrants whose children live close by. In the latter case, older migrants express a strong preference to remain. As a result, back-and-forth travel takes place (Bolzman et al., 2017; Buffel & Phillipson, 2011; Ciobanu et al., 2017; de Coulon & Wolff, 2010). Such international bi-local strategies are particularly favoured by women (Fokkema et al., 2016; Zontini, 2015). Thus, social factors can act as both a motivation and a hindrance in return intentions. Finally, health- and welfare-related considerations determine return decisions by mostly driving older migrants to opt against a permanent return (Bolzman et al., 2017; Buffel & Phillipson, 2011; Ciobanu et al., 2017). This is particularly true when older migrants believe the quality of health care in the host country is better than that in the home country (Fokkema et al., 2016; Hunter, 2011), and when welfare benefits are more generous in the host country (Ciobanu et al., 2017; Gehring, 2017). In such cases, older migrants prefer to move back-and-forth between the host and the home country in order to retain access to healthcare and welfare services. However, if physical incapacity sets due to illness or disability, older migrants find themselves having to reconsider their bi-local residence strategy (Bolzman et al., 2017; Gehring, 2018a).

2.3 Research Gaps

This section describes how individuals with and without pre-retirement migration trajectories engage in transnational mobility in old age. While the mobility of international retirement migrants is mostly fostered by financial, climate-, and lifestyle-related considerations, return migrants also take into account cultural, economic, social, and health-related factors when deciding on their transnational mobility. Furthermore, this section highlights that post-retirement mobilities may represent a newly developed practice or a continuation of a transnational lifestyle which has been established over time via tourism and return visits (Horn, 2022).

From this summary, two research gaps become apparent. First, transnational ageing research has mainly focused on the understanding and analysis of the mobility practices of two categories of migrants, namely international retirement migrants and older labour migrants (Ciobanu et al., 2017; Näre et al., 2017). However, as can be seen in the following section, a wide variety of individuals are *on the move* during retirement. Second, international retirement migrants' reasons and motivations for transnational mobilities have mostly been investigated separately from older labour migrants, which has resulted in "separate sets of literature" (Näre et al., 2017, p. 516). This paper therefore aims to broaden and deepen our knowledge of transnational ageing processes by studying 1) the different profiles of older adults engaging in transnational mobility, and 2) the reasons for such mobility. In so doing, it looks at the differences and similarities in the motivational factors of four categories of

older adults, i. e. first-time migrants, return migrants, onwards migrants, and bi-local older adults in a Swiss-Spanish context.

3 Building Categories of Older Adults through the Prism of Mobility

Recently, scholars have pointed to the fact that a use of a “new mobilities paradigm” provides relevant and original insights in the study of migratory phenomena by challenging the taken-for granted sedentary construction of societies (Sheller & Urry, 2006; see also Piccoli et al., 2024; Steiner & Wanner, 2019). In so doing, this paradigm invites scholars to look at, for example, less permanent forms of human movement, as well as ideas, objects, and other non-human elements that accompany, support, or hamper migration flows. In order to formalise and give credence to the connection between migration and mobility research, the Migration-Mobility-Nexus was introduced (Piccoli et al., 2024; Steiner & Wanner 2019). While Piccoli and colleagues (2024) identify four interplays between migration and mobility, I am interested in understanding the continuum between these two forms of movement in the context of transnational ageing (see also Ciobanu & Hunter, 2017; Nedelcu et al., 2024). To this end, qualitative interviews were conducted with older individuals who relocated from Switzerland to Spain, and with older adults travelling back-and-forth between the two countries since leaving work.

These conceptual reflections set the format for the construction of the four categories of older adults. Indeed, I built these categories, viewed from the prism of mobility, along the three following lines: 1) post-retirement mobility pattern; 2) pre-retirement migration trajectory; 3) and direction of mobility. The first dimension refers to the continuum, in which migration is defined as a long, rather permanent form of movement, and mobility as a temporary, fluid form of movement (D’Amato et al., 2019; Piccoli et al., 2024). In the second dimension, I distinguish between older adults with and without a pre-retirement migration trajectory to systematically include experienced mobilities within the analytical framework. Finally, to complete this framework, I differentiate between older individuals returning to a country they knew from previous migrations, and older adults moving to a new country. I make this distinction to take into account resources acquired from previous stays, on which older individuals can fall back on (e. g., place attachment, home ownership, and personal networks). Table 1 summarises these arguments.

Therefore, I define *bi-local older adults* as individuals who sojourn for at least three months per year in another country (Gustafson, 2001). *First-time migrants*, on the other hand, are individuals who spend their lives in one country and relocate to another during retirement. As the name of the category suggests, this is the first migration that these individuals have experienced in their life course. In the context of the state of the art presented in the previous section, first-time migrants can be

Table 1 Four categories of older adults

		Post-Retirement Mobility Pattern	
		Bi-Locality	Relocation
Pre-Retirement Migration Trajectory	No		First-time migrants
	Yes	Bi-local older adults	Return migrants Onwards migrants

linked to international retirement migration (Casado-Díaz et al., 2004). *Return migrants* are also connected to the previous section. However, in this study, return migrants are defined more broadly, i. e. as older adults who have moved at least once before ceasing work, and then have chosen to return to one of these countries during retirement. In so doing, this category encompasses the return movements of a wide variety of individuals, such as older labour migrants (Ciobanu & Ramos, 2016) and international retirement migrants (Giner-Monfort, 2018). Onwards migration, on the other hand, is “understood as a form of reactivation of migration and mobility of third-country nationals (TCNs) who use their new citizenship acquired in an EU country, [...] to move to another EU country” (Della Puppa et al., 2021, p. 17). I extend the characterisation of *onwards migrants* by referring more generally to individuals who migrated at least once during their life course and decided to relocate to another country during retirement. This category, thus, recognises continued migration trajectories and patterns of “re-emigration” (Giner-Monfort, 2018), a widely unacknowledged mobility practice in transnational ageing research.

By basing my comparative analysis on these four categories, I highlight the diversity of post-retirement mobility patterns and the various profiles of mobile older adults. This is the first original argument of this article.

4 Methods

4.1 Data collection and analysis

This paper is based on qualitative PhD research which investigates older adults’ transnational practices, mobilities, and personal networks in a Swiss-Spanish context. This context is relevant from both an immigration and an emigration point of view (Nedelcu et al., 2024; Tomás & Ravazzini, 2022), making the case study particularly interesting for comparative research designs.

The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in German, Swiss German, French, and Spanish. In total, I carried out 43 qualita-

tive interviews between June 2020 and August 2021. These interviews took place in personal and in online settings. The 27 face-to-face interviews were held at participants' homes, and if requested in other locations such as cafés and restaurants. Three different Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technologies, namely Skype, WhatsApp, and Zoom were employed to carry out the 16 online interviews. As with personal interviews, the "online" participants were free to choose their preferred VoIP technology, which explains the variety of software used in this qualitative project (Tomás & Bidet, 2024).

In order to maximise the potential to broaden existing knowledge on transnational mobilities in old age, the search for participants was guided by three criteria. First, all participants had a connection with Switzerland, either by residing or by having once lived and worked in this country. Second, all participants had reached the Swiss statutory retirement age of 64 for women and 65 for men. Third, all participants had engaged in transnational mobility since reaching retirement age. This "inclusive" manner of defining the population under study (Tomás & Ravazzini, 2022), required various recruitment strategies. Therefore, participants were reached through four channels (see also table A1 in the supplementary materials): 1) an announcement in June 2020 in the *Swiss Review*, a magazine published six times a year aimed at the Swiss community living abroad; 2) a letter of invitation sent by the Central Compensation Office (CCO) to 290 randomly selected individuals living in the *Comunidad Valenciana* and *Cataluña*; 3) snowball sampling; and 4) contacts from my personal and professional networks.

For data analysis, the semi-structured interviews were fully transcribed. Thematic coding was applied by following an abductive approach. In so doing, I first deductively identified the overarching topics of the codebook in order to remain focused on my main research interests. Then, I began the coding process by highlighting the interview passages and giving each a specific code (Thompson, 2022). This process was facilitated by the use of MAXQDA. Finally, I analysed the relationship between the different codes and "sort[ed] them based on their ability to collectively explain the story behind the data" (Thompson, 2022, p. 1414). One theme that played a particularly important role in the qualitative interviews relates to the factors motivating and influencing transnational mobility in old age. This empirical paper is based on the codes assigned to this theme.

4.2 Qualitative Sample

As previously mentioned, 43 interviews were conducted in the framework of this PhD research. Nine of these interviews were carried out with couples and the remaining 34 interviews with individuals, making a total of 52 participants (24 women and 28 men). These older individuals spent (part of their) retirement on the South coast of Spain and were between 64 and 89 years old. Regarding interviewees' pre-retirement

trajectories and post-retirement mobility patterns, the sample included a variety of both. Indeed, 22 participants had no pre-retirement migration experience, 12 had migrated once before reaching retirement age, and 18 migrated multiple times before ceasing work. Furthermore, 44 interviewees relocated to Spain, and the remaining eight travelled back-and-forth between Switzerland and Spain. Therefore, my sample consisted of 17 first-time migrants, 11 return migrants, 16 onwards migrants, and eight bi-local older adults. Table B2 in the supplementary materials provides more information on the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants.

The category first-time migration represents the most homogeneous group. Indeed, all 17 interviewees were born in Switzerland and had spent their entire lives in this country. When they reached retirement age, they decided to relocate to Spain. The category return migration captures more heterogeneity. A total of eleven older individuals are included in this category. Of these, eight participants are characterised by a “traditional” return (Bolzman et al., 2006; Ciobanu & Ramos, 2016), and one participant can be linked to the emerging research field on the return of international retirement migrants (Giner-Monfort et al., 2016; Giner-Monfort, 2018). This latter older migrant, therefore, returned to Switzerland after spending 14 years in Spain during retirement. The remaining two older individuals spent between three and five years in Spain for professional and affective reasons, then moved (back) to Switzerland, and finally decided to relocate to Spain during retirement. This return pattern has been widely overlooked in transnational ageing research. The category onwards migration also captures the diversity of older adults on the move. In total, 16 participants experienced multiple migrations during their life course. While eleven of these interviewees moved to Switzerland from another country, the remaining five individuals were born in Switzerland. These five participants spent several years (2–6 years) in another country for personal or professional reasons before returning to Switzerland. At retirement age, all 16 onwards migrants decided to leave Switzerland and to relocate to a “new” country. Finally, the category bi-locality includes eight older adults. These bi-local individuals reside in Switzerland (6), Germany (1) and Spain (1). The latter individual spends between three and six months per year in Switzerland, while the other seven bi-local older adults regularly visit Spain. In terms of pre-retirement migration trajectories, this category is the most diverse: three participants had never migrated, neither before nor after ceasing work; two interviewees migrated once during their life course; and the remaining two older adults migrated multiple times.

5 Comparative Analysis of Motivational Factors

The analysis of the qualitative interviews shows that 1) climate-related preferences; 2) financial considerations; and 3) a sense of attachment fostered by return visits,

tourism, and family ties act as decisive motivational factors in transnational mobility in old age. Furthermore, data analysis highlights that major life events such as health issues, unemployment, separation from a partner, or a new affective relationship greatly influence post-retirement mobilities. This section, thus, delves into the three main reasons identified in the qualitative data, then discusses the role of turning points in life courses leading to transnational mobility in old age. Finally, it emphasises the novel aspects of the article in a final discussion.

5.1 Climate

Climate- and lifestyle-related factors motivating transnational mobilities have mainly been discussed in the context of international retirement migration, i. e. older adults without pre-retirement migration trajectories who spent (part of their) retirement in Southern (European) countries (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Casado-Díaz et al., 2004; Gehring, 2018a; Gustafson, 2001; King et al., 1998; Oliver, 2008; Repetti et al., 2018). In my comparative analysis, however, I came across these motivational factors in the narratives of all four categories of older adults. Indeed, participants in this study cited better climatic conditions and a perceived slower pace of life as key elements for their mobility. These reasons are particularly prevalent in bi-local older adults, as their mobility strategy allows them to avoid hot and crowded summers in Spain and cold winters in Switzerland (Gustafson, 2001). However, climate and lifestyle considerations not only motivate transnational mobility, but they also influence the choice of retirement location. Juan, a bi-national individual in his mid-80s, spent up to five months a year in Spain. During these five months, he and his wife resided in three different regions. They stayed with his wife's family in northern Spain, and his own family on the south coast of Spain. However, most of their time was spent in the area around Valencia, where they bought a flat shortly before retirement. The decision to buy a home in this region was motivated by climate- and lifestyle-related considerations, as well as relational factors. Indeed, Juan and his wife looked with friends for a place by the sea where they could enjoy a "*quiet retirement*".

Thus, bi-locality in particular is influenced by quality of life considerations. As a result, individuals born and raised in Spain do not necessarily return to their hometown but choose their second home based on climate and lifestyle preferences.

5.2 Financial factors

Financial considerations play a crucial role in transnational mobility in old age. During the qualitative interviews, first-time, return, and onwards migrants consistently indicated that financial factors were one of the main drivers for relocation. However, for bi-local older adults, such considerations were not a priority which led me to

deduce that back-and-forth movements are mainly driven by factors other than financial ones. One explanation for this finding stems from the relatively financially privileged position of bi-local older adults. Indeed, it was found that this pattern of mobility is facilitated above all by second home ownership as bi-local participants owned a property in Spain and additionally owned or rented a home in Switzerland. In other words, back-and-forth movements require a certain financial flexibility (Bolzman et al., 2006; Repetti et al., 2018).

In contrast to bi-local interviewees, financial considerations play a major role in the narratives of participants who relocated to Spain. I identified two different types of narratives. On the one hand, lower living costs and the higher purchasing power of retirement incomes were put forward as the driving forces behind participants' decision to relocate. On the other hand, interviewees stressed the difficulty of making ends meet in Switzerland. While the first narrative viewed relocation as an "income-optimisation strategy" (Fokkema et al., 2016), the second conceived migration as a specific strategy to deal with financial precarity in old age. First-time migrants mainly referred to their improved financial situation through relocation to Spain. Return and onwards migrants, on the other hand, had mixed responses. For some, relocation was a useful strategy to maximise their available income, for others it was a means of coping financially in old age. Thus, pre-retirement migration trajectories impact economic resources available during retirement. This is connected to reduced pension rights as a result of incomplete national insurance contributions, unregistered work relationships (Bocker & Hunter, 2017; Gehring, 2018a), and fluctuating exchange rates which might devalue retirement incomes (Repetti et al., 2018). The problem of missing contribution years and unstable exchange rates is highlighted by Patricia, who migrated from Colombia to Switzerland in her late thirties:

I only came to Switzerland when I was 38, so I have a big contribution gap. My husband has an even bigger gap because he came to Switzerland later. So, we would have had to live very frugally in Switzerland. [...] I also have some money in Colombia. I saved it for my pension while I was working there as self-employed. I keep it in Colombia, because when I change pesos to euros, there isn't much left.

Interview with Patricia, 67 years old, onwards migrant

In conclusion, financial considerations play a decisive role in the transnational mobilities of older adults. While individuals in relatively privileged financial positions can decide with greater flexibility on their preferred mobility pattern, older adults with limited economic resources feel compelled to leave Switzerland in order to make ends meet. The latter narrative is particularly prevalent among participants who were already mobile before reaching retirement age.

5.3 Sense of attachment to Spain

Various studies have shown that feelings of homesickness and nostalgia weigh on older labour migrants' return decisions (Buffel & Phillipson, 2011; Gehring, 2018a). In my data I find that return migrants express similar narratives, as can be seen in the case of Antonio. He moved back to Spain in 2018, after having spent nearly 50 years in Switzerland. In the course of the interview, he mentioned the relevance of being back in his own country: "*I feel good here, because I am in my homeland, here are my roots. I was born in the centre of [city in Spain] and I never forgot the town, although I spent many years in Switzerland*". Interestingly, a sense of attachment can also be found in the narratives of the two return migrants who spent between three and five years in Spain for professional reasons. Jens, who returned to Spain in 2019 after his wife died, explained why he relocated to Spain thus:

Ever since I spent a few years in Spain in my twenties, I've felt connected to the country. How can I explain it [...] Sometimes I didn't think about Spain for years, but every now and then I would read a book in Spanish or take a course to keep my language skills up.

Interview with Jens, 79 years old, return migrant

Although these feelings of attachment to Spain were most strongly expressed by return migrants, I found similar elements in the discourses of other participants. Indeed, many of the first-time and onwards migrants, as well as bi-local older adults spent their holidays in Spain before retiring. As a result of these regular trips, they got to know and appreciate the country, the weather, and the way of life. The purchase of a holiday home further encouraged return visits and while this was perceived as a lucrative investment, such homes were often linked to mobility intentions for retirement years (Casado-Díaz, 2006). Charles and Liliane, a couple that migrated multiple times before reaching retirement age, explained their decision-making process as follows: "*Initially, we bought the house to spend our holidays in and as an investment. And then, well, we quickly realised the difference in the cost of living... So, we decided to move here for our retirement long before ceasing work*". Besides these financial considerations, they decided not to return to France or England, but to move to Spain because of, amongst other aspects, the climate and the environment.

David, a first-time migrant in his early seventies, goes one step further in his narrative. During the interview he mentioned that he had spent holidays in Spain for "*a very, very long time*". At present, he lives in the house, which he inherited from his parents. Throughout these years, David began to feel attached to Spain, which he described as follows: "*My mother was already very fond of Spain and I think I inherited her love for this country. [...] Living in this house, which my parents built years ago, is like continuing her wishes*". In summary, I found strong indications that

tourism and mobility in old age are interconnected and facilitate the migration process (Barbosa et al., 2021; Casado-Díaz et al., 2014; King et al., 2021; Rodríguez, 2001). However, I would like to take this argument one step further by stating that a sense of attachment is also developed during these repeated sojourns. These feelings of attachment in turn can function as a specific motivational factor for mobility during retirement, as the empirical examples indicate.

Furthermore, an attachment to Spain can be the result of family relationships. For example, among the 17 first-time migrants, two were from a bi-national marriage and two had children living in Spain. Such ties influence mobility intentions (Casado-Díaz, 2006; de Coulon & Wolff, 2010). The interview with Heinz exemplifies how a sense of attachment can be created through family ties: *“My wife is from here, her relatives all live in this region. When we spent time in Spain before reaching retirement age, it wasn't just to go on holiday. We already lived here, but for shorter periods than we are able to now”*. Over the years, he fell in love with the country and wished to relocate to Spain during retirement. However, as his wife prefers to move back-and-forth between Switzerland and Spain, they decided to keep their main residence in Switzerland.

To conclude, individuals with different migration trajectories build a sense of attachment to Spain over time. These feelings can be linked to participants' sense of attachment to their home country, or as a result of regular return visits, holiday stays, and family ties. In any case, such a sense of attachment can act as a decisive reason for all four categories of older adults to spend (part of their) retirement in Spain.

5.4 Turning points in life courses

This section is dedicated to a topic that has received comparatively little attention in transnational ageing research, namely how turning points in life courses influence transnational mobilities in old age (Bolzman et al., 2021). For international retirement migrants, for example, Oliver (2008) demonstrated that the death of a parent, a divorce, or an illness can act as a catalyst for older individuals to move to another country. In the case of older labour migrants residing in the destination country and spending part of the year in their country of origin, Fokkema and colleagues (2016) illustrate that deteriorating health and financial situations prevent continued back-and-forth movements. I find similar elements in the narratives of my interviewees.

Among the participants who relocated to Spain, return migrants were most affected by pivotal events in their life course. Due to the heavy, physical work carried out by most older labour migrants throughout their lives (Bolzman et al., 2006; Ciobanu et al., 2017), many return migrants spoke of the onset of health problems when approaching retirement age. Some other return migrants lost their jobs a few years before reaching statutory retirement age. As these older migrants owned a property in Spain, they decided to leave Switzerland and live off their sav-

ings until they could receive their pensions. María Luisa, for example, returned to Spain with her husband 23 years ago after she lost her job and fell ill with cancer shortly before turning 60:

Finally, I couldn't work anymore. [...] My husband, who is nine months younger than me, was also exhausted from work. As we had this little flat in Spain, we decided to come back and wait for my pension. [...] In addition, the Spanish state gave fifty thousand pesetas to people who returned. So, with this help and the little money we had, we were able to live for three years until I received my pension.

Interview with María Luisa, 83 years old, return migrant

Therefore, unemployment and an illness shortly before retirement can result in financial precarity or exacerbate the economic situation of older migrants.

In the case of Michel, the return migrant who spent 14 years in Spain and then decided to move back to Switzerland, transnational mobility was caused by his divorce. The fact that such events can act as a catalyst for return movements is reflected in the literature. Giner-Monfort and colleagues (2016), for example, name the death of a partner, declining health, and age-related disabilities as turning points that drive international retirement migrants to return to their home country.

Such turning points in life courses were also mentioned in the interviews conducted with first-time and onwards migrants. On the one hand, unemployment, divorce, and the onset of disabilities were highlighted as pivotal life events that drove these older individuals to search for a “new start” in Spain. On the other hand, new affective relationships were put forward by some first-time and onwards migrants as important reasons for their relocation during retirement. Magdalena, for example, explains during the interview:

We met here [Spain] when I was on holiday with a friend. Then we moved back-and-forth between Switzerland and Spain to see each other. But now I've been living in Spain for three years. He's also a retiree and he can't live in Switzerland on his German pension. So we decided that I would move.

Interview with Magdalena, 77 years old, onwards migrant

In contrast to return migrants, onwards and first-time migrants' mobility is, therefore, not only influenced by disruptive life events, but also by “positive” events such as a new, affective relationship.

Among bi-local participants, turning points did not play a major role. This finding is not surprising, as I interviewed these older adults while they were still highly mobile. They, thus, held the necessary conditions and means to move as they pleased between Switzerland and Spain. However, situations can change (Fokkema

et al., 2016). María Isabel, for example, moved back-and-forth for about 15 years before returning permanently to Spain in the early 2000s. Her return to Spain was instigated by the significantly deteriorating health of her husband. This turning point in their life, forced María Isabel and her husband to make a final decision on their main country of residence.

To conclude, life events play an important role in the mobility of all four categories of older adults. On the one hand, such turning points re-define the capacity to remain mobile in old age. On the other hand, these turning points drive older individuals to reassess their current situation and to make adjustments. In such cases, life events can act as a catalyst for transnational mobility in old age.

5.5 Discussion

The contribution of this paper to existing debates in transnational ageing literature is fourfold. First, the construction of categories of older adults viewed through the prism of mobility draws attention to multiple migration trajectories over a life course. Such patterns of onwards migration have been largely overlooked by transnational ageing research. This paper, however, sheds new light on the diversity of older adults *on the move*, thereby broadening the academic debate. In so doing, the comparative analysis of motivational factors demonstrates that financial concerns play an important role in onwards migration. In this context, financial difficulties often result from a lack of contributing years towards a pension and the devaluation of retirement incomes linked to exchange rate fluctuations (Bocker & Hunter, 2017; Repetti et al., 2018). This finding is relevant because it highlights the impact of migration trajectories on retirement incomes.

Second, while transnational ageing research has mainly been conducted with either international retirement migrants or return migrants (Ciobanu et al., 2017; Näre et al., 2017), the comparative analysis presented in this paper also explores the similarities in motivational factors between these categories of older adults. For example, it has been shown that climatic and cultural considerations play a role in the transnational mobility of first-time and return migrants. This is interesting as climate- and lifestyle-related reasons have been discussed primarily in the context of first-time migration (Casado-Díaz et al., 2004; Gehring, 2018a; Gustafson, 2001; King et al., 1998; Repetti et al., 2018), and cultural reasons in the context of return migration (Buffel & Phillipson, 2011; Gehring, 2018a). However, this study demonstrates that return migrants take into consideration climate and lifestyle factors when choosing their mobility pattern and their retirement location. Also, the narratives of first-time migrants illustrate that a sense of attachment can be developed through repeated touristic trips and family ties.

Third, in addition to the similarities in the reasons for transnational mobility, I also find resemblances in the profiles of older adults in all different categories (see

Table A1 in the supplementary materials). As my categorisation is based on three dimensions of mobility rather than a specific ethnicity or migration background (Nedelcu et al., 2024; Tomás & Ravazzini, 2022), Swiss citizens are present in all four categories of the analytical framework. In a world in motion, it is therefore important to find new dimensions for categorisation to gain a better understanding, for example, of the reasons for financial problems during retirement. Indeed, this study shows that the pre-retirement migration trajectory, rather than having a specific ethnicity, is the decisive factor for such difficulties.

Fourth, empirical evidence presented in this paper highlights the influential role of life course events in shaping post-retirement mobility patterns, a topic that has aroused comparatively little interest in transnational ageing research (Bolzman et al., 2021). The most important life course events affecting participants in this study are unemployment, the development of health problems and disabilities, divorce, and newly formed relationships. This comparative analysis demonstrates that return migrants are most affected by pivotal turning points, while bi-local older adults are least affected by such events.

6 Conclusion

This paper relies on a comparative analysis of four categories of older adults, namely first-time migrants, return migrants, onwards migrants, and bi-local older adults. More precisely, it explores the factors motivating and influencing transnational mobilities in old age. In so doing, this study broadens our academic knowledge by extending the analysis to onwards migrants, a yet little researched group of older adults. Furthermore, the study deepens existing scientific knowledge in transnational ageing research by comparatively analysing the differences *and* similarities in motivational factors in four categories of older adults *on the move*. It, thus, joins recently published, eminent research using a comparative approach (Bolzman et al., 2021; Gehring, 2018a; King et al., 2017), which allows for a more nuanced understanding of transnational ageing processes. Finally, the study highlights life course events and their ability to influence transnational mobilities in old age, a relatively underexplored topic in transnational ageing research (Bolzman et al., 2021).

To expand these findings, future research should shed more light on the factors driving the choice for a specific mobility pattern. In this context, personal ties have been shown to be influential (de Coulon & Wolff, 2010; Gustafson, 2008; Razum et al., 2005; Tomás & Molina, 2024). To this end, future research could explore how personal ties come into play and are taken into consideration in older adults' migration decisions.

7 References

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Appendix

A. Additional Methodological Information

Table A1 Information on recruitment of participants

Recruitment channel	Number of participants recruited	Profiles of recruited participants	
		Nationality(ies)	Categories of older adults
Announcement in the Swiss Review (OSA, 2020, p. 25)	21	Swiss: 19 participants Swiss double nationals: 2 participants	First-time migrants: 14 Return migrants: 1 Onwards migrants: 5 Bi-locals: 1
Invitation letter sent by the CCO in March 2021 (Tomás, 2022)	18	Swiss: 3 participants Swiss double nationals: 4 participants Spanish: 3 Other: 8 participants	First-time migrants: 2 Return migrants: 8 Onwards migrants: 7 Bi-locals: 1
Snowball sampling	6	Swiss: 5 Spanish: 1	First-time migrants: 1 Return migrants: 1 Onwards migrants: 2 Bi-locals: 2
Contacts from personal and professional network	7	Swiss: 4 participants Swiss double nationals: 1 participant Other: 2 participants	First-time migrants: 0 Return migrants: 1 Onwards migrants: 2 Bi-locals: 4

B. Socio-demographic information

Table B2 Socio-demographic information of participants

Pseudonym of Participant [Interview Number]	Age	Gender	Civil status	Nationality(ies)	Occupation*	Pre-retirement migration experience	Post-retirement mobility pattern	Direction of mobility	Category of older adult
Josef [101]	72	Man	Married	Swiss	Sales occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Erika [101]	69	Woman	Married	Swiss	Service occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Walter [102]	72	Man	Married	Swiss	Sales occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
David [103]	69	Man	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Robert [104]	72	Man	Divorced	Swiss	Semi-skilled worker	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Ernst [105]	79	Man	Married	Swiss	Higher administrative occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Heidi [105]	77	Woman	Married	Swiss	Unskilled worker	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Ernesto [106]	67	Man	Married	Argentinian	Semi-skilled worker	Multiple migrations	Back-and-forth mobility between Switzerland and Spain	'Known' country	Bi-local older adult
Rudolf [107]	75	Man	Divorced	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Back-and-forth mobility between Switzerland and Spain	'New' country	Bi-local older adult

Anton [108]	77	Man	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Monique [109]	69	Woman	Divorced	Swiss	Service occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Juan [111]	85	Man	Married	Swiss & Spanish	Semi-skilled worker	One migration	Back-and-forth mobility between Switzerland and Spain	'Known' country	Bi-local older adult
Jacqueline [112]	67	Woman	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Back-and-forth mobility between Switzerland and Spain	'New' country	Bi-local older adult
Patricia [113]	67	Woman	Married	Swiss & Colombian	Service occupation	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Milan [115]	84	Man	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Nina [115]	82	Woman	Married	Swiss	Service occupation	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Michel [116]	76	Man	Divorced	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Marianne [117]	75	Woman	Married	Swiss	Service occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Verena [119]	75	Woman	Divorced	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Marcel [122]	88	Man	Widowed	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Gertrud [123]	76	Woman	Divorced	Swiss & German	Semi-skilled worker	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant

Continuation of Table B2 on the next page.

Pseudonym of Participant [Interview Number]	Age	Gender	Civil status	Nationality(ies)	Occupation *	Pre-retirement migration experience	Post-retirement mobility pattern	Direction of mobility	Category of older adult
Heinz [124]	73	Man	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Back-and-forth mobility between Switzerland and Spain	'New' country	Bi-local older adult
Antonio [125]	74	Man	Divorced	Spanish	Semi-skilled worker	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Martin [126]	66	Man	Divorced	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Jean [127]	67	Man	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Cécile [128]	74	Woman	Divorced	Swiss	Service occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
María Isabel [130]	89	Woman	Widowed	Spanish	Service occupation	Multiple migration	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Alain [131]	77	Man	Divorced	French	Sales occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Mario [132]	88	Man	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Pilar [132]	78	Woman	Married	Swiss & Spanish	Service occupation	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Pierre [133]	72	Man	Married	Swiss	Service occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Charles [134]	78	Man	Married	British	Professional and technical occupation	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Liliane [134]	81	Woman	Married	French	Sales occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant

Gerry [135]	64	Man	Single	Italian & Argentinian	Service occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Peter [136]	74	Man	Married	Swiss	Higher administrative occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Rita [136]	73	Woman	Married	Swiss	Service occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Laurent [137]	85	Man	Married	Swiss	Service occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Sophie [137]	74	Woman	Married	Swiss	Semi-skilled worker	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
René [138]	68	Man	Divorced	Swiss	Semi-skilled worker	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Wilhelm [139]	80	Man	Married	Austrian	Higher administrative occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Ingrid [139]	77	Woman	Married	German	Clerical occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Agnès [140]	82	Woman	Divorced	Swiss	Sales occupation	Multiple migrations	Back-and-forth mobility Switzerland and Spain	'New' country	Bi-local older adult
Carmen [141]	73	Woman	Widowed	Swiss & Spanish	Service occupation	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Andrés [142]	78	Man	Married	Spanish	Skilled worker	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Lucía [142]	77	Woman	Married	Spanish	Skilled worker	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Dolores [143]	69	Woman	Divorced	Swiss & Spanish	Clerical occupation	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Charlotte [144]	72	Woman	Married	German	Service occupation	Multiple migrations	Back-and-forth mobility Germany and Spain	'New' country	Bi-local older adult

Continuation of Table B2 on the next page.

Continuation of Table B2.

Pseudonym of Participant [Interview Number]	Age	Gender	Civil status	Nationality(ies)	Occupation*	Pre-retirement migration experience	Post-retirement mobility pattern	Direction of mobility	Category of older adult
María Luisa [145]	83	Woman	Married	Spanish	Service occupation	One migration	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Magdalena [146]	77	Woman	Widowed	German	Sales occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	Onwards migrant
Jens [147]	79	Man	Widowed	Swiss & German	Professional and technical occupation	Multiple migrations	Relocation to Spain	'Known' country	Return migrant
Susi [148]	87	Woman	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Back-and-forth mobility between Switzerland and Spain	'New' country	Bi-local older adult
Philippe [150]	81	Man	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Relocation to Spain	'New' country	First-time migrant
Heinz [124]	73	Man	Married	Swiss	Professional and technical occupation	No migration	Back-and-forth mobility between Switzerland and Spain	'New' country	Bi-local older adult

Note: Couple interviews are marked in grey.

* This information was gathered by coding the last occupation before retirement. Then, the occupational categories from the European Social Survey were used in order to simplify the data (ESS, 2016). These categories are: 1) Professional and technical occupations; 2) Higher administrator occupations; 3) Clerical occupations; 4) Sales occupations; 5) Service occupations; 6) Skilled worker; 7) Semi-skilled worker; 8) Unskilled worker; 9) Farm worker. The three women who did not have paid jobs and who mainly took care of the family and the household were assigned to the service occupations.