

## Living conditions

The living conditions of old people are a reflection of the living conditions of society as a whole. The change in living standards in European countries in the past 20 years has had its effect on the living conditions of old people, but even in the richest countries the living standards of the retired are lower than those of the working age groups (42). Changes in the living standards of the working sectors of the population also take place faster than among the retired, and the differences between the living conditions of the middle-aged and the old will widen (42). Studies conducted in various European countries permit the assumption that living conditions are worse in the older age groups (43,44). The living conditions of men are better than those of women (42).

The definition of level of living has been based on either needs or resources. According to Drewnowski (45), the level of living of a population is the level of satisfaction of its needs attained per unit of time as a result of the goods, services, and living conditions which the population enjoys in the unit of time. In talking about living conditions the term "standard of living" is widely used, and it is sometimes seen merely as an economic concept, a measure of material wellbeing. The term "living conditions" is most often used with the same meaning as standard of living. There are many measurable aspects of living conditions. Drewnowski (45) has pointed out that it is possible to find meaningful quantitative expressions for each of the aspects of every complex and broad aggregate and yet it may not be possible to obtain a clear idea of the meaning of a numerical expression that could be arrived at if an attempt was ever made to aggregate the numerical values for all aspects.

Living conditions are primarily determined by economic resources, but cultural factors, regional customs, past events and education have a strong influence on the standards people expect. Needs and demands also change in the course of time. There are great individual differences in subjective evaluation of the standard of living. Even when belonging to the same age group, sex, and nationality, people may have differing ideas about what particular factors constitute an adequate standard of living.

A uniform evaluation of the standard of living is very difficult and a comparison of the living conditions of old people in various countries presents enormous problems, but the main components of the standard of living can be compared. In different reports on standards of living and levels of living the lists of components change, but one of the main components

has always remained — housing conditions, or shelter, as it is called in Drewnowski's classification (45–49).

According to Stevens-Long (50), most of the research on housing specifically designed for the elderly shows that the physical and social environment has a decisive impact on the wellbeing of older people, in particular on life satisfaction and social behaviour. Housing is no longer considered as an element that has no connection with the whole environment; for the elderly it is of special importance because an old person is much more tied to his living environment than younger age groups. Housing for the elderly should be related to every aspect of living, including the system of services (51). In recent studies on the living conditions of elderly people, special attention has been paid to housing conditions (52,53).

Old people's living conditions and family structure and function are closely related to each other. Family structure is determined by, and changes with, the culture prevailing in society and its development in time. In the past few years social care systems have been developed in many countries to replace the more family-centred care systems for old people. On the other hand, the family continues to be considered the basis for the continuing support needed by old people and a basic emotional resource (3,54). In studies and discussions on old age the alternative of living together with the children or alone has been a frequent subject of debate. Living together with the family in one and the same household appears to be approved where circumstances warrant it, but it is not generally considered to be desirable. It has been found that old people living in urban areas are willing to live with their children only after they have been widowed (54).

This section of the report is concerned mainly with one component of living conditions, housing. Its significance increases with age; how well an old person can live outside an institution depends to a large extent on the standard of his housing.

## **Family Structure**

In most study regions living alone increases with age (Fig. 6). In all regions and in all age groups the percentage of women living alone is considerably higher than that of men. There are great differences between the different areas. The percentages of those living alone are highest in Berlin (West), Tampere, and Upper Normandy, lowest in Kuwait and Low Ombrone.

As far as age and sex are concerned, no clear connection was found as regards old people living in large families (four or more family members) (Table 27). However, there were major differences between areas, which can be explained on the basis of cultural differences and their social development over time. In Kuwait 84–92% of men and 81–95% of women live in large families. In Tampere and Berlin (West) less than 10% do.

Living with a spouse also decreases with age, the percentages in all regions and in all age groups being lower among women than among men (Fig. 7). The percentage of women living with their husband also decreases with age more sharply than among men. For instance, of the men belonging to the youngest age group, 70–95% live with their wife, whereas 36–80% of

Table 27. Percentages of people living with four or more people<sup>a</sup>

	Age group (years)													
	Men							Women						
	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89		
Brussels	0	0	4	4	0	0	3	0	4	0	4	7		
Leuven	16	14	5	2	6	12	3	8	7	13	18	9		
Berlin (West)	2	1	0	0	2	3	2	2	0	1	3	2		
Tampere	5	4	1	1	3	5	3	2	1	3	4	0		
Midi-Pyrénées	13	8	8	13	21	18	7	7	7	11	11	15		
Upper Normandy	1	5	5	0	5	0	3	1	1	4	3	13		
Rural Greece	22	22	24	33	31	35	27	18	32	27	27	33		
Florence	16	10	15	16	18	25	13	22	25	20	18	12		
Low Ombrone	23	32	33	40	47	46	26	34	44	37	42	43		
West Amiata	9	7	13	11	12	11	9	6	11	17	16	12		
Kuwait	84	89	89	92	87	84	81	84	86	95	94	94		
Bialystok	36	31	23	20	27	—	27	25	16	26	24	—		
Bucharest	8	2	11	7	22	20	10	11	11	9	18	13		
Kiev	19	20	17	22	20	11	19	20	15	14	16	18		
Belgrade	23	20	14	14	18	11	14	20	13	13	16	18		
Zagreb	29	24	11	24	12	13	13	14	18	12	13	20		

<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 42.

Table 28. Percentages of people with four or more rooms for their own use<sup>a</sup>

	Age group (years)													
	Men							Women						
	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89		
Brussels	61	62	60	58	48	35	53	58	56	52	41	33		
Leuven	89	83	88	83	87	70	88	86	79	76	66	55		
Berlin (West)	33	20	23	18	13	17	16	13	7	11	8	7		
Tampere	38	33	26	22	17	27	21	15	15	11	14	13		
Midi-Pyrénées	60	62	57	46	42	40	66	57	58	55	48	39		
Upper Normandy	64	52	56	52	56	86	58	48	49	42	42	50		
Rural Greece	7	7	3	9	2	3	13	8	5	4	4	2		
Florence	41	49	38	48	38	22	40	34	38	29	11	10		
Low Ombrone	32	36	19	19	18	14	29	25	21	14	10	20		
West Amiata	32	41	34	34	24	27	35	36	27	24	26	19		
Kuwait	1	1	0	3	2	4	0	1	0	0	0	1		
Bialystok	8	6	5	3	2	—	10	7	3	2	5	—		
Bucharest	3	5	2	2	0	0	3	3	1	2	0	1		
Kiev	1	1	0	3	1	1	0	2	2	0	0	0		
Belgrade	5	1	6	3	5	5	3	4	3	4	5	4		
Zagreb	15	13	7	13	7	16	11	7	9	5	7	12		

<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 50.

Table 29. Percentages of people with a bathroom, shower, or sauna<sup>a</sup>

	Age group (years)											
	Men						Women					
	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89
Brussels	81	77	88	73	64	65	80	64	67	76	70	61
Leuven	83	80	64	34	44	52	66	68	45	50	56	52
Berlin (West)	92	89	80	81	78	77	86	89	85	83	80	74
Tampere	84	94	79	74	83	84	81	80	77	73	67	68
Midi-Pyrénées	79	86	71	71	76	70	85	74	72	73	65	72
Upper Normandy	80	73	73	56	60	71	73	62	56	54	45	38
Rural Greece	33	24	16	16	21	16	29	17	18	13	16	17
Florence	84	93	88	95	84	91	89	91	86	86	84	89
Low Ombrone	92	90	87	86	88	85	89	87	87	85	87	87
West Amiata	81	77	75	63	59	60	76	77	71	65	61	66
Kuwait	97	100	99	100	99	98	100	99	99	100	99	100
Bialystok	64	62	61	45	56	—	65	67	54	56	55	—
Bucharest	75	78	83	84	89	88	82	77	76	73	81	79
Kiev	94	90	93	96	95	87	87	90	81	87	81	87
Belgrade	83	86	76	77	78	72	90	80	70	67	75	77
Zagreb	89	91	77	80	77	84	88	75	73	73	66	76

<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 5.1.1.

Table 30. Percentages of people with an automatic washing machine<sup>a</sup>

	Age group (years)													
	Men							Women						
	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89		
Brussels	50	55	35	46	24	4	37	32	26	28	22	33		
Leuven	86	49	51	32	51	51	65	61	34	34	56	48		
Berlin (West)	86	68	66	45	48	47	70	59	37	27	25	20		
Tampere	72	69	48	52	42	49	50	53	42	33	38	43		
Midi-Pyrénées	89	92	87	71	71	84	89	84	67	73	64	69		
Upper Normandy	86	85	78	58	58	79	85	75	67	47	39	50		
Rural Greece	14	13	11	12	10	16	9	6	11	6	11	8		
Florence	93	91	78	84	77	69	84	79	77	64	71	75		
Low Ombrone	88	80	81	82	81	83	84	81	78	78	75	69		
West Amiata	81	76	74	74	54	57	77	73	69	66	66	55		
Kuwait	90	95	95	94	94	89	94	98	93	94	94	97		
Bialystok	70	71	65	60	59	—	65	62	60	51	43	—		
Bucharest	93	74	78	59	76	79	70	58	49	49	60	56		
Kiev	40	35	33	25	19	12	58	51	26	19	11	12		
Belgrade	86	85	69	73	77	62	81	78	68	55	60	62		
Zagreb	90	88	76	66	75	63	86	72	63	64	56	65		

<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 58.1.

Table 31. Percentages of people with a television set<sup>a</sup>

	Age group (years)													
	Men							Women						
	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89		
Brussels	75	90	92	88	64	88	93	91	89	90	81	82		
Leuven	100	94	93	85	90	95	97	91	91	90	92	84		
Berlin (West)	100	98	96	95	91	89	97	99	97	93	86	86		
Tampere	96	94	91	90	83	76	92	90	86	75	68	85		
Midi-Pyrénées	94	95	92	88	87	92	95	90	92	91	82	80		
Upper Normandy	91	88	95	91	95	100	97	93	89	81	71	88		
Rural Greece	4	10	19	16	19	24	7	17	22	28	26	44		
Florence	95	98	96	94	94	87	90	94	90	95	94	92		
Low Ombrone	95	95	96	93	96	96	95	97	92	93	96	87		
West Amiata	88	86	90	82	64	70	93	89	84	78	77	81		
Kuwait	97	100	96	98	98	97	95	99	98	100	100	97		
Bialystok	91	88	95	77	79	—	89	84	76	75	70	—		
Bucharest	96	98	91	88	89	81	86	74	80	79	79	81		
Kiev	94	96	92	94	87	88	94	97	90	87	77	66		
Belgrade	92	95	86	88	90	76	94	91	85	76	83	73		
Zagreb	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		

<sup>a</sup> Derived variable 19.1.

Table 32. Percentages of people with a telephone at their disposal<sup>a</sup>

	Age group (years)													
	Men							Women						
	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89		
Brussels	68	77	80	85	52	69	73	64	74	62	81	61		
Leuven	69	39	53	39	55	50	36	71	49	57	54	45		
Berlin (West)	92	93	80	77	81	75	85	87	82	74	72	64		
Tampere	86	89	79	79	79	84	78	77	75	73	68	68		
Midi-Pyrénées	68	76	71	66	66	72	73	69	62	63	55	57		
Upper Normandy	70	73	68	60	51	64	68	53	57	54	42	63		
Rural Greece	30	24	20	22	20	24	23	9	18	12	16	9		
Florence	96	95	95	97	91	98	94	95	93	99	88	93		
Low Ombrone	66	55	59	56	61	58	60	59	60	60	58	62		
West Amiata	43	41	50	36	27	34	52	41	41	37	30	30		
Kuwait	74	86	78	85	83	71	68	86	80	79	84	88		
Bialystok	19	14	22	12	16	—	13	18	12	18	10	—		
Bucharest	87	78	91	81	95	88	82	82	80	75	84	83		
Kiev	61	51	57	65	56	56	55	53	48	48	48	33		
Belgrade	59	63	54	50	57	48	67	55	53	43	56	53		
Zagreb	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		

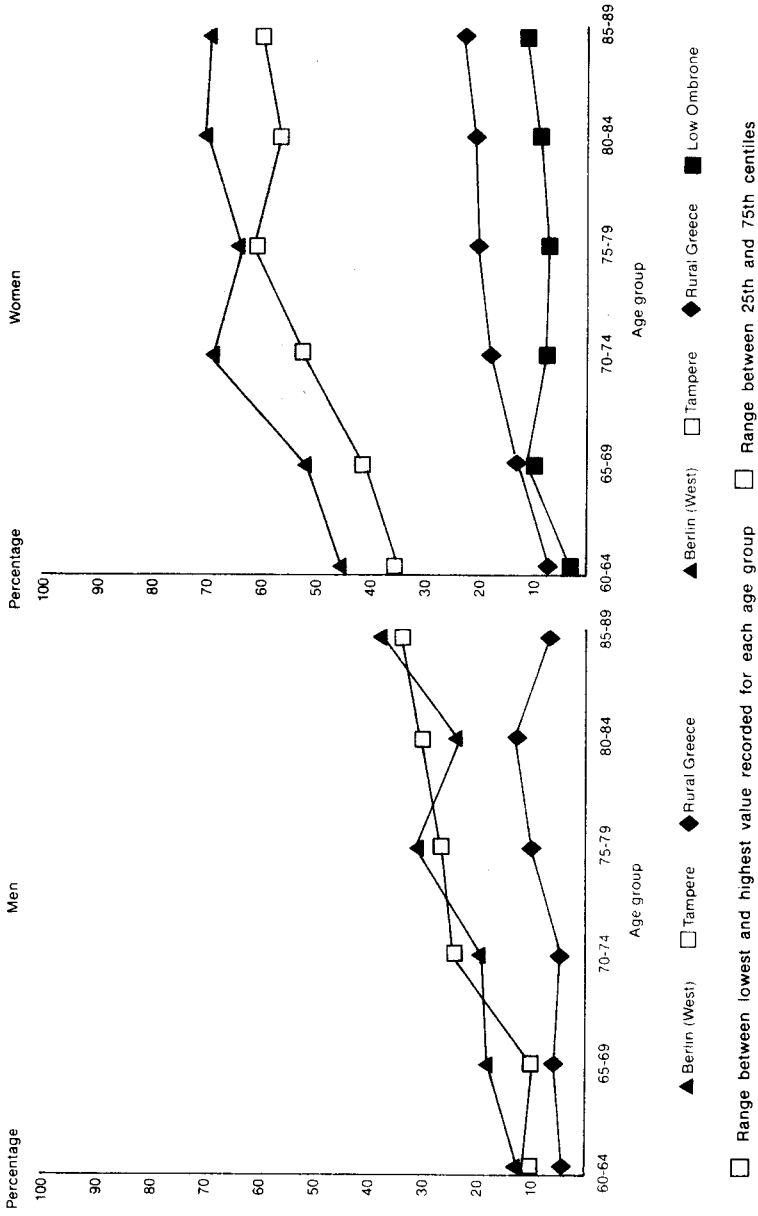
<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 61.1.1.

Table 33. Percentages of people living above the second floor without a lift<sup>a</sup>

	Age group (years)												
	Men						Women						
	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	
Brussels	3	6	0	0	0	0	7	4	8	7	8	0	
Leuven	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Berlin (West)	19	17	17	17	18	11	21	15	13	11	15	19	
Tampere	16	4	7	12	4	5	6	5	4	6	5	3	
Midj-Pyrénées	2	1	1	0	3	0	0	2	1	1	1	2	
Upper Normandy	8	3	2	4	0	0	5	1	3	5	0	0	
Rural Greece	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Florence	17	12	8	7	7	9	13	13	11	15	6	11	
Low Ombrone	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	
West Amriata	3	1	0	4	0	3	4	2	0	4	3	0	
Kuwait	2	0	2	0	1	1	3	1	0	1	1	0	
Bialystok	7	4	5	4	6	—	5	7	6	10	10	—	
Bucharest	6	3	0	6	6	0	2	6	3	5	0	3	
Kiev	10	14	16	12	14	20	16	13	11	16	17	17	
Belgrade	11	10	7	6	7	5	12	12	7	6	10	4	
Zagreb	15	14	7	10	7	13	10	15	7	7	11	12	

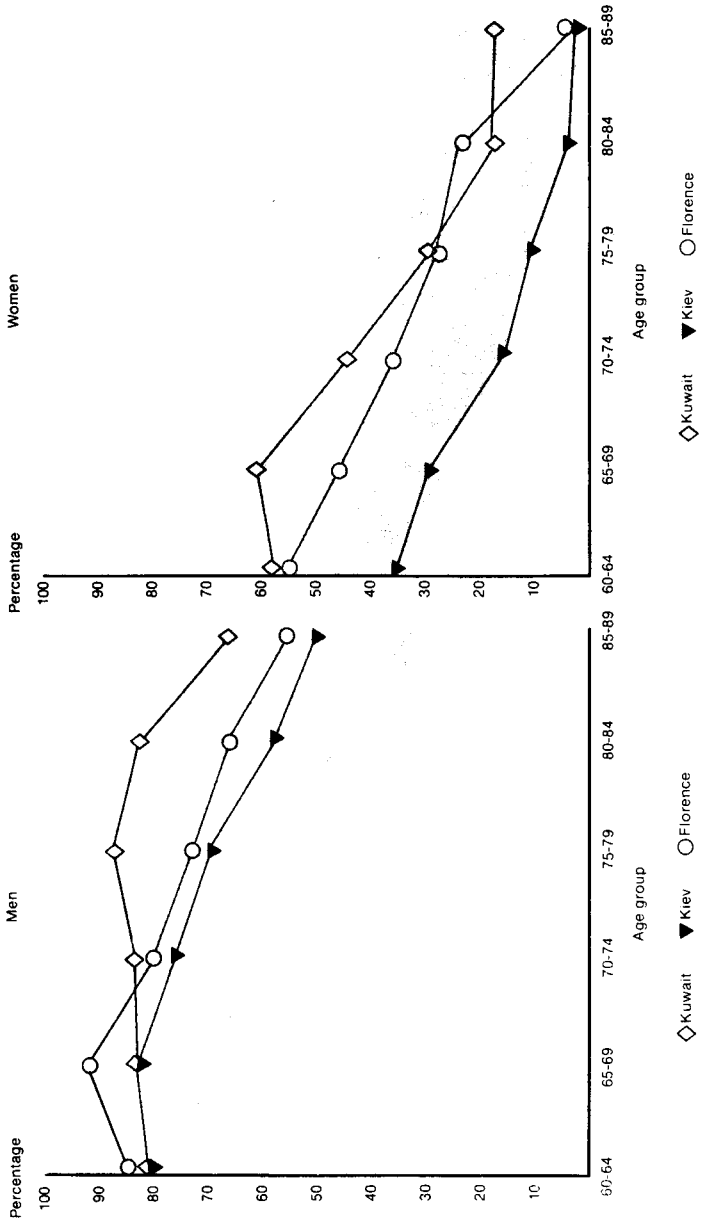
<sup>a</sup> Codebook items 64.3.65.2.

Fig. 6. Percentages of people living alone<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 42.

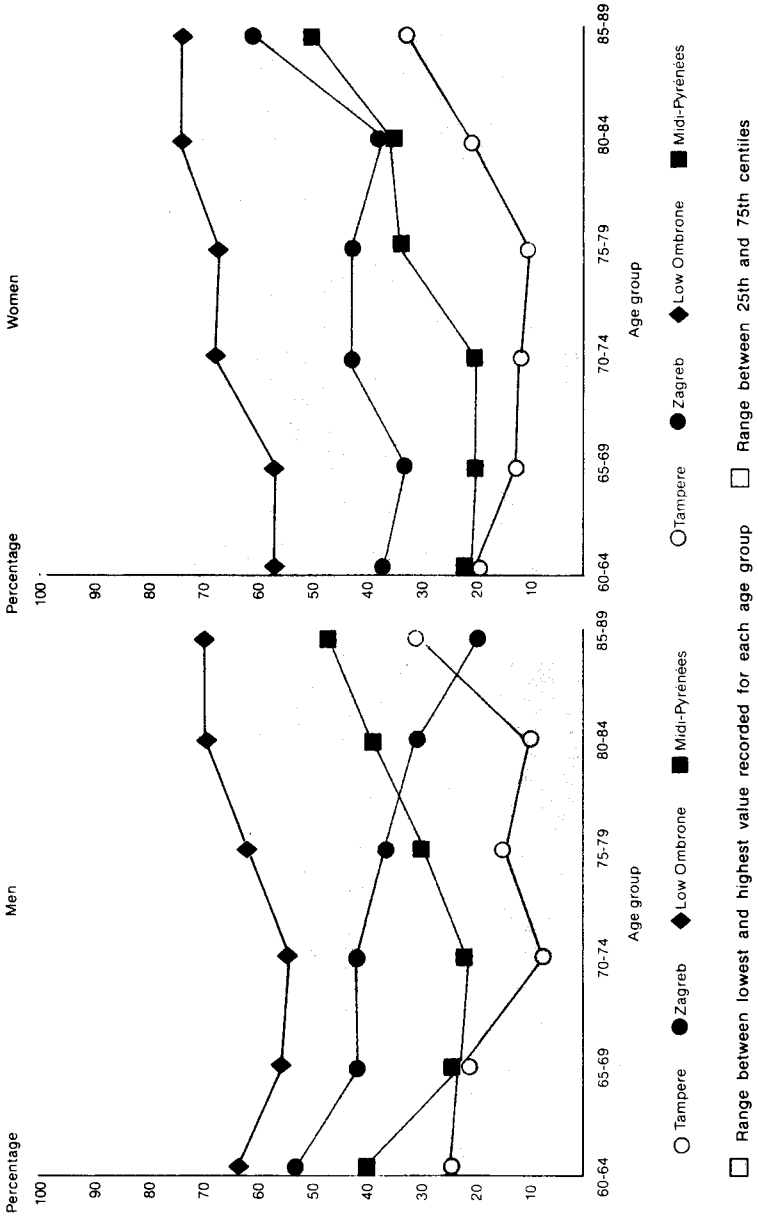
Fig. 7. Percentages of people living with their spouse<sup>a</sup>



□ Range between lowest and highest value recorded for each age group

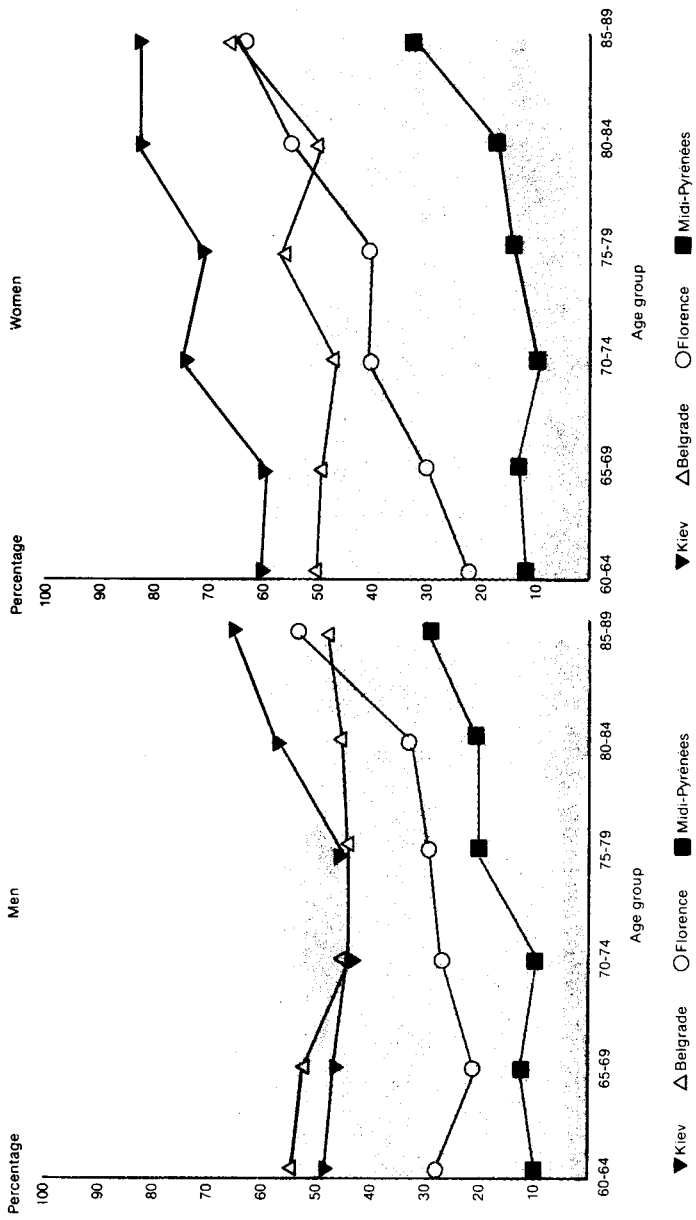
<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 46.1.

Fig. 8. Percentages of people living with their children<sup>a</sup>



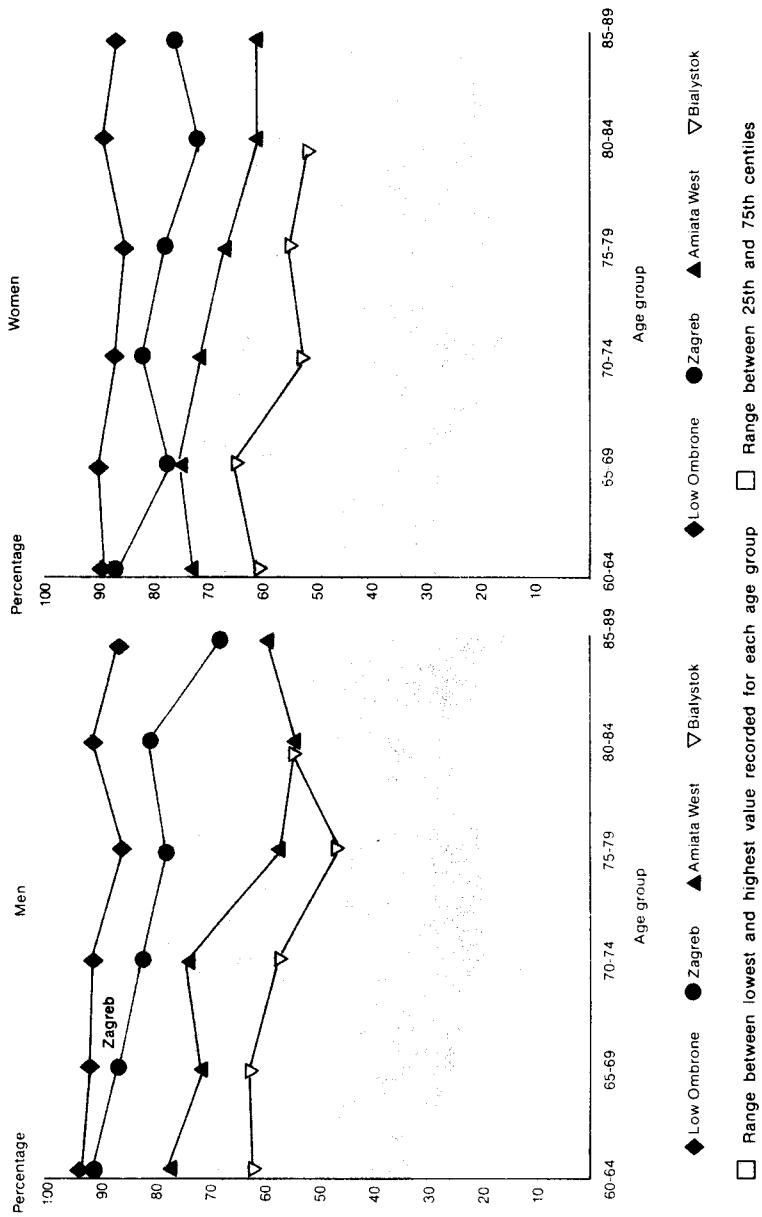
<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 43.1.

Fig. 9. Percentages of people with only one room for their own use (excluding a bathroom)<sup>a</sup>



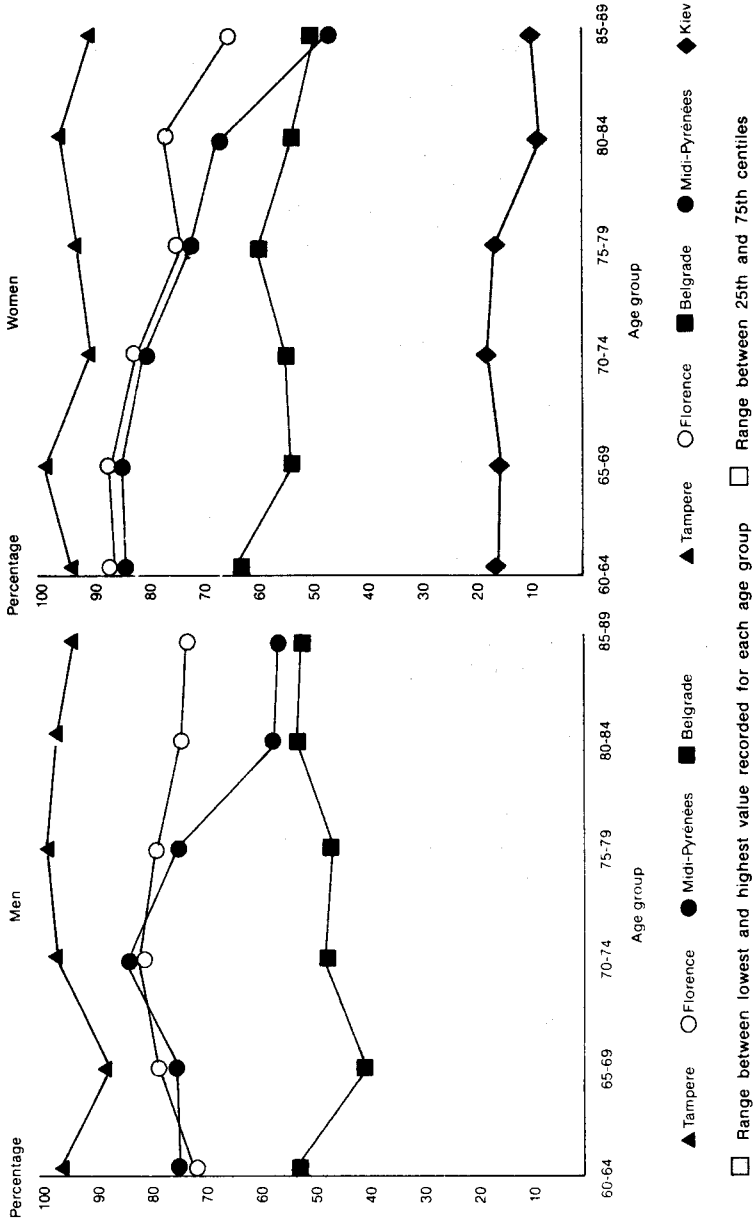
<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 50.1.

Fig. 10. Percentages of people with inside hot and cold water taps<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Derived variable 11, 1.

Fig. 11. Percentages of people with their own cooking facilities<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Codebook item 57.1.

the women of the same age group live with their husband. In the age group 75–79 years, 55–88% of the men live with their wife, 11–42% of the women live with their husband.

Increasing age does not seem to influence the percentages of persons living with their children (Fig. 8). There is a difference between the sexes, men in the youngest age group living with their children more frequently than women do. In the oldest age groups the situation is reversed. There are clear regional differences as regards living with the children. For example, in Kuwait 78–93% of those interviewed live with their children. The figures for Berlin (West) are the lowest, varying from 3% to 17%, depending on the age group and sex.

Living in a family together with grandchildren is less common than living with children. Living with grandchildren increases in the older age groups in Kuwait, Low Ombrone, and rural Greece. In the areas where living with grandchildren in general is rare (less than about 10%), as for instance Berlin (West) and Tampere, no increase with the age groups occurs. Different kinds of social security systems and the different status of the family explain these differences.

## Size of Dwelling

The size of the dwelling was measured by the number of rooms occupied by the household. Many old people live with other people and thus share a dwelling. To assess the housing it is important to know how many rooms the old person has available for his or her own use.

Not more than a quarter of men (Kiev) and not more than one third of women (Tampere) live in an apartment consisting of one room. In many cities women clearly live more frequently in a one-room dwelling than men. Age is not an important factor as far as living in a one-room dwelling is concerned, although living in a one-room dwelling increases a little after the age of 70. In many areas (e.g., Midi-Pyrénées and Kuwait) 80–90% of the people interviewed live in dwellings consisting of at least four rooms. Large dwellings are common, as a rule, in the countryside but in some cities also the majority of the dwellings have at least four rooms (Table 28). There was no age trend or sex difference in the proportion of old people living in a large dwelling.

When the number of rooms available for use is examined, the picture changes completely (Fig. 9). The percentage of old people who have only one room for their own use is many times higher than the percentage of those who live in one-room apartments. For example, although in Kuwait only a few old people have one-room dwellings, 81–96% have only one room for their own use. Similar results were obtained for Kiev (45–83%) and Belgrade (45–66%). These are centres where old people often live in families that include as many as three generations. In Tampere and Berlin (West) there are no major differences between the number of rooms in the dwelling and the number of rooms at the disposal of the old person. Women more frequently than men have only one room at their disposal. Men live more frequently in large apartments than women. Likewise, those belonging to

the younger age groups occupy at least four rooms more frequently. Large differences exist between the study areas in the number of old people who have at least four rooms at their disposal.

## Facilities

The fittings and amenities of the apartment are important from the point of view of whether the old person can manage at home. The important fittings and amenities are a water tap, an indoor toilet, and washing and cooking facilities (Fig. 10 and 11).

With the exception of rural Greece, the majority of old people have hot and cold water available in their apartments; it is typical that at least 70–90% of the old people have this facility. In this respect Kuwait, Kiev, Low Ombrone, and Tampere represent the highest standard of housing, since on the average 9 out of 10 have hot and cold water available. In rural Greece about 20% on the average and in Bialystok more than 50% of old people have a water tap in their apartment. Age and sex are not connected to any great extent with possession of a water tap.

A flush toilet in an apartment is almost as common an amenity as connection to the water mains. In rural Greece the exclusive use of a toilet is a rarity, although a water tap is commonly available. A flush toilet is commonly available in Florence, Low Ombrone, Berlin (West), and Tampere. There are no obvious systematic age and sex differences.

It can be seen from Table 29 that washing facilities (bathroom, shower, or sauna) are associated with whether the apartment is connected to the water mains. In Kuwait practically all those interviewed had one of the above-mentioned washing facilities. In Kiev, Florence, Berlin (West), Low Ombrone, and Tampere 80–90% reported that they had a bathroom, shower, or sauna at their disposal. However, the study does not reveal to what extent the old people in the different regions use their washing facilities. In some of the centres concerned, including Tampere and Upper Normandy, it has been found that the availability of washing facilities decreases in the older groups, especially among women.

There are many other ways in which an old person's laundry can be washed other than in a washing machine of his or her own. For this reason owning a washing machine (Table 30) does not depict, to the same extent as possession of a flush toilet or running water, the standard of housing among old people. It appears from the table that the number of washing machines *per capita* is not as high as that of other basic equipment. In Kuwait more than 90% have access to a washing machine, and in Florence and Low Ombrone the washing machine is also common. In many areas the percentage owning washing machines decreases among the older age groups. Old people may find it difficult to use the machine or may never have had one and they therefore need other arrangements for the laundry.

Having one's own cooking facilities in the apartment is naturally connected with living with other people (Fig. 11). In those regions (e.g., Bialystok, Kiev, Kuwait) where it is common practice for the old to live with others, having one's own cooking facilities is not usual. In Bucharest

almost everyone has his or her own cooking facilities, and in Berlin (West), Tampere, and Low Ombrone more than 90% on the average have their own cooking facilities. In some areas (e.g., Midi-Pyrénées) the availability of cooking facilities decreases with age, which may show that when people age they move in with their children. What "own cooking facilities" consists of may also vary.

Important factors in whether people are well settled in their own dwellings are a television set and a telephone. The telephone also contributes towards a feeling of security. With the exception of a few areas, at least two thirds of old people, irrespective of age and sex, have a television set in their apartment (Table 31); it is typical that about 90% have a television set themselves. In Kuwait and Berlin (West) practically every old person included in the study has a television set in his or her apartment. The proportion of people who have a television set decreases slightly in the two oldest age groups in, for example, Kiev, West Amiata, and Belgrade.

The figures for telephones vary greatly from one region to another (Table 32). In Berlin (West), Tampere, Florence, Kuwait, and Bucharest 70–90% of those interviewed had their own telephone or one at their disposal. The lowest telephone density occurs in rural Greece and Bialystok. There are no systematic age or sex differences as regards possession of a telephone.

From the point of view of the suitability of an old person's apartment, location and access are important. It can be seen from Table 33 that old people relatively rarely live more than two floors up in houses where there is no lift. However, in the largest cities, for example Berlin (West) and Kiev, as many as every fifth person, depending on the age group and sex, lives on the upper floors in buildings where there are no lifts. In the cities mentioned the situation is the same even for the very oldest age group. In some urban areas too (e.g., Berlin (West) and Florence), more than half of the old people have to climb 20 steps or more in order to reach their apartments.

Although in the majority of the areas old people have a fairly satisfactory level of housing, it should be noted that, according to the criteria used, about one fifth even in the best areas have poor facilities. The differences between the sexes are fairly small; however, except in Bialystok, women have a somewhat lower standard of housing than men. According to the mean percentages, the variations between the age groups are not large either. It can be seen, however, that in many areas the people belonging to the three oldest age groups have a slightly poorer standard of housing.

## Conclusions

In family structure, especially in relation to living as members of large families, age and sex were not found to have any marked effect. Extended families are very rare in most industrialized areas. If this trend continues more of the elderly will be living alone and more of them will be women.

Living with a spouse decreases with age and, in all regions and all age groups, women live with their husbands less frequently than husbands with wives. The large regional differences as regards living with children and

grandchildren are attributable partly to differences in the role of the family as an institution providing security for its old people, partly to differences in social security systems.

Living alone increases with age in almost all the areas studied and the percentage of women doing so in all of the age groups is almost everywhere larger than the percentage of men. Since people living alone experience loneliness more than those who live with others, special attention should be paid to the network of social relations of old people and the functioning of such a network.

In general, the results indicate that, as measured by the criteria used, old people's standards of housing in the areas studied are satisfactory. However, even in the areas where housing standards are high some facility is missing for every fifth old person, or the location of his or her dwelling is unsuitable.

The standard of housing is not significantly connected with age or sex. There may be a slight trend for women and members of the oldest age group to have poorer housing than the other age groups.

The degree of independence old people have in their homes (e.g., rooms or facilities in them at their own disposal) is affected by culture and custom. Privacy naturally decreases, for instance, where a family of three generations live together. On the other hand, the social support provided by a family may be a decisive factor in enabling an old person to live outside an institution. Although spaciousness is a factor in housing, too large an apartment may in certain cases be a strain on an old person; maintaining and cleaning it without adequate help may make it impossible for an old person to remain at home. From the point of view of old people flexibility in housing policy enabling old people to change apartments according to their situation would be desirable.

In this study standards of living have been examined on the basis of objective criteria only. In formulating policies concerning old people it should be remembered that, from the point of view of their comfort, how the old people themselves experience their living is important. Many factors contribute towards creating a comfortable environment; physical factors alone are not decisive. Further research into the living conditions of old people should concentrate on analysing their positive and negative characteristics as a whole. It is important to know how different living conditions are distributed amongst the various age groups.

