clariane

Centenarians in Europe

June 2026

Asterès study for Clariane

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The ageing of the European population is accompanied by an increasing number of centenarians. This phenomenon is due to two combined factors: more elderly people, and a steadily increasing life expectancy, with nearly four years gained in twenty years across the continent. In France, this has recently been documented by the national statistics bureau, INSEE[1]: the number of centenarians could quadruple by 2070.

According to the most recent census (conducted in 2021), the European Union had nearly **100,000 centenarians**, representing **0.022% of the population**, i.e. one centenarian for every 4500 Europeans.

Who are they? Is their presence uniform across the continent, or are conditions in some places particularly conducive to exceptional longevity?

These are the questions addressed by the consulting firm, Asterès, at the behest of Clariane, a European provider of care services for the elderly and vulnerable, in a two-part study.

The first part offers a snapshot of European centenarians: who they are, where they live. The study first draws up a profile: **the typical European centenarian is, in eight cases out of ten, female, most often widowed, and better educated than most people of their generation**.

The second part digs deeper: it focuses on identifying the regional conditions associated with a longevity greater than the average life expectancy. The analysis carried out on 243 regions of the European Union and 34 variables reveals in particular **five factors statistically associated with the concentration of centenarians**.

The factors identified here are those that statistical analysis associates with greater longevity. Of course, these do not tell the whole story, and their presence alone is not enough to account for a higher proportion of centenarians.

Of these five factors, the most decisive is **geography**: Southern European countries have 77% more centenarians than those in Western Europe, while Eastern Europe accounts for 55% fewer, a gradient that reflects a range of lifestyles, social ties and health legacies that are difficult to isolate individually.

This is followed by the level of **education of the population**, the maintenance of a **marital relationship** into advanced age, and **smoking**, the primary negative factor. **Extreme heat** also has a specific negative effect, which is why the hottest regions in Southern Europe do not have the highest proportions of centenarians.

The study also points out that neither the wealth of the territories nor the density of the healthcare services, expressed in terms of the number of hospital beds or the number of doctors, have any measurable statistical effect on the status of centenarians.

Another lesson is the extent of the **disparities observed between countries (from 5 centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants in Bulgaria to 33 in France)**, but also – and equally markedly – **between regions** of the same country.

It is therefore the **regional scale**, much more than the national scale, that makes it possible to account for such differences. France (with regional variations ranging from 1 to 7) and Spain (1 to 5) provide particularly striking examples of this.

Nearly 100,000 centenarians

One centenarian per 4500 inhabitants

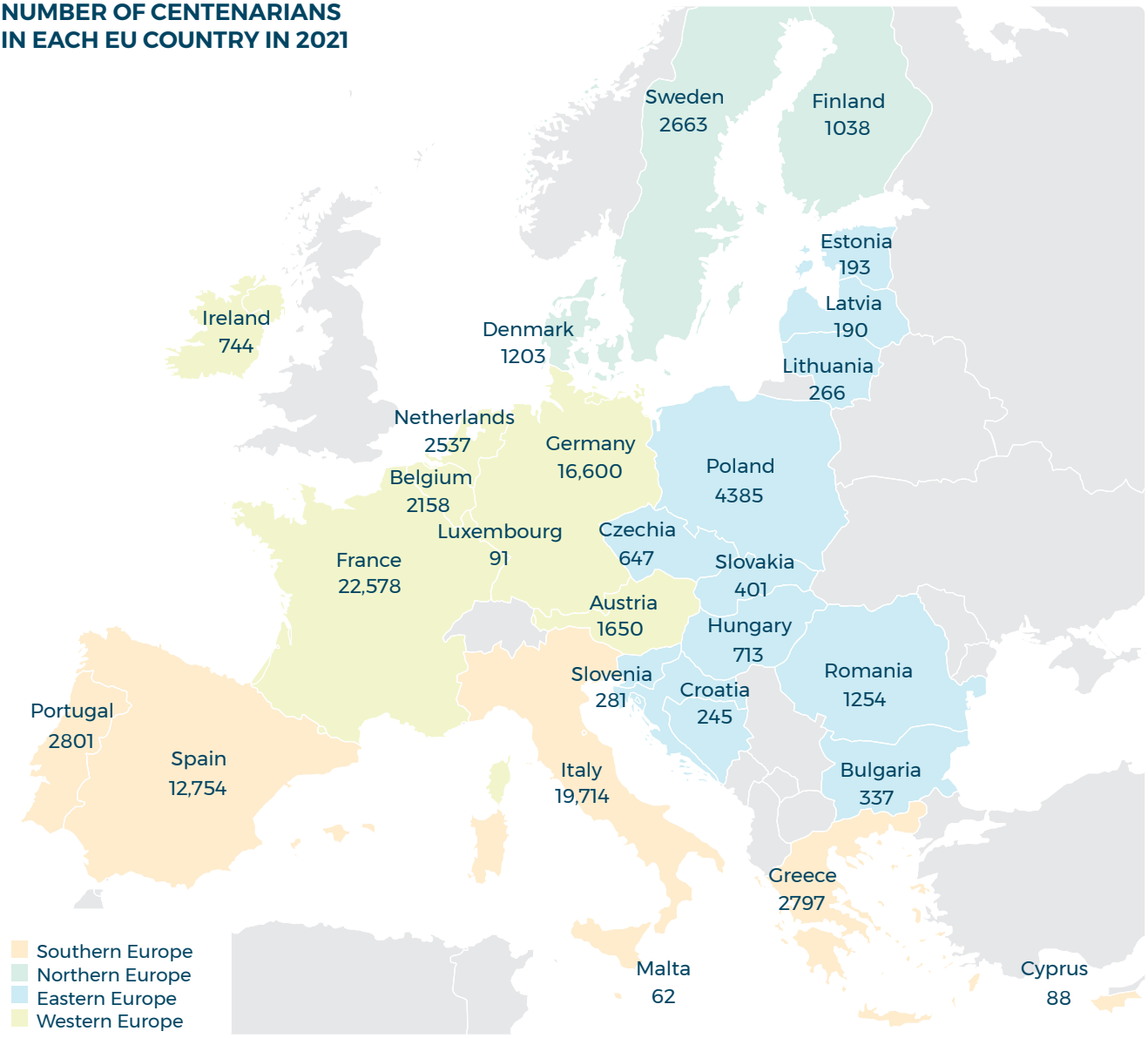
(1) *Insee Première* No. 2108, INSEE, June 8, 2026.

Snapshot of centenarians in Europe

GEOGRAPHY

The European Union had nearly 100,000 centenarians[1] in 2021, an average of 22 centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants. Yet their geographical distribution is far from uniform across the countries. Grouping the 27 Member States into four regional groups[2] shows a very clear gradient: the highest proportions of centenarians are concentrated in the countries of the South, followed by those of the West and the North, while the East shows the lowest proportions.

NUMBER OF CENTENARIANS IN EACH EU COUNTRY IN 2021



Source: Eurostat 2021 Census Hub and Eurostat 2021 Regional Indicators

(1) The number of centenarians in Europe is estimated at 118,000 (Eurostat). This figure covers a wider geographical scope than that used in this study, which encompasses the 27 countries of the European Union and identifies 98,390 centenarians.
(2) Southern Europe, Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, Western Europe.

Heterogeneous distribution

The proportion that centenarians represent in the population of a country varies greatly from one Member State to another. The ratio is thus from 1 to 7 between the countries with the fewest centenarians (such as Bulgaria, with 5 centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants) and those with the most (France, 33 per 100,000).

With 22,578 centenarians in 2021, France occupies top spot in absolute terms, ahead of Italy and its 19,714 centenarians. The two other countries of the European Union which have more than 10,000 centenarians on their soil are Germany (16,600) and Spain (12,754).

France, Italy, Germany and Spain: these four Member States alone account for 73% of the European Union's centenarians, while at the same time the total population of these four countries represents only 58% of the EU's 447 million citizens.

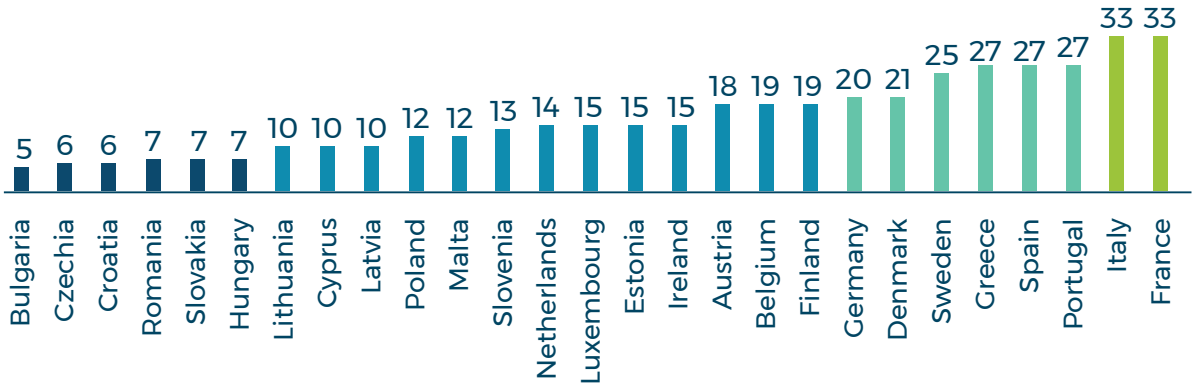
Along with Italy, France also shares first place in terms of the proportion of centenarians. The two countries have a proportion of 33 centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Portugal, Spain and Greece (27 centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants).

By contrast, Bulgaria (5), Czechia and Croatia (6), Romania, Hungary and Slovakia (7) close the rankings.

Germany, the European country with the largest population, is below the European average in this regard, with a ratio of 20 centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants.

The ranking is similar when the ratio is calculated based solely on the population aged 65 and over, rather than the total population. France (162 centenarians per 100,000 people aged 65 and over), Italy (141) and Spain (137) remain at the top of the ranking.

Number of centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants



Differences at regional level

The ten European regions in which there are the greatest number of centenarians are: Île-de-France, Lombardy, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Catalonia, Rhône-Alpes (within its pre-2014 reform boundaries), Lazio, the Community of Madrid, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Veneto.

The largest intra-national differences mainly concern three countries: France, Spain and Greece, as illustrated in the following graphic, with the other countries showing a more uniform distribution.

Thus, in France, the ratio ranges from 92 centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants in Martinique to 13 in French Guiana, a ratio of 1 to 7. In Spain, it ranges from 56 in Castile and León to 12 in Melilla, a ratio of 1 to 5. In Greece, Epirus (56) has four times more centenarians than Eastern Macedonia (13). In contrast, Germany and Poland have a more uniform distribution with ratios of 1 to 2.

Centenarians: contrasting regional situations

The proportion of centenarians varies from region to region within individual countries. The ratio can be considerable between a region with a large number of centenarians and one with very few. France has the widest gap between two regions, with a ratio of 1 to 7.

RATIO OF 1 TO 7

FRANCE
an average of **33 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

13	92
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **French Guiana**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Martinique**

RATIO OF 1 TO 5

SPAIN
an average of **27 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

12	56
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **City of Melilla**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Castile and León**

RATIO OF 1 TO 4

GREECE
an average of **27 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

13	56
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Eastern Macedonia & Thrace**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Epirus**

RATIO OF 1 TO 3

PORTUGAL
an average of **27 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

13	37
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Azores Autonomous Region**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Central Region**

RATIO OF 1 TO 2

ROMANIA
an average of **7 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

4.5	8.5
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **West Region**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Bucharest-Ilfov**

RATIO OF 1 TO 2

POLAND
an average of **12 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

9	19
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Lower Carpathians**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Warsaw Capital District**

RATIO OF 1 TO 2

BELGIUM
an average of **19 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

12	22
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Prov. of Limburg**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Prov. of West Flanders**

RATIO OF 1 TO 2

GERMANY
an average of **20 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

13	26.5
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Lower Bavaria**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Hanover**

RATIO OF 1 TO 2

SWEDEN
an average of **25 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

18	33
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Upper Norrland**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Småland and islands**

RATIO OF 1 TO 2

ITALY
an average of **33 centenarians**
per 100,000 inhabitants

23	53
centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Campania**	centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants **Liguria**

Snapshot of centenarians in Europe

THE PROFILE OF CENTENARIANS

Centenarians in Europe are mostly women, widowed, and often better educated than other people of their generation. A majority live in areas with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants.

Women in the majority

82% of European centenarians are women, a proportion ranging from 68% in Slovakia to 90% in Malta. This majority representation of women makes sense, given an average life expectancy of 5 to 6 years longer than that of men in Europe.

This growing feminization is the culmination of a process that is reinforced at each age bracket: at birth, the distribution is almost 50/50, with boys even making up a slight majority; women then represent 61% of 80-89 year-olds, 72% of 90-99 year-olds, before reaching 82% at the centenarian threshold, under the ongoing impact of excess male mortality.

More educated centenarians

At first glance, the number of highly-educated centenarians may seem particularly modest, if we refer to current standards in terms of access of an age group to secondary and higher education. However, the opposite reality is emerging: compared to their peers, centenarians are found to be disproportionately well-educated. They were born in a Europe where higher education concerned only a tiny minority, essentially male as it happens. 9% of them managed to access higher education, compared to only 3% of their contemporaries.

Similarly, nearly one in three centenarians (31%) has graduated from secondary or higher education, while this proportion does not exceed one in five Europeans (19%) within the same cohort.

These differences are not the result of chance: the overall level of education is one of the best-established determinants of longevity, as confirmed in the second part of the study.

Widows and widowers

More than four out of five centenarians are widowed (81% to be precise). However, this high rate is not unusual: it is simply a natural consequence of reaching this age, as evidenced by the fact that the proportion of Europeans who have already lost their spouse stands at 70% for those aged between 90 and 99.

82%
are women

81%
are widowed

42%
live in rural areas

73%
of all centenarians in the European Union reside in only four countries: France, Italy, Germany, Spain

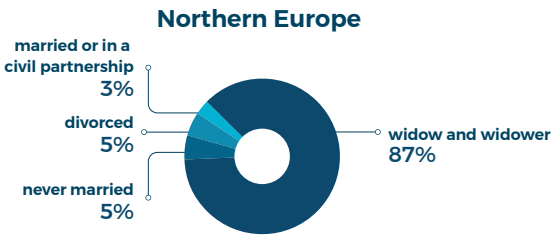
The level of education of centenarians

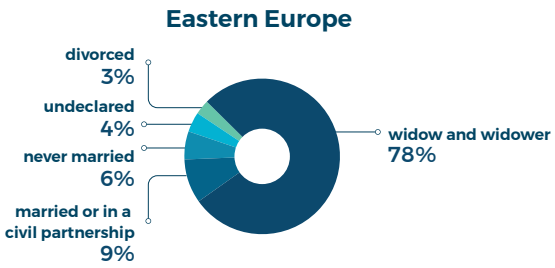
	Average proportion of centenarians today	Their generation (born between 1916-1925)
Higher education	9%	3%
Secondary education	22%	16%
Less than secondary education	69%	81%

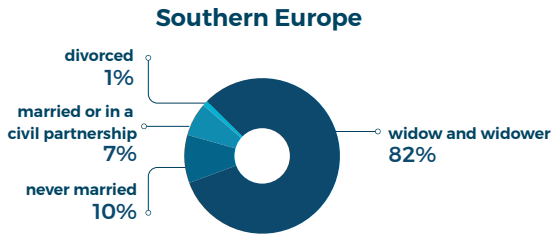
Source: Eurostat 2021 Census Hub and Eurostat 2021 Regional Indicators

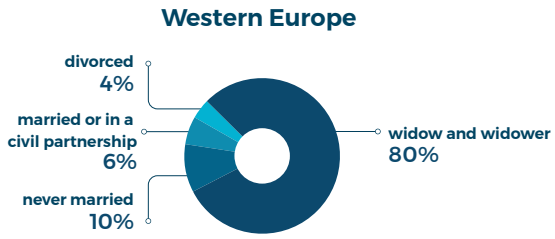
The status of centenarians

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of people who reach the age of one hundred or more are widowed. This is true in each country and for the four European regions. Slight variations, however, exist between these four regions.









Rural areas

Centenarians are overrepresented in rural areas: 42% live in areas with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, compared to one in four (27%) in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. This rural profile is consistent with the current state of knowledge regarding extreme longevity, associating territories with a high concentration of centenarians with a lifestyle characterized by daily physical activity, locally sourced food, and community links.

Geographical distribution of centenarians: 42% in rural areas

Type of area	Average proportion of centenarians	General EU population
Rural area (<10,000 inhab.)	42%	28%
Mid-sized town (10,000 - 100,000 inhab.)	30%	33%
Large urban area (> 100,000 inhabitants)	27%	39%

Source: Eurostat 2021 Census Hub and Eurostat 2021 Regional Indicators

Indicators favourable to the presence of centenarians

The study shows that there are **more centenarians in the regions and countries of Southern Europe than in the rest of the European Union**, and that Eastern Europe has far fewer centenarians than the average of the 27 Member States. But this disparity across different regions is not merely a matter of distribution: it can also reflect lifestyles that are **not measured directly**, such as diet, the density of family and social ties, or daily physical activity.

In this study, Asterès analysed **a set of thirty-four variables of different kinds** (socio-economic variables, climatic variables, demographics, etc.) in 243 European regions. The analysis ultimately allows us to identify a number of factors which, depending on the criteria and methodology chosen for this study, may favour the presence of centenarians. Similarly, it helps put the significance of certain variables into perspective, as their effects are statistically limited.

Again, it should be emphasized that the most relevant scale of observation is **that of the region and not the country.**

FIVE SIGNIFICANT FACTORS

The analysis, assuming all other things remain equal, reveals five factors that are statistically associated with the concentration of centenarians in Europe. While this statistical approach does not allow us to establish a causal link, it does enable us to obtain a more accurate picture of the current situation and to dispel certain misconceptions. Thus, none of the factors identified are economic in nature.

Geography (home country)

Geography (home country) is the primary factor associated with extreme longevity. Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta) have 77% more centenarians than Western European countries, all other things being equal.

Eastern European countries have 55% fewer centenarians than Western European countries, once all other variables have been neutralised.

Once geography is taken into account, some variables no longer have any impact. For example, there are more centenarians in rural areas, but it is not living in a rural area that explains why people live to be 100; it is specifically the region in which they live.

This geographical gradient, the most robust of the model, reflects a set of factors that are difficult to isolate individually: Mediterranean diet, density of social and family ties, genetic population factors, and health history.

Education of the population

The population's level of education is also associated with a higher proportion of centenarians: each additional percentage point of college graduates in the population aged 25-64 increases the ratio of centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants by 1.2%. A more educated population adopts better health behaviours and has easier access to information and healthcare.

These collective results echo the individual observations of the first part: centenarians are, compared to their peers, better educated.

Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta) have, proportionally,

77%

more centenarians than Western European countries

Eastern European countries have, proportionally,

55%

fewer centenarians than Western European countries, once all other variables have been neutralised.

Extreme heat

While not carrying the same weight as geography or the lifestyles mentioned above, extreme heat emerges from the study as a potential risk factor.

Thus, even if the countries of Southern Europe have proportionally the most centenarians, the hottest regions of Southern Europe (Sicily, Crete, Andalusia…) do not account for the highest ratios of their home country.

Cold temperatures, on the other hand, have no specific impact.

Maintaining a marital relationship

Maintaining a marital relationship into old age is an indicator of regions with high life expectancy, even if it makes perfect sense that a large majority of centenarians are widowed (life expectancy in the European Union varies between 75.6 and 84 years[3]).

Regions where a larger share of centenarians are widowed have significantly fewer centenarians. Conversely, regions where more centenarians are still married tend to have more of them. The two results converge: marital relationships that endure into very old age are an indicator of social bonds that directly influence healthier longevity.

Smoking

Smoking is the number-one negative factor regarding lifestyle. Each percentage point of daily smoking reduces the ratio of centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants by 6.4%, all other things being equal.

As an illustration, Eastern European countries have the highest smoking rates (Bulgaria: 29%, Croatia: 23%, Hungary: 22%), and the fewest centenarians.

29%

Bulgaria is the EU country with the highest smoking rate, with almost one smoker per three inhabitants.

GDP, CARE PROVISION: TWO FACTORS WITH NO REAL IMPACT

Counter-intuitively, the gross domestic product (GDP) and the healthcare system have no statistical links with the proportion of centenarians. Of the 34 variables tested, 20 have no specific impact, with the two most notable being regional wealth and hospital care provision.

Regional wealth

Regional wealth has no statistical links with longevity beyond the age of 100, whether measured by GDP per capita or poverty rate. For example, Epirus (Greece), with a GDP of €14,000 per capita, has 55.6 centenarians per 100,000 inhabitants. Luxembourg, with €87,100 per capita, has only 14.1. The result is robust in all tested specifications.

Provision of hospital care

The availability of hospital care also has no impact on the number of centenarians. The number of hospital beds and doctors per 100,000 inhabitants cannot be used to predict the ratio of centenarians. Eastern European countries, which have the largest number of beds (legacy of the Soviet era), also have the fewest centenarians.

(3) Insee, *Life expectancy at birth in 2023*, published on 22 October 2025; source Eurostat (extract of 21 August 2025).

Methodology

Asterès built an econometric model for 243 European regions (NUTS 2) in the 27 nations of the European Union, testing 34 socio-economic, climatic and demographic variables to identify factors associated with the concentration of centenarians. The model, estimated using cross-sectional data from the 2021 census, explains 77% of the variance in the ratio of centenarians per capita between regions.

Objective and scope: identifying factors associated with extreme longevity in Europe

This study aims to understand the phenomenon of centenarians in Europe and to identify the socio-economic, climatic and societal conditions associated with their concentration. The study covers 243 administrative regions (NUTS 2) in the twenty-seven countries of the European Union. The data relates to the year 2021, the only harmonised European census year available. The model therefore takes into account the differences between regions on a given date, and not their evolution over time.

Source: European census, Eurostat, and complementary databases

Asterès drew on data from the 2021 European Census (Eurostat Census Hub) for the number of centenarians, their living arrangements, marital status, educational level, and geographic distribution. This census data was cross-referenced with Eurostat regional indicators covering GDP per capita, poverty rate, unemployment, education, care provision (doctors, hospital beds), climate (heating and cooling degree days), and fertility. Complementary sources were mobilized for air pollution (European Environment Agency), quality of governance (EQI index of the University of Gothenburg), and health behaviours at the national level (Eurostat 2019 EHIS survey). A total of 34 variables were compiled and tested.

Method: regional comparison and econometric modelling

Asterès proposes a three-step analysis to identify the factors associated with extreme longevity in Europe: a statistical description of the phenomenon of centenarians, an analysis of regional correlations, followed by econometric modelling.

The **centenarian phenomenon** is described at the national and regional levels. The number of centenarians, their ratio per 100,000 inhabitants, their profile (gender, marital status, level of education, mode of housing, type of area lived in) and the disparities between countries and regions are presented on the basis of the 2021 census data.

Correlation analysis is conducted variable by variable. Asterès tested the correlation between the ratio of centenarians per capita and 34 indicators: GDP per capita, poverty rate, unemployment, education, healthcare provision, climate, pollution, fertility, population density, organic farming, road network, quality of governance, as well as the specific characteristics of centenarians (widowhood, institutionalization, rurality, residential isolation). This step makes it possible to identify gross correlations, some of which are misleading and do not hold up when other factors are taken into account. The approach is exploratory, with Asterès compiling and testing all variables that might be both available and relevant on the scale of NUTS 2 regions on Eurostat and complementary sources, without being limited to factors identified in the existing literature on longevity.

Econometric modelling identifies the factors that have a specific effect on the ratio of centenarians per capita. A multivariate regression model is estimated for the 243 European regions, making it possible to distinguish the variables that retain a significant impact after adjusting for the other factors. Each variable was added individually to the base model to measure its specific contribution. Only the variables that significantly improved the model were retained. Several robustness tests were conducted: exclusion of overseas territories, alternative dependent variables, and verification of the absence of redundancy between explanatory variables. The complete model explains 77% of the variance in the ratio of centenarians per capita between regions (R^2 = 0.77).

The model incorporates control variables to isolate the specific effects of each factor. The proportion of the population aged 65 and over is included to neutralize the mechanical effect of demographic structure: a region with more elderly people will inherently have a wider pool of potential centenarians. The geographic variable captures a set of factors that are difficult to dissociate at this scale, which limits the identification of specific effects for the variables correlated with it. In addition, geographical indicators distinguishing Southern Europe, Northern Europe and Eastern Europe from Western Europe are introduced to capture regional specificities that cannot be measured directly (diet, social ties, health history). These checks ensure that the effects identified do not simply reflect an effect of demographic structure or geographical affiliation. The selected groupings are as follows: Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta), Northern Europe (Sweden, Denmark, Finland), Eastern Europe (Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), and Western Europe (France, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Ireland, Germany, Austria).

Studies to be found in the Health and Longevity section

Clariane produces or conducts studies, research, and expert analyses to enlighten professionals and the general public on the major societal issues of care and ageing: geroscience, demographics, health economics, care pathways, mental health, rehabilitation, training and the place of caregivers, the role of carers, and innovations in the service of longevity. All of these publications and contributions are freely available from the **Health and Longevity** section **at clariane.com.**

Already available

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October 2026

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Contact us
presse@clariane.com

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