

An end to rural population decline? Side meeting @ EPC 2022

Where did the Spaniards move to after the COVID-19 outbreak?

Antonio López-Gay, *Department of Geography (UAB) and Center for Demographic Studies (CED-CERCA)*

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic was expected to have a disruptive impact on human mobility since its outbreak.

Determinants of residential mobility and internal migration could have changed significantly during the first months of the pandemic, mainly as a consequence of:

(i) Mobility restrictions; (ii) The desire to improve housing conditions; (iii) The expansion of teleworking; (iv) The strong impact of the pandemic on urban areas;

Appearance of particular housing and residential needs and preferences that differ from the pre-pandemic triggers of residential mobility (Duque et al., 2020).

Case studies are starting to be released. For example, Japan, Germany, and Sweden (Fielding & Ishikawa, 2021; Stawarz et al., 2022; Vogiazides & Kawalerowicz, 2022). COVID-19 does not seem to have altered the pre-existing structure of internal migration, but it seems to have accelerated some trends that were already in motion pre-pandemic (Davies, 2021; Kolko et al., 2021)



Fleeing the virus, what if we move to the countryside? *El Periódico de Catalunya*, May 20th 2020

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The reversed exodus: from the city to the countryside *El País*, August 2nd 2020

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La vuelta al mundo: la pandemia provocó un éxodo urbano en Milán, Cataluña y California



Primera modificación: 02/10/2020 - 02:21 Última modificación: 02/10/2020 - 02:24

Around the world: the pandemic triggered an urban exodus in Milan, Catalonia, and California. *France 24, October 2nd 2020*

Structure of the presentation: Three main questions

01

Understanding Patterns of Internal Migration in 2020

- A. General overview. What type of movement changed the most in the first pandemic year?
- B. Territorial implications. A small respite for rural depopulation?
- C. Which have been the main destinations from the largest Spanish cities?

02

The socioeconomic dimension of residential mobility in 2020

- A. What happened to residential mobility within cities?
- B. Which socioeconomic profile led the 2020 shifts in residential mobility and internal migration?

03

Are these short or long-term changes?

- A. Evidence from the new dataset of 2021 (limited detail)

Data

01 Understanding Patterns of Internal Migration in 2020

Microdata from the Residential Variation Statistics (EVR) of the Spanish Statistical Office (INE) which cover **all changes of residence in the country's 8,131 municipalities**. Variables: Sex, Age, Place of Birth, Country of Citizenship, Municipality of origin/destination, Month of change.

González-Leonardo, M., López-Gay, A., Newsham, N., Recaño, J., & Rowe, F. (2022). Understanding Patterns of Internal Migration During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Spain. *Population, Space and Place*, e2578.

02 The socioeconomic dimension of residential mobility in 2020

Municipal Register of Dwelling Changes (Barcelona + Madrid)

It overcomes the major limitations of the previous source:

Changes of address **within municipalities** + **High geographic detail** + **Socioeconomic** characteristic of migrants (educational level).

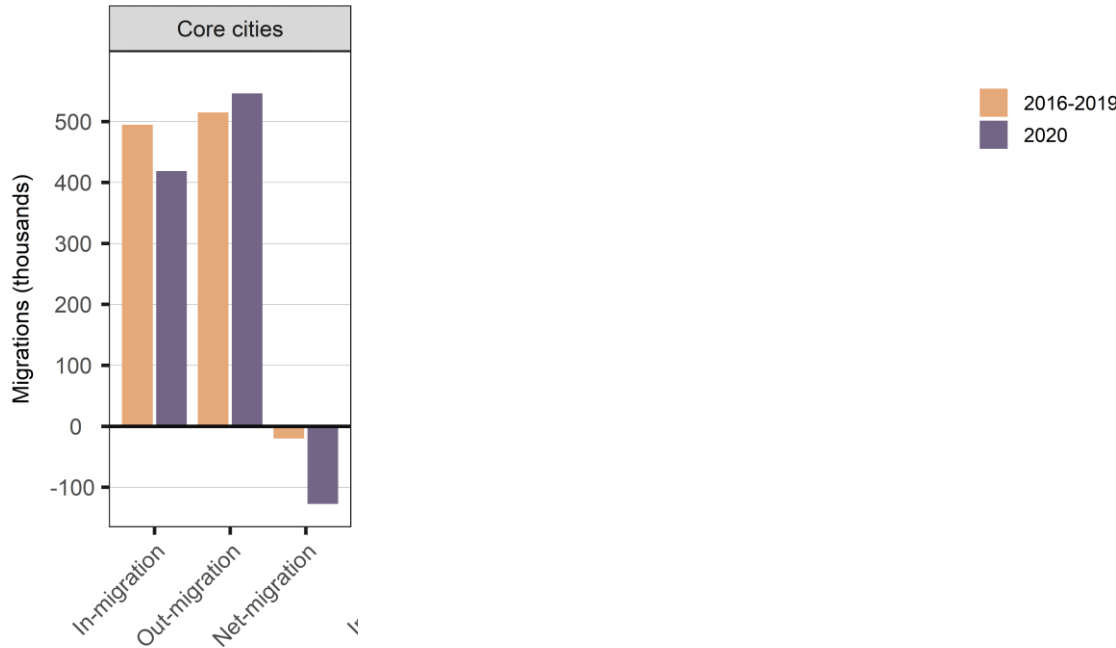
03 Are these short or long-term changes?

New dataset of the EVR for 2021, but with limited geographic detail (is not possible yet to reproduce the analysis done for 2020)



1A. What type of movement changed the most in the first pandemic year?

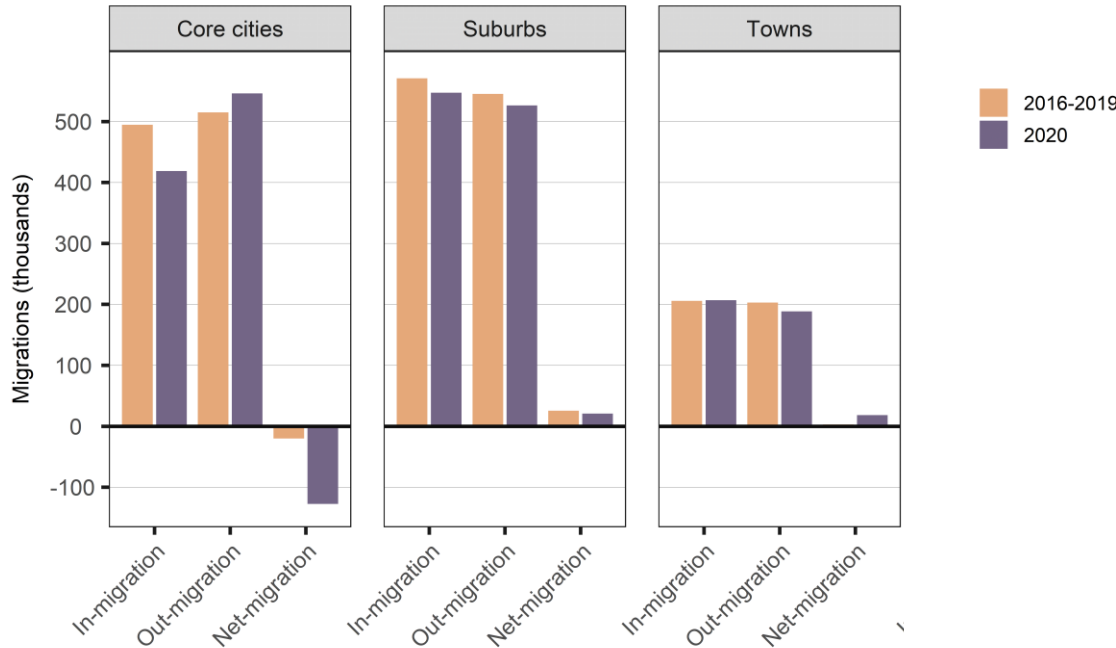
Figure 1. Internal in-migration, out-migration, and net-migration by municipal typology: 2016-2019 (average) and 2020.



- **Significant changes in flows involving the Spanish core cities.** - 15.4% decrease in internal in-flows, and a 6% rise in the out-flows. Where? We will see later. Consequently, the population losses in central cities increased in comparison with the pre-pandemic period.

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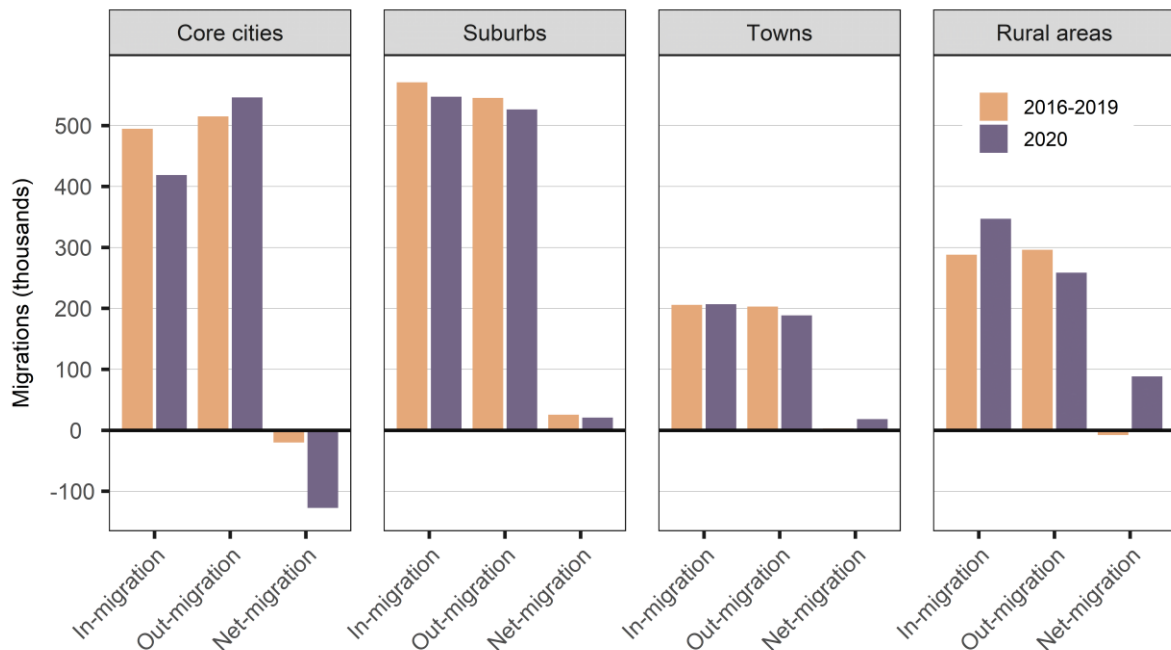


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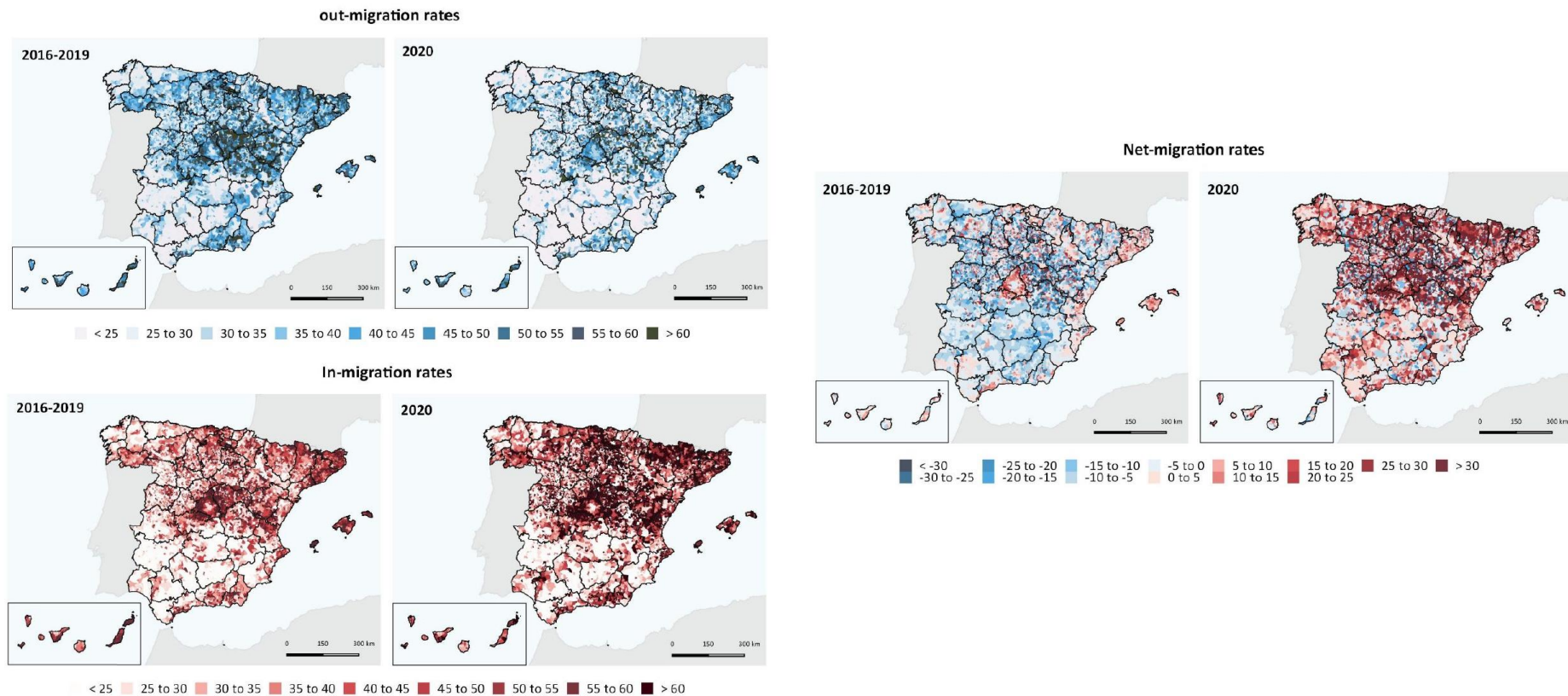
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- **Major changes in rural dynamics.** 20.5% increase in in-flows. Out-flows decreased by 12.6%. Therefore, net migration became positive and achieved high levels.

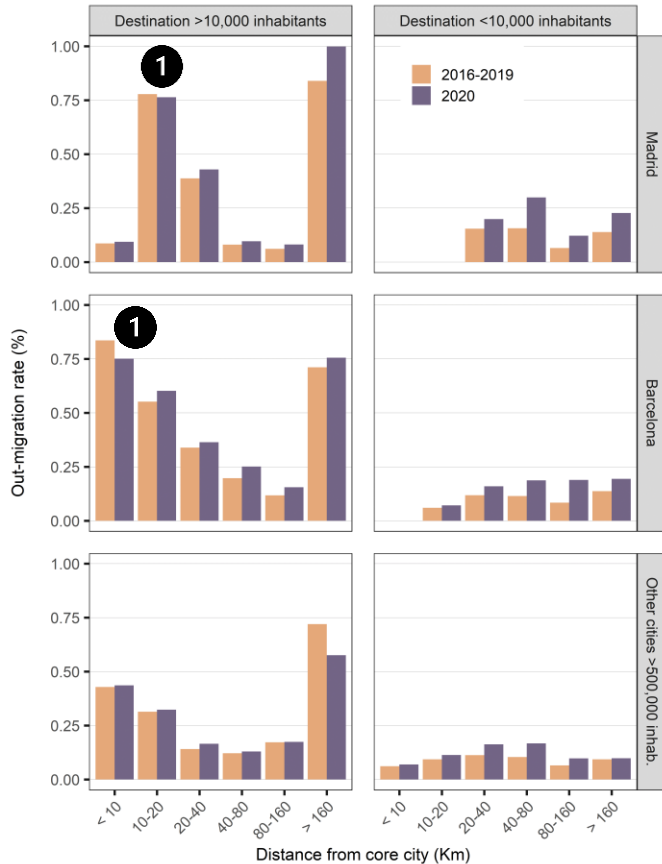
1B. Territorial implications. A small respite for rural depopulation?

Figure 2. Internal in-migration, out-migration, and net-migration rates by municipality: 2016-2019 (average) and 2020.



1C. Which have been the main destinations from the largest Spanish cities?

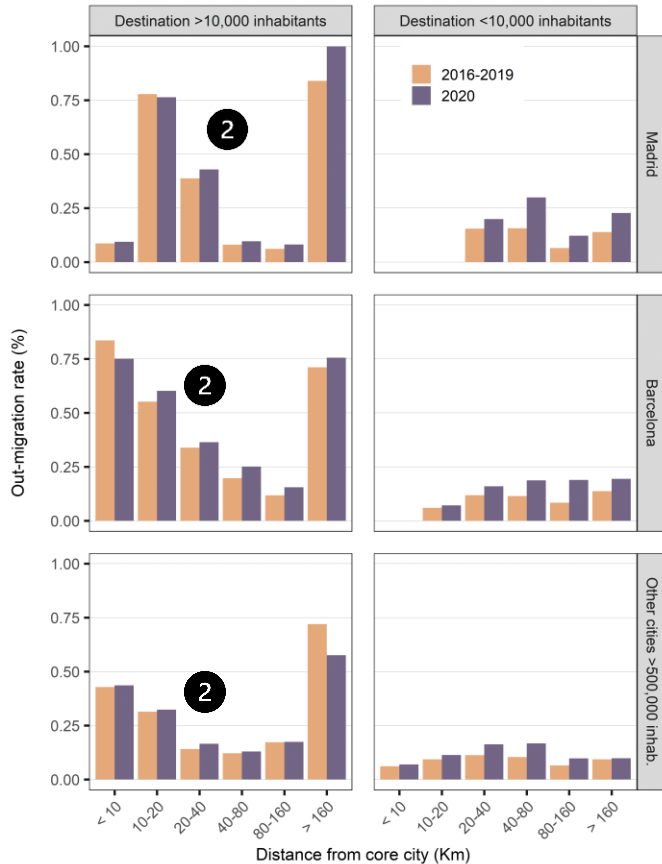
Figure 3. Internal out-migration rate from Madrid, Barcelona, and other cities large cities (> 500,000 inhab.) by population size and distance to the municipality of destination: 2016-2019 (average) and 2020.



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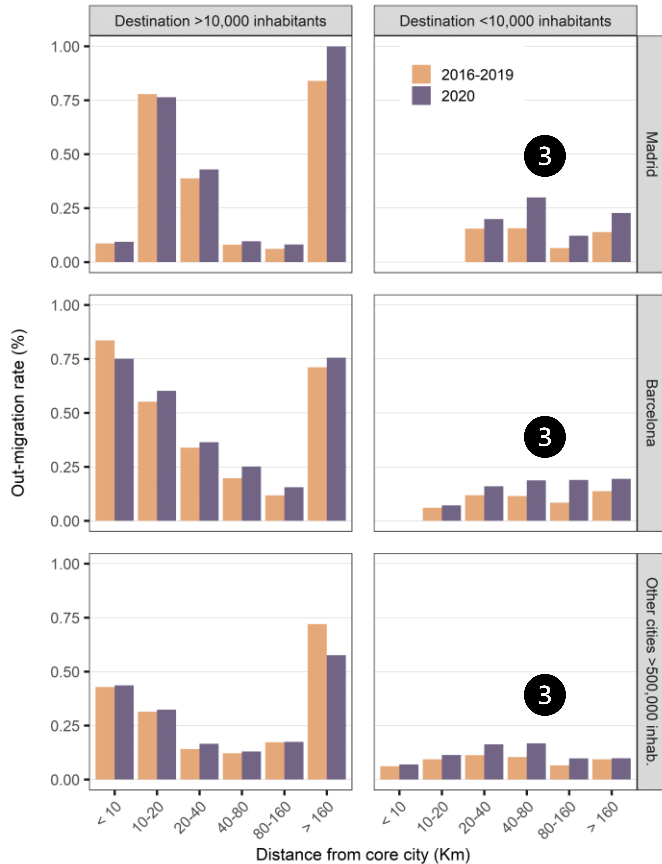
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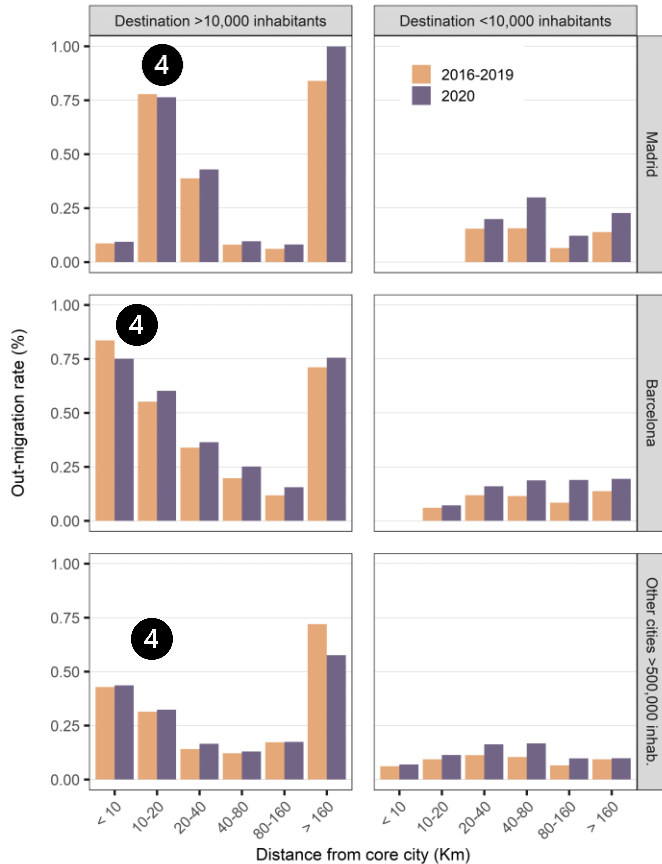
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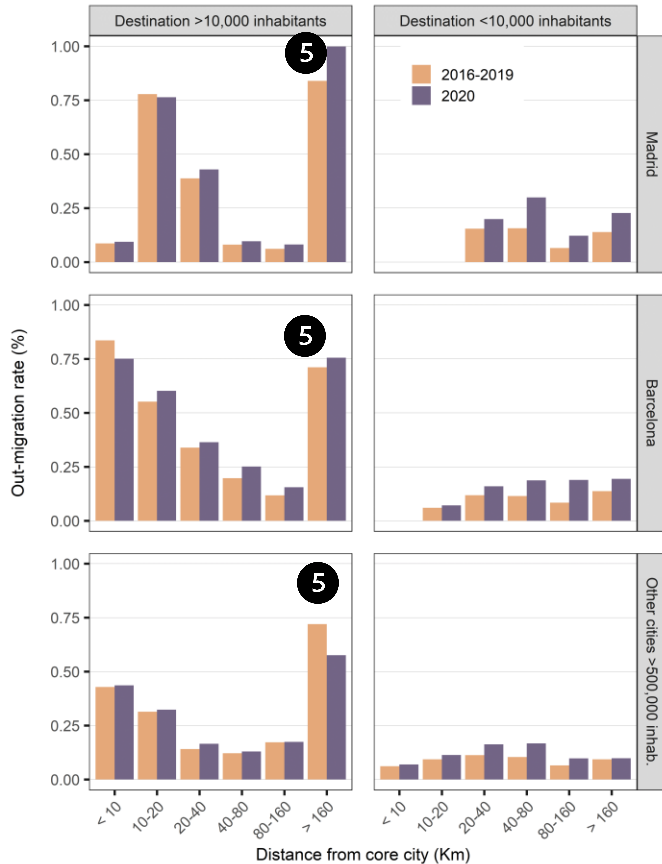
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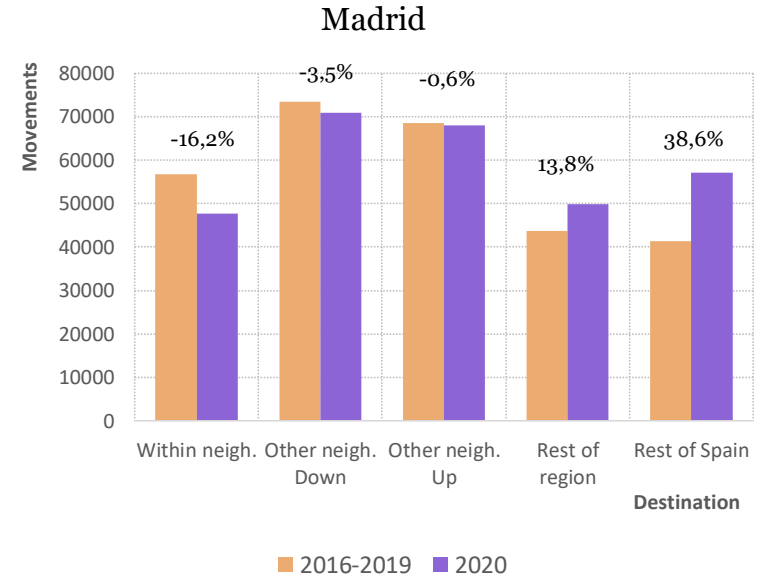
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- 5 Interesting mobility shift in mobility exchanges with urban areas located >160km. More movements leaving Madrid, lower number of movements from medium cities. (**temporal stop to interregional mobility of human capital?**)

2A. What happened to residential mobility within cities?

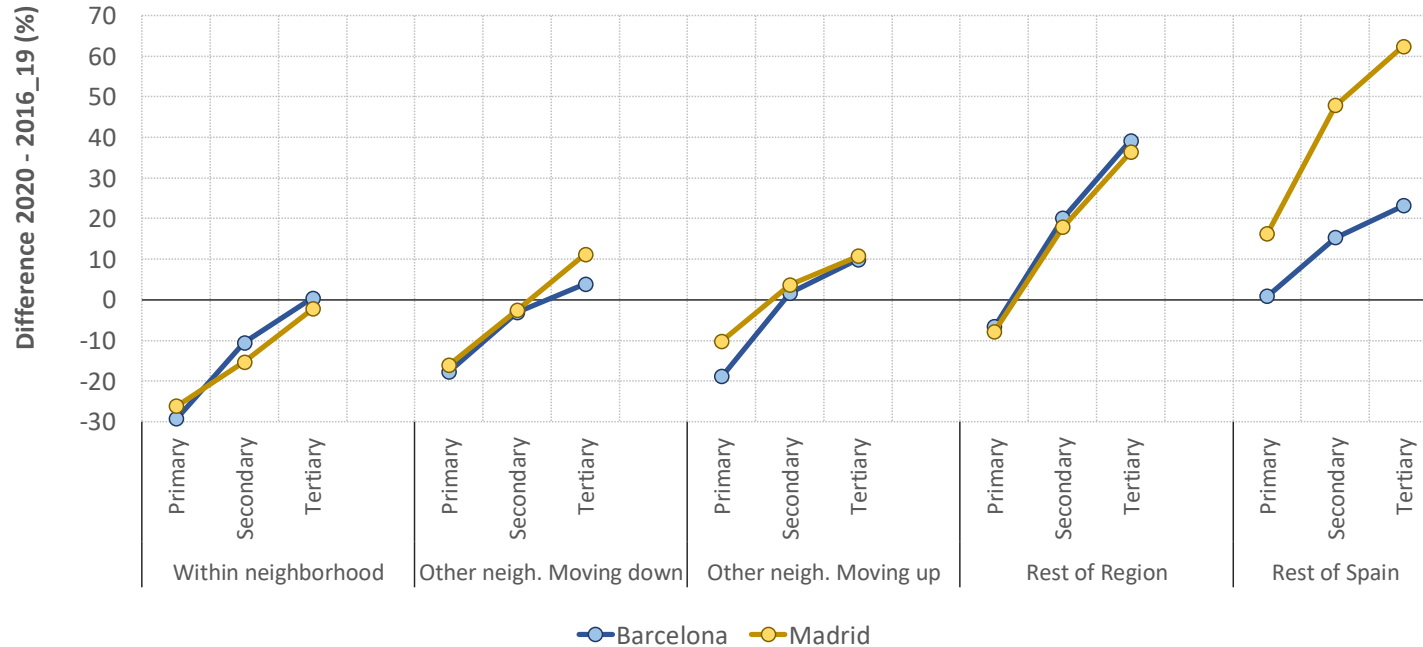
Figure 4. Intra and intermunicipal movements from the two largest cities, Barcelona and Madrid: 2016-2019 (average) and 2020.



- Largest decrease of short distance movements (within the neighborhood = -15%). Movements to neighborhoods with worst average income registered a higher decrease than movements to neighborhoods with better income.

2B. Which socioeconomic profile led the 2020 shifts in internal migration and residential mobility?

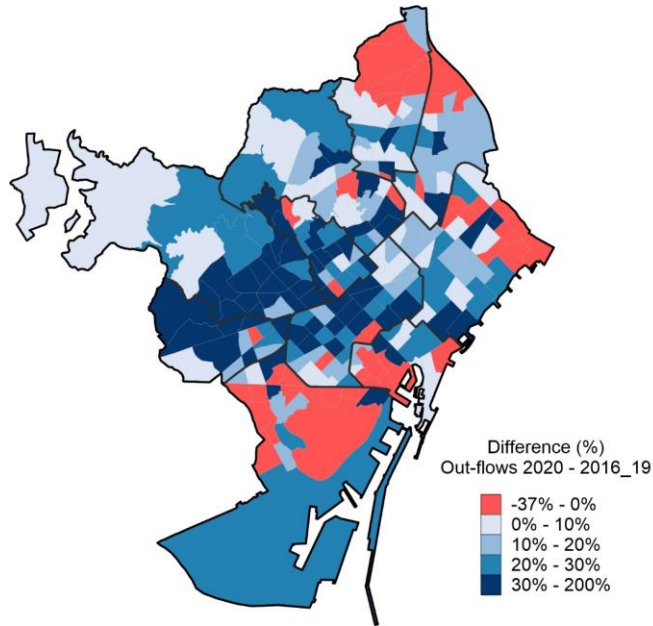
Figure 5. Difference 2020 – 2016_19 (%) in residential movements and internal migration in Barcelona and Madrid's inner cities by type of destination and educational attainment (population > 25 y.o.).



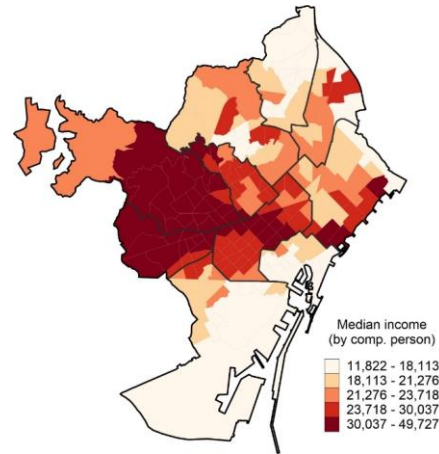
- There is a clear educational gradient in all types of movement and in the two largest cities. The highly educated moved significantly more than in the pre-pandemic period, while the less educated were much more stationary.

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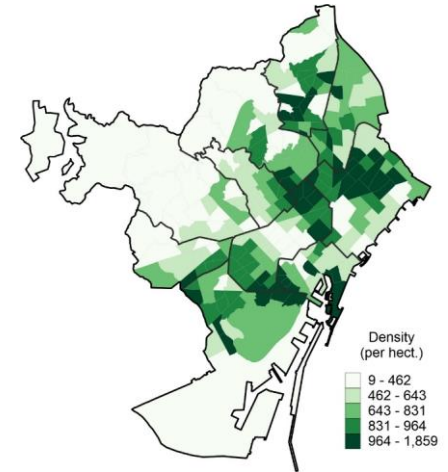
Figure 6. Spatial distribution of the difference in the out-flows leaving the central city (with destination to the rest of the region). 2020 – 2016_19 (%)



Average income (2016_2019)



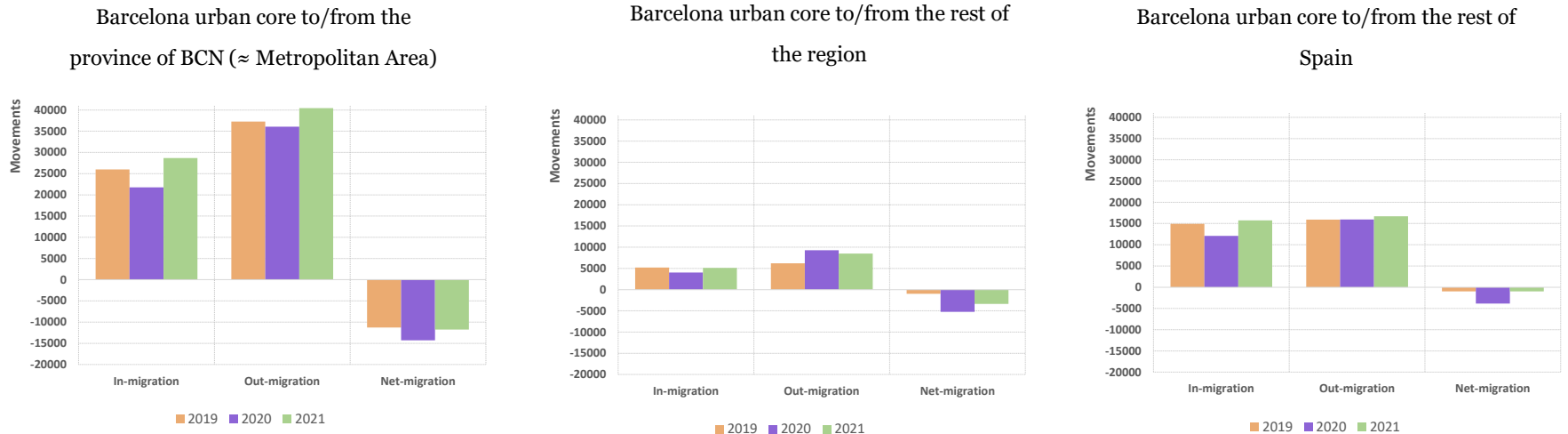
Population density



- The role of remote work ✓
- The role of second homes ✓
- New housing needs and preferences ✓ ✗
- The role of overcrowded households and density ✗

3. Are these short or long-term changes? Evidence from the 2021 (recent) dataset

Figure 7. Internal in-migration, out-migration, and net-migration by type of movement: 2019-2021.



- Urban Cores seem to regain their pre-pandemic attraction
- The 'urban exodus' bubble deflates slightly
- Reinforcement of out-flows to Metropolitan Rings

Final thoughts and concluding remarks

- We have found that, in 2020, there was a **decline in inflows to large cities and an acceleration in outflows**, while **rural areas recorded an increase in in-migration and greater population retention**.
- **Significant changes, but...** The outbreak of the pandemic had a notable impact on internal migration in 2020, but this is far from representing a change in dominant mobility patterns or a reversal of rural depopulation.
- Most of the movements were between or within cities, as was the case before the pandemic. Yet, these changes did have a **major impact on rural areas**, sparsely populated places where the arrival of new residents have had a major effect on demographic dynamics.
- **Socioeconomic dimension. The most privileged groups have led the changes.** On the other hand, the most vulnerable (those who lived in the worst housing conditions) have reduced residential mobility (it does not seem to have been able to improve their conditions). We expect an important role of second homes and atypical registrations (to avoid mobility restrictions, for example).
- **Are these changes temporal or long-term?** The EVR data for 2021 show that (i) Urban Cores regain their pre-pandemic attraction; (ii) The 'urban exodus' bubble explodes a bit; (iii) Reinforcement of out-flows to Metropolitan Rings
- **Implications on previous processes of urban transformation and socio-economic segregation.** COVID-19 pandemic has emerged after years of increasing processes of socio-economic segregation and polarization in many Western cities. Suburbanization of poverty? Gentrification? (Middle local classes leaving inner cities vs international transient privileged populations arriving to inner cities?)

THANK YOU FOR
YOUR
ATTENTION

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