



# Predictors of returns to work following retirement: A prospective analysis of Germany, Russia and the United Kingdom

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## In summary

Returns to work following retirement are most common in Russia and least common in Germany. Retirees in good health or who live in higher income households are more likely to unretire, suggesting that unretirement benefits those who are already advantaged.

## Background

Individuals may return to paid work following retirement, a phenomenon described as “unretirement”. By following recent retirees over time in Germany, Russia and the United Kingdom, we examined whether unretirement is more common for people who are facing financial hardship.

## Methods

Data are drawn from four prospective surveys: the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (1991–2013), the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (1994–2013) and, for the United Kingdom, the British Household Panel Survey (1991–2008) and Understanding Society (2010–2014), harmonized ex post. Unretirement behaviour was examined using Cox regression in relation to demographic covariates, as well as education, health and financial adequacy.

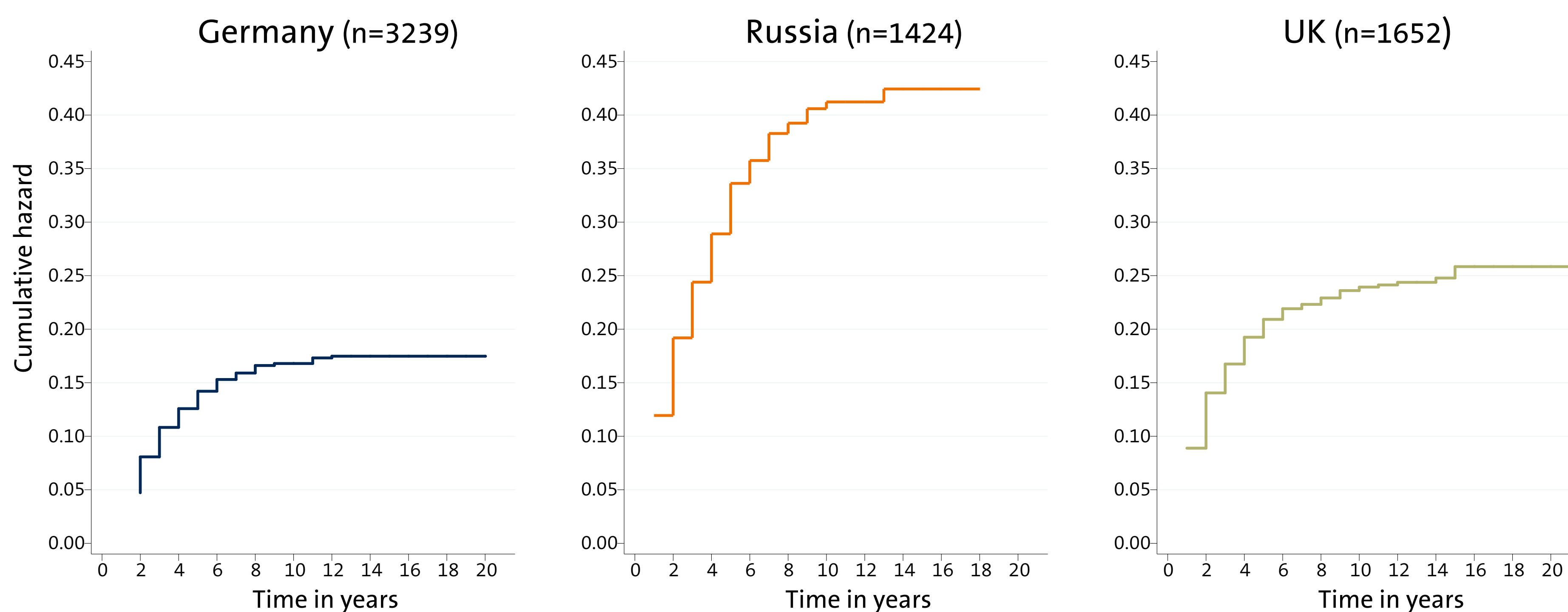
## Findings

The cumulative hazard of unretirement attained around 0.17 among German participants, 0.26 among British participants and 0.42 among Russian participants after 20 years of follow-up. As expected, based on earlier literature, retirement reversals occurred rapidly among the retirees (Figure 1), with three-quarters of the reversals occurring within five years in each country sample. Males, younger and more educated retirees, as well as those in better health and with higher incomes were generally more likely to return to work. Participants who were more concerned about their finances were not more likely to unretire in Russia or the United Kingdom and were only more likely to return to work in Germany following adjustment for the other covariates (Figure 2).

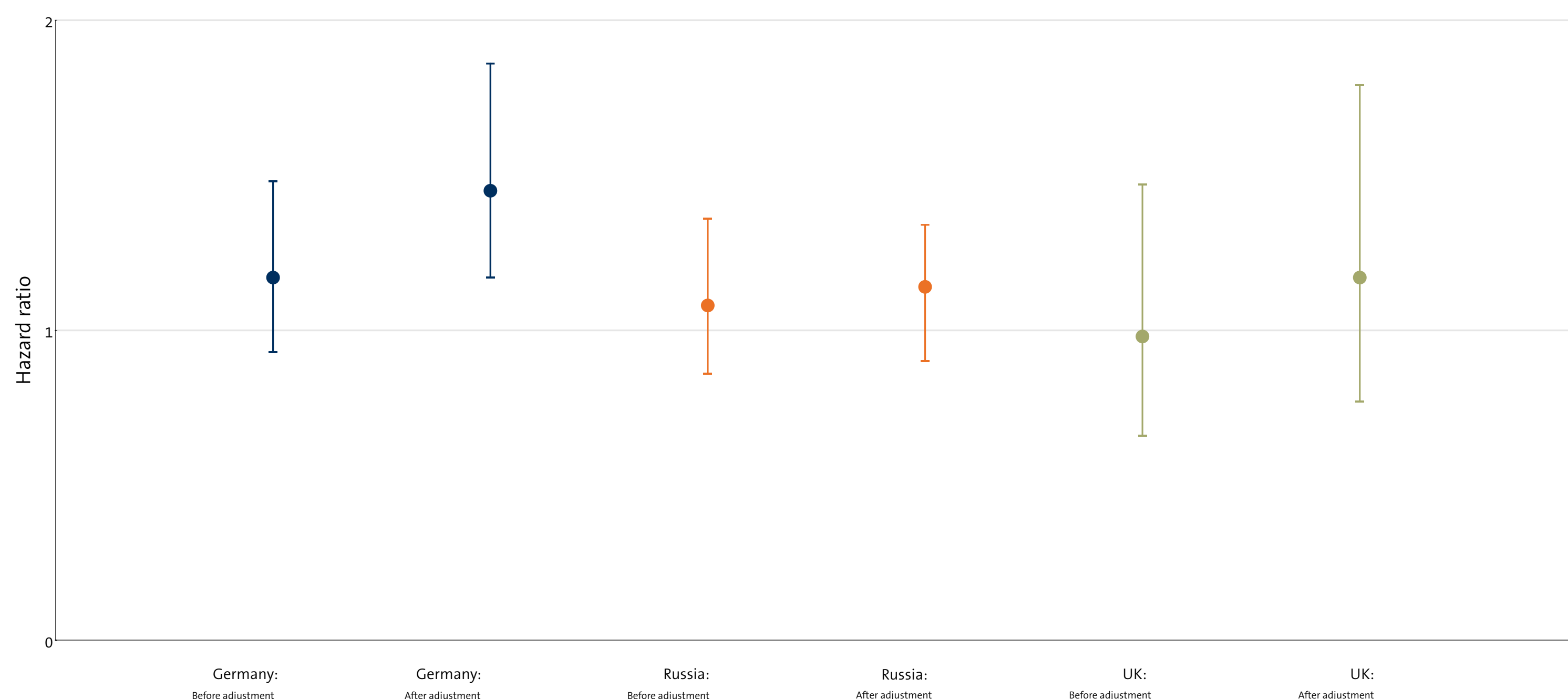
## Conclusions

Unretirement was common, confirming previous largely North American studies depicting retirement as a fluid and flexible process. While retired people may represent a substantial pool of potential labour, there was little indication that those most in need were unretiring, particularly in Russia and the UK. This suggests that encouraging greater reliance on employment in later life may cause hardship among older people unable to find suitable work and potentially exacerbate social inequalities.

**Figure 1.** Time to retirement reversal in Germany, Russia and the United Kingdom



**Figure 2.** Association of poor subjective finances with unretirement, before and after adjustment for period and demographic, socio-economic and health factors



## CONTACT