

**Project: Ageing Migrants' Well-being: The Structuring of Local Welfare Provisions at the Intersection of Public, Private, Third Sector and the Family (AgeWell), Marie Curie IEF Grant no. 328518**

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Target groups: policy makers and civil society

The population of older migrants increasingly attracts the attention of researchers and policy makers. For a long time, the buzzword has been the ageing of societies in Western Europe and North America. To address this issue, one solution was to attract younger working-age migrants. Traditionally migrants have been considered to be a young, male population. Nonetheless, given the immigration flows to Europe after the Second World War, the opening of borders within the European Union, and recent flows of retirement migration towards Southern Europe and beyond, there is increasing awareness that parts of the migrant population are ageing. In 2004, Warnes and his colleagues estimated that “the number of older migrants in Europe (and other developed world regions) will grow substantially during the coming half-century”<sup>2</sup>.

The project's objective was to study older migrants strategies to achieve well-being through the use of welfare provisions by different institutions: public, private, third sector or informal, i.e. the family.

To achieve this, the project employed a **qualitative methodology**. The fieldwork took place in three Swiss cantons: Geneva, Basel and Ticino. 57 in-depth interviews were conducted with older migrants aged 63+ and one focus group. Respondents were originally from Italy and Germany. These are among the most numerous migrant groups in Switzerland. Additionally, 33 interviews were conducted with representatives of institutions that provide services for older persons, including migrants. There were interviewed different types of formal care providers: public, private and third sector.

**Table 1: Percentage of residing older migrants and Italians and Germans in Switzerland, 2014 (%)**

	Foreign-born population	Italians (average in Switzerland is 3.7)	Germans (average in Switzerland is 3.6)	Older migrants, 65+ (average in Switzerland is 4.1)
Geneva	49.9%	4.4	1.0	7.9
Basel	40.8	4.2	7.8	6.3
Ticino	35.4	16.6	1.0	8.2

Source: Swiss Statistics, Table 'Permanent and non-permanent residing population by year, canton, type of population, gender, type of permit, age group and place of birth (country)'

The project **results** focus on three topics:

1. Institutions' perception of older migrants,
2. The welfare services for older migrants,
3. Older Italians and Germans in Switzerland.

### **Institutions' perception of older migrants**

One important aspect studied was the place older migrants occupy in local institutions focusing on: (1) whether older migrants are a visible population among the clients of the different institutions, (2) how institutions describe this population, and (3) when institutions speak about older migrants, who are they in fact speaking about.

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<sup>2</sup> Warnes AM, Friedrich K, Kellaher L, Torres S. 2004. The diversity and welfare of older migrants in Europe. *Ageing and Society* 24:307-326, p. 308.

The analysis concludes that older migrants constitute a rather invisible population that contacts institutions little. When they do, generally, their contact is mediated by their adult children who are well integrated and master the language from the destination; i.e. French or German. This is determined by a lack of language skills among older migrants, and not having the habit to interact with institutions. Representatives of local institutions in the three studied cantons acknowledge the heterogeneity of this group. They explain how one can see among their clients the different flows of immigration; in other words, the population who arrived as guest workers in the 1950s and 1960 originally from Italy, Spain and Portugal is already ageing and they are to be found among those who use services for the elderly. More recently, there is an increase in the older population with a migration background from other countries, whose citizens migrated later; for example former Yugoslavia, even Russia and African countries. To conclude, the discourse of the institutions towards older migrants is not a marginalising one in which they portray this population as an 'other', opposed to and different from the Swiss population.

### **The welfare services for older migrants**

Another important aspect refers to the existence or not of specialised welfare services targeting elderly migrants, and how the different institutions, which can be public, private or third sector, complement each other in the provision of services. The project outcome was the fact that there are few specific services, and when these exist, they are provided mainly by migrant associations. On the contrary the public sector speaks about individually tailored services. The response to the lack of formal services is to develop ad-hoc, improvised services developed in the one-to-one interaction between the provider and the client. While responding to individual needs is something to be applauded, there are limitations that need to be acknowledged. Individually tailored services are too dependent on the time availability among the care providers and the characteristics of the care receiver such as daring to ask for help or of the caregiver such as availability and willingness to help. The over-individualisation and lack of formalisation of care services, while accepting differences between persons, can potentially increase inequalities. Thus, it is important to formalise policies taking into account cultural variations, and encourage more exchanges between researchers and policy makers in the development of specialised services.

### **Older Italians and Germans in Switzerland**

The study of these two populations aimed to shed more light on the heterogeneity within these two groups, and go beyond the dichotomy of Italians – vulnerable working migrants – and Germans – well-off migrants. While these interviews are not representative of the respective migrant groups in Switzerland, the outcomes point to situations of vulnerability among older Germans, as well as cases of well-off and professionally established older Italians. Thus, they provide rich information on a variety of life situations and trajectories. For both Germans and Italians, ethnic associations are very important in the every day life for socialising and exchanging information. While family is important for many of the respondents, they understand that there are limitations to relying on family for care in old age, and prefer formal home care, if one is in need of it.

To conclude, one hypothesis that needs to be tested is if the heterogeneity of the Swiss population has a positive impact on how institutions in Switzerland see migrants, different from them, but then just as different as a person from another region would be.

Generally, more research is needed to cover more groups of older migrants. This would provide us with even a better image of the heterogeneity of older migrants and it would allow us to underpin the differences and similarities among older migrants looking at the duration of residence in the country of destination, the level of education, reasons for migration and age at the time of migration.