Ageing and job satisfaction: a comparison between native and migrant workers in Italy

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Introduction and background

Population ageing and migration are key demographic forces reshaping high-income countries. Ageing poses major challenges for intergenerational support, healthcare, and pension systems, while migration adds complexity by introducing diverse ethnic and cultural groups now reaching old age in their destination countries.

Labour market policies increasingly focus on extending working lives by raising retirement ages and eliminating early retirement to ensure pension sustainability (Vogel et al., 2013). While this has increased labour force participation among older workers (OECD, 2017), progress varies across countries, and those in physically demanding jobs may struggle to extend their careers (Visser et al., 2016).

Italy has experienced rapid population ageing over the past 50 years, with the elderly population growing from 9.3% in 1960 to 23.1% in 2022. The proportion of older migrants (50+) also doubled from 10.5% in 2002 to 20.4% in 2019 (Istat, 2020). This ageing trend, alongside efforts to extend working lives, has led to the rapid ageing of Italy's workforce (De Rose et al., 2019). Additionally, migrants in highly developed economies are also ageing (Ciobanu et al., 2017). Given these shifts, examining job satisfaction among older workers, especially comparing native-born individuals and migrants, is crucial and remains underexplored (Wang & Jing, 2018).

Analysing job satisfaction among older workers is essential due to its negative consequences. Low job satisfaction is linked to reduced performance (Judge et al., 2001), higher turnover (Green, 2010), increased sickness absence (Ybema et al., 2010), and negative effects on mental and overall health (Faragher et al., 2005). Dissatisfied older workers are also more likely to consider early retirement (Schnalzenberger et al., 2014), counteracting policies aimed at extending working lives. While much research has examined the determinants of job satisfaction (e.g., Kooij et al., 2010), studies focusing on older workers are limited (D'Angelo et al., 2016). Similarly, though there is extensive literature on migrants' health (Trappolini & Giudici, 2021), life satisfaction (Ambrosetti & Paparusso, 2021), happiness (Hendriks, 2015), and loneliness (Cela & Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2021), research on migrants' job satisfaction remains scarce (Piccito & Avola, 2023). To address this research gap, the first contribution of this study is to examine how migration status influences job satisfaction among older workers in Italy. Migrants are not a homogeneous group, as they differ by country of origin, duration of stay, and age at arrival. Therefore, the second contribution is to analyze job satisfaction differences between older native workers and older migrants, further distinguishing between those who migrated at an older age and those who have aged in Italy. The aim is to compare job satisfaction across these groups.

Data and methods

In this abstract, we used the Italian Labour Force Survey (LFS) from 2014 to 2022, carried out by the Italian National Statistics Institute (Istat).

The LFS surveys Italy's resident population annually, collecting comprehensive information on individuals' demographic characteristics, household composition, employment status, job tenure, and job satisfaction. Despite being a cross-sectional survey, it offers the most valuable microdata source for Italy, particularly for migrant-focused studies, due to its large immigrant sample (Alderotti et al., 2022).

For the analysis, we specifically focused on older workers aged 50 years old and older (N = 205,021; 9.2% migrants). The dependent variable is job satisfaction, measured with an 11-point Likert scale from 0 (at all satisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied). This indicator represents a reliable measure of job satisfaction (Spector, 1997), which was already used in previous studies (Piccitto & Avola, 2023; Spector, 1997). The main explicative variable is the migrant status measures on the basis of the place of birth, which we categorised into three groups: Italians, older migrants who arrived in Italy at the age of 40 or older and who spent less than 10 years of residence in the country (old migrants), and older migrants who have aged in Italy, those who arrived in Italy before the age of 40 and who spent more than 10 years of residence in Italy (aged migrants). As independent variables we included three sets of factors: 1) individual's socio-demographic characteristics (age group, educational level, and macro-area of residence in Italy). In the analysis only among migrants, we also included the origin area (highly developed countries – HDC, Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, South America); 2) household composition; 3) job characteristics (type of contract and working time).

For this abstract, first we analysed differences in job satisfaction between older native workers and older migrant workers, distinguishing between those who migrated later in life (old migrants) and those who have aged in the destination country (aged migrants). Second, we analyse determinants of job satisfaction among older migrant workers only. All analyses are stratified by sex and type of occupation (High/Medium skilled and Low skilled).

Preliminary results and conclusions

Figure 1 shows the results of the OLS analysis for both men and women for the total population by distinguishing between Italians, old migrants and aged migrants. While Figure 2 shows the results of the OLS analysis for both men and women among migrants only.
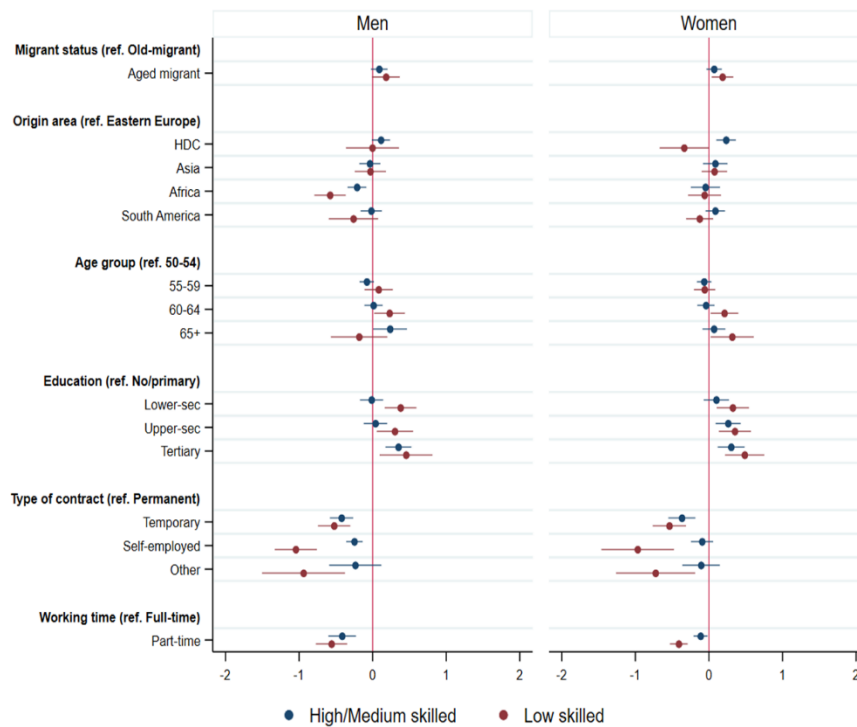
Figure 1 – Effect of migrant status on job satisfaction. Total population
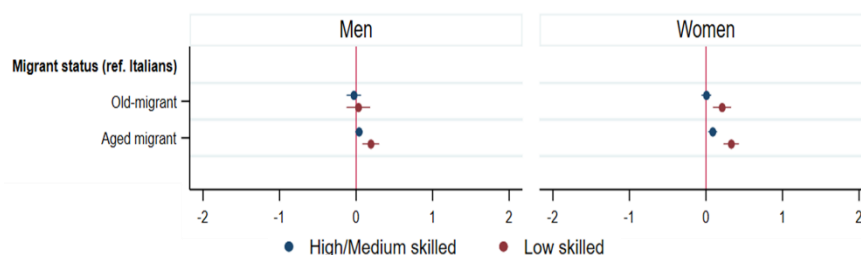
Note: The models control for: age group, education, macro-area of residence in Italy, household type, type of contract and working time.
Source: Authors' elaboration on LFS data (2014-2022).

Figure 2 – Determinants of job satisfaction among older migrant workers only

Note: The models also control for macro-area of residence.
Source: Authors' elaboration on LFS data (2014-2022).

The results suggests that migrants are generally more satisfied than natives, including older migrant workers, especially migrants aged in Italy and women. These results are in line with the job satisfaction paradox hypothesis which states that for the groups which are under-represented and typically disadvantaged in the labour market report higher job satisfaction than the majority group, due to their lower work-related expectations (Hodson, 1985). This paradox has been extensively demonstrated for women (Crosby, 1982; Piccitto et al., 2023). Finally, we found that as for the total the total population (e.g., Hünefeld et al. 2020), even among older workers, contract type and working time strongly influence job satisfaction.

Further developments

Our future analyses will focus on two main aspects:

1) Investigating the determinants of job satisfaction among native older workers.

2) Using the random forest model, we will examine other dimensions of satisfaction (e.g., wage satisfaction, workplace satisfaction, career satisfaction) to better understand how they influence overall job satisfaction and their relative importance.

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