

Job Satisfaction among Older Workers: Differences between Native and Migrant Populations in Italy

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Introduction and background

The progressive ageing of populations and the migration phenomenon are two key demographic forces affecting the population structure in high-income countries. Population ageing represents a major challenge for those countries, with far-reaching implications for intergenerational support, healthcare, and pension systems. The migration phenomenon adds further complexities to the ageing process of population. It involves individuals from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds who are now approaching old age in their destination countries.

National labour market policies now commonly focus on extending working lives by eliminating early retirement options and raising the state retirement age to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of pension programs (Vogel et al., 2013). While this approach has led to increasing labour force participation among older workers (OECD, 2017), its progress varies across countries, and older workers in physically demanding jobs may face difficulties in extending their careers (Visser et al., 2016).

Among developed countries, Italy has experienced rapid population ageing in the last 50 years, with the share of elderly individuals increasing from 9.3% in 1960 to 23.1% in 2022. The country has also seen a doubling in the percentage of older migrants aged 50 and over, rising from 10.5% in 2002 to 20.4% in 2019 (Istat, 2020). This impressive ageing of the population, combined with the initiatives to extend working life, has led to the rapid ageing of the Italian workforce (De Rose et al., 2019). Moreover, there is a growing presence of migrants in the workforce in highly developed economies (Field et al., 2013; Ambrosini & Panichella, 2023) who are experiencing progressive ageing (Ciobanu et al., 2017). Given these evolving work dynamics, it is crucial to examine job satisfaction among older individuals. This analysis is particularly important when comparing the job satisfaction between native-born individuals and migrants, as it remains a relatively unexplored issue (Koh et al., 2016; Wang & Jing, 2018).

Analysing job satisfaction among older workers is critical due to its various negative implications. Low job satisfaction is associated with reduced job performance (Judge et al., 2001), increased job turnover (Green, 2010), higher sickness absence rates (Roelen et al., 2008; Ybema et al., 2010), and negative effects on mental and overall health (Faragher et al., 2005; Spector et al., 1997). Additionally, dissatisfied older workers tend to consider or choose early retirement (Schnalzenberger et al., 2014; Zacher & Rudolph, 2017), which contradicts the policy focus on extending working lives.

While previous research has extensively explored the determinants of job satisfaction (e.g., Kooij et al., 2010) studies on job satisfaction among older workers are limited (e.g., D'Angelo et al., 2016). Similarly, although there is a substantial body of literature on migrants' health (e.g., Loi & Hale, 2019; Trappolini & Giudici, 2021), life satisfaction (e.g., Ambrosetti & Paparusso, 2021), happiness (e.g., Hendriks, 2015), and loneliness (e.g., Cela & Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2021), research on migrants' job satisfaction is limited (Piccitto & Avola, 2023).

To address this research gap, the first contribution of this study is to investigate how migration status influences job satisfaction among older workers in Italy. Still, migrants are not a homogenous group, as they differ in terms of country of origin, duration of stay in the destination country, and age at arrival. In this context, the second contribution of this study is to analyse differences in job satisfaction between older native workers and older migrant workers, further distinguishing between those who migrated at an older age and those who have aged in the destination country. Therefore, the aim of our study is to compare differences in job satisfaction between these populations.

Data and methods

In this abstract, we used the fourth quarter of the 2022 Italian Labour Force Survey (LFS), carried out by the Italian National Statistics Institute (Istat) (n = 126,921 individuals).

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 (Fullin & Reyneri, 2011; Alderotti et al., 2022).

For the analysis, we specifically focused on older workers aged 50 years old and older (n = 18,689 individuals) and who do not have missing information at job related variables (n = 18,447 individuals; 12.3% 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, which we categorised into three groups: Italians, older migrants who arrived in Italy at the age of 40 or older (O.M. 40+), and older migrants who have aged in Italy (O.M. – A.I.).

As independent variables we included three sets of factors: 1) individual's socio-demographic characteristics (age, educational level, and macro area of residence in Italy); 2) household composition; 3) job characteristics (type of contract and working time).

For this abstract, we analysed differences in job satisfaction between the populations identified (Italians, O.M. 40+, and O.M. – A.I.) applying OLS models stratified by sex.

Preliminary results

Table 1 shows the results of the OLS analysis for both men and women. The regression coefficients are linear, indicating the extent to which reported job satisfaction changes for a one-point increase in the covariate.

For male workers, the coefficient for migrant status is positive but not statistically significant. Conversely, for female workers, the coefficient is negative and statistically significant. This suggests that, after accounting for socio-demographic and job-related factors, migrant female workers are generally less satisfied with their jobs than their Italian counterparts. This difference is particularly pronounced for migrant female workers who migrated at the age of 40 or older (-0.351), whereas for those who have aged in Italy, the coefficient is smaller (-0.157).

Table 1 - OLS regressions coefficients of job satisfaction by gender

	Men	Women
<i>Migrant status (ref. Italians)</i>		
O.M. 40+	0.008 (0.955)	-0.351 (0.002)
O.M. – A. I.	0.026 (0.667)	-0.157 (0.013)
<i>N. observations</i>	10,350	8,097

Note: (1) The models control for: age group, education, macro-area of residence in Italy, household type, type of contract and working time. (2) "O.M. 40+" refers to older migrants who arrived in Italy at the age of 40 or older; "O.M. – A.I." refers to older migrants who have aged in Italy. (3) P-value in brackets.

Source: Authors' elaboration on LFS data (2019 – IV).

Further developments

Our study is planned to include data from additional survey waves, beginning with 2014, which is the first year the job satisfaction question was included. Our future analyses will focus on two main aspects:

- 1) Determinants of job satisfaction for both native and migrant older workers.
- 2) Examining differences in job satisfaction and other dimensions of satisfaction (i.e., wage satisfaction, workplace satisfaction, career satisfaction) based on migrant status, type of contract, occupation, and migrants' area of origin.

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