

Old immigrants in France and their choice of place of residence

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ABSTRACT

The modern world has long faced two types of demographic changes: intense population migration and ageing. Migration flows evolve and change, influenced by globalization and better transport and communication possibilities. Temporary immigration gradually becomes permanent. Over time, immigrants also get old and increase the already significant number of elderly people in the host country. Once retired, the question arises as to the choice of their place of residence: to stay in the host country, or to return to the country of origin?

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Introduction and theoretical approach. France is one of the first immigration countries where the process of importing foreign labour began two centuries ago, so before other receiving countries it was faced with the problem of ageing of large numbers of immigrants.

The issue of ageing migrants has been raised and discussed thanks to the effective joint action of several associations and researchers from different fields (gerontology, sociology, demography, history, law, etc.). Publications such as *Écarts d'identité* and *Plein droit*, as well as *Hommes & Migrations* and *Migrations Société*, have made the issue of migrant ageing visible through the specialized press and public debates.

Along with the work of Sayad [1] and Noiriel [2], who showed that retirement is often a time of deep re-examination of the identity of old migrants, other sociologists such as Marc Bernardot [3] and Remi Gallou [4] are interested in the living and ageing conditions of migrants living in Sonacotral homes, specially built for immigrant workers from the Maghreb countries. Public authorities considered this type of housing temporary but paradoxically continued to build on the same model until the early 1980s.

Contrary to the idea of the "illegitimate age" of ageing immigrants in the host country, Claudine Attias-Donfut [5] sees retirement and staying in France in retirement as an indicator of successful integration.

The ageing of immigrants from the perspective of their family ties is the angle Sylvie Emsellem [6] has chosen to understand the family strategies of migrant retirees. According to her, the presence or absence of a family in France, the maintenance or distance of family ties between the two countries, are the basic parameters for deciphering the paths of immigrants, especially at the time of retirement.

This research, which primarily refers to the ageing immigrant population in France, shows the general tendencies in Western Europe. After the pioneering research started by Sayad and Noirel in the 1980s, other authors became involved in the treatment of this topic, which today, with the general tendency of ageing in the host countries, presents a very current social issue.

Immigration and its stages

Immigration, at first, appears as temporary, provisional, and so are residence and work permits issued to it by the host country (for those who are not from EU member states). It is understood that immigrants will be in the receiving country for some time, depending on the work they do, and will return to their country of origin after completing their work. The ageing and age of immigrants in the receiving country have therefore not been considered for a long time. The presence of immigrants in the receiving country should stop as soon as the work that was the reason for their arrival stops. Therefore, the pension implies the time of return to the country of origin and should not be of interest to the host country. However, a significant part of immigrants, over time, manages to stabilize and settle in the host country, which forced its society to face a new social problem: old immigrants.

UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines an immigrant as a person who moves into a country other than that of his or her nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination

effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence [7]. So, it refers to the first generation of immigrants, but not to their children and grandchildren, although these next generations also bear the stigma of their ancestors. Since the largest number of immigrants have historically been recruited from the ranks of unskilled and low-skilled foreign labour, there is a stereotype about immigrants in the collective consciousness of the host country, as mostly poor and uneducated people performing unskilled jobs. Of course, since the 1960s, when unskilled labour was imported en masse, times have changed and now, conversely, "selected immigration" is encouraged, ie highly qualified foreign experts. It remains, however, that the first generations of elderly immigrants who got retired were just those who did hard and low-paid jobs.

This issue has gradually become the subject of research in various scientific fields, such as gerontology, sociology of immigration, the study of foreigners' rights, the creation of a social security fund for migrant workers and other activities that have drawn public attention to these specific questions.

Awareness of the particular problems of ageing immigration slowly took shape in France in the late 1980s, when researchers began to take an interest in the issue, under the impetus of state organizations.

In 1988, the *Fonds d'action Sociale* (Social Action Funds) launched research to include the structure of old migrants in France, an analysis of their motivations for staying or leaving France, and forms of ageing of foreigners living in France, with the recommendation to concentrate the research on immigrants from the Maghreb countries. This is how the study "Ageing of migrants in the Paris region" was created [8].

In their methodological choice, the authors decided to take a much broader approach, opting for a comparative method between the immigrant elderly population and the native elderly population, distinguishing in the immigrant population earlier immigrants – Italians, Spaniards, from groups that came in later waves – Portuguese, Moroccans, Tunisians and Algerians. Researchers concluded that the biggest problems in integration, including the problems of ageing, affect recent immigrants. Migrants, who belong to the waves of migration that appeared earlier (in their research, it is primarily Italians and Spaniards) have almost the same characteristics as groups of native Frenchmen of the same age. This led the authors to conclude that the success of integration depends on the length of stay of immigrants in the receiving country. Therefore, their ageing in the receiving country represents an indicator of their integration.

The dilemma of old migrants: to return to the homeland, or to stay in France until death?

According to a survey conducted in France among immigrants aged 45 and over, only 7% of active immigrants intended to return to their country of origin at the time of retirement. But despite remaining in France, most maintain close ties with the homeland, through the departure and return routes, sending money and developing transnational bridges between the two countries [9]. Most of the interviews conducted showed that elderly immigrants, whatever their nationality, were imbued with the idea of

returning to their homeland. Ageing, i.e. the end of the active period, puts them in a specific situation to both their receiving country and their country of origin. They came to the host country to work in it, and once the activity ceases, their stay in it is perceived as illegitimate by themselves, as well as by the immigration society. On the other hand, the decision to end their life in the host country seems to be a definite betrayal of the country of origin, to which, until then, they had hoped to return. Because of that dilemma, old migrants seem to experience retirement time worse than the French.

Why, then, does the majority still decide to stay in the receiving country? The main reason is material. Most of them, even after having achieved the age for retirement is still working. Others do not want to lose some rights they have obtained by leaving France definitively, such as social benefits, accommodation in social housing, etc.

What also binds them to France are better medical services than they would have in their country of origin and some comfort they are used to. A very important element of attachment to France is the integration of their children, which they do not want to leave. All while maintaining a love for their country of origin, they did everything they could to make their children fit into French society and the second generation to have a better life than their parents. Thus, paradoxically, with the success of their children, their desire to return ends. Integrated into French society, in most cases with French citizenship, their children have no intention of settling in their parents' country of origin, which they know only as a place where they have spent their school holidays.

In such circumstances, if they want to return to their country of origin, the parents are faced with a new separation at a time when, thanks to retirement, they can finally dedicate themselves to the family. Having grandchildren is a new social role for them, which takes precedence over the desire to return to the homeland.

Those whose families remained in the country of origin are most likely to return. Immigrants who have no family in either France or their country of origin generally stay in France in old age [8].

Although the integration has not fully succeeded, acculturation has largely separated them from the society of the country of origin, in which they feel like foreigners, and are considered as such by those who remained in the country. Propagated social trends, which led to increasing individualization, weakened earlier ties with the community from which they came.

Some of them do not want to return, so as not to show that their "emigration" failed, that they failed to acquire significant material goods, which they aspired to when leaving. If they could create the illusion of material success abroad for their compatriots during the few weeks of vacation they regularly spent in the homeland, they often avoid facing the reality of a definite return, especially since many emigration countries have significantly increased economically, and have the standard of living much higher than at the time when they emigrated.

The fact that they managed to build a house in their country of origin is a factor that may favour their return – at least for economic reasons – they no longer have to pay rent. Some experience the

return as a kind of rehabilitation: the feeling of being intruders who have no place in the receiving country, is finally replaced with a sense of belonging where “their house” is.

It is often stated that men have a greater desire to return than women, who, more attached to their home and children, are better able to socialize through the circle they make with the help of their children and school. It could be said that this, weaker integration of men, also stems from their more frequent encounters in the professional milieu with discrimination and racism, which constantly brought them back to their role as foreigners who have no place there, or at least not permanently [10]. Old migrants face the same problems as other elderly people belonging to the same social milieu, but these problems are amplified by the specificity of their immigrant situation. They have worked poorly paid all their lives, their professional careers are often interrupted, with frequent job changes, undeclared work, unsuccessful attempts to return to their country of origin. All this penalizes them at the time of retirement when they have to prove that they had been paying into pension funds long enough. Most of them, even after decades in the country of immigration, do not speak its language. This prevents them to be informed and to initiate procedures to exercise their rights, especially with the complicated French administration, which can easily discourage them from further efforts.

To be able to use their pension, they have to reconstruct their careers, which requires numerous procedures at all the companies they worked for, in the country of origin and the host country. The inability to submit evidence of work experience is one of the main reasons why this foreign population is much more often active after the age of 65. On the other hand, they are facing an earlier termination of employment more often than the French. With the restructuring of the industry, especially in the automotive industry, where foreign workers were more represented, “ungrateful” jobs, mostly occupied by immigrants, disappeared. After the age of 50, very few of them can find a new job. They then live with insufficient income – low pensions, social assistance, temporary unemployment benefits. Because their working lives were more precarious, with lower incomes, primo-immigrants (first-generation immigrants) have heavier old years than the French.[11]

What is most often the reality of old age immigrants, is the constant departures and arrivals between their “two worlds” – country of origin and country of destination. This is a way for them to reconcile their contradictory “double” relationship with these two poles. Those who cannot or will not participate in these constant journeys are the loneliest [1].

The main difference exists for those who are surrounded by their family in old age and for those who are alone. Suffering from exile and segregation, members of these communities seem more receptive and more hearing than the French when it comes to ageing, often rejecting any idea of putting their old parents in nursing homes. Children and grandchildren play an essential role for the ageing population and the quality of its life, which is even more pronounced in the case of old immigrants [12].

Among the population of foreign origin in France aged 65 and over, most have acquired French citizenship. For immigrants who have the citizenship of one of the EU member states, taking French citizenship has no longer the same meaning, but the citizens of “third” countries are still interested in it.

Noiriel, Guichard and Lechien [8] observed that naturalization changes immigrants' perception of the legitimacy of their presence in French society.

The results showed that almost 100% of the old people living in nursing homes are native French. Approximately 1% are naturalized French from the oldest, European immigration. Of course, old people's homes are not "reserved" for the French, but as far as immigrants are concerned, it is much more common to get old surrounded by the family integrated in France, or, if single, to continue living in single homes for as long as possible [8].

Ageing

As Bourdieu said: "Age is a biological data that is socially manipulated and subject to manipulation" [13]. Age can be interpreted and viewed based on different criteria: chronological age, biological age, social age.

The concept of ageing, in addition to biological, can be viewed as professional ageing, which means inequality before the professional devaluation, which manifests itself differently for different socio-professional categories. The lower the hierarchy of jobs, the faster the ageing at the professional level – which is reflected in the rapid "ceiling" of salaries and the cessation of opportunities for professional promotion. This devaluation in the work environment is followed by rapid physical ageing, exhaustion due to hard work and a high percentage of injuries at work.

On the other hand, the weakened health condition of immigrants is often the reason for their decision to stay in the host country even in old age, because they are afraid that they will have poorer medical care in the country of origin. Gathering a family, almost beyond them, leads to a definite stay in the host country. Immigrants who have become parents are focused on the social success of their children in the new society. Knowing that school is the main place of socialization and that school success is a ticket to further climbing the social ladder, immigrant parents insist on educating their children to provide them with a better life than theirs in the host country. However, it is in school, which should be their ticket to a better tomorrow, that their children see that "the norms of the host country's society are constantly devaluing their family [2].

This attitude of immigrant parents towards their children carries with them an initial, basic immigrant contradiction: the desire for their children to become "invisible", fully integrated elements of the receiving society, and on the other hand, the desire to preserve their original cultural identity.

According to Lenoir [14], the definition of age is the subject of a struggle between social classes, and, within each of them, between generations. It aims at redistribution of power and privileges which also takes place in the family, through transmission between parents and children. When the parents get old, the relationship of dependence is reversed. This has an even deeper meaning for immigrants, as it contrasts first-generation members, immigrants who had their first socialization in their country of origin, with their children, as a second-generation, socialized in the host country.

The feeling of ageing is not just a result of the passing of years – it also depends on the relationship that individuals maintain with young people, and especially with their children. Ageing is certainly one stage in the life cycle, but biological age is also subject to different social perceptions and definitions. Over time, the weakening of “physical capital” forces the reduction of various forms of activity, and even the abandonment of responsibilities that are an integral part of adulthood.

From old age to the "third age"

In his article Lenoir [14] gives a historical overview of the forms of care for the old people, which until the end of the 19th century was the role of the family. In the 20th century, this care was institutionalized, and the new category, “Third age” was invented. The third age, according to new agents involved in the care of the old persons, means the age between retirement and old age. It is not old age, but its negation. Defining old age as “new youth”, “third age” as leisure and entertainment and retirement as “active retirement”, imposing the idea that life begins at age of 60, means favouring the introduction of new agents who live off these people. The social intention is to intervene earlier with the collective management of old age. These changes resulted from transformations of lifestyles and changes in the position of households and families in the mechanisms of society’s reproduction. Many areas that have traditionally been the responsibility of the family, and which have contributed to its survival as a group, have been delegated to institutions and specialists. Thus, the care of children of all ages is entrusted to specialized institutions, family vacations are replaced by organized vacations, etc. With all this, the role and authority of parents over children has weakened. The marriage of children was accompanied by the systematic separation of children from the parental household, aided by the development of the real estate market and the expansion of opportunities to provide loans for the purchase of apartments to young couples.

All these changes in the structure and organization of the family and society affected the invention of the “third age”, which, along with other changes, was accompanied by construction of a picture of the lifestyle of active retirees, which was spread by works on this topic and specialized magazines. Most of these instructions and magazines convey one message: do not be a burden to the younger generations!

The development of the category of “third age” and the inversion of power relations between parents and children, does not affect different social strata in the same way and with the same intensity. Retirement does not have the same meaning for all classes. For executives and senior management, retirement does not mean retirement from all positions they held until then, nor complete cessation of business activities. In addition, people from these circles have economic and cultural capital, which allows them to spend their time with various cultural and other activities. Also, most have a significant number of acquaintances, from professional and other backgrounds, people of the same social status and with the same cultural capital, with whom they have the opportunity to meet and exchange on various issues, which makes their retirement time fulfilled, as in the age when they worked. The various activities of which they are a part, gather not only representatives of the same layer of their age, but also the younger generation, so there is a common, intergenerational field of exchange, which continues to function

independently of the retirement of older generations. This type of “easy” pension does not necessarily mean turning to the family or intensifying relationships with children, especially not for those who have significant social relations outside the family.

On the other hand, retirement for the middle and lower classes is objectively a cross-section, a significant lifestyle change. This is especially true for immigrants, for whom work in a foreign country was a reason to come and stay in it, and the workplace is often the only area of exchange with other social groups, apart from their compatriots.

Although the method of calculating pensions is the same for all workers – migrants and domestic, at the time of retirement, migrants again and fully face the discrimination that accompanied their careers. Retirement is a definite indicator of all the difficulties of their working life – difficulties in employment, inequality in the level of wages, the uncertainty of status and conditions, as well as poor opportunities for career advancement. Economic immigration, which came to France from countries of lower socio-economic development, low levels of diplomas, or diplomas that are inadequate for the French labour market, are most often employed in jobs that require unskilled labour, have low wages and precarious status. Many of them work illegally, some consciously, and some even without knowing that their employer does not pay the legal costs for them. This is especially the case with workers in construction, catering, or clothing [11].

Also, many women working as a home-help have been left without any income. These women mostly came to France through the family regrouping procedure, with limited employment opportunities, working little, or often illegally [11].

The fact that migrants occupy unskilled and low-paid jobs explains the low level of their pensions. With such a small pension, they have no choice but to apply for social assistance, ie old-age allowance, and continue working [11].

Conclusion. The retirement of immigrants raises the question of international coordination of pension systems, given that a significant number of immigrants have worked in two or more countries where they have acquired the right to a pension. Differences in regimes, administrative procedures, and legislation present significant difficulties in exercising their pension rights.

It is not enough just to secure a pension, it should also enable a quality life within and outside their families and the opportunity to participate in social flows, which makes their doubly negative social position of the old and immigrants even more difficult.

Even though there are migrants who retire while living alone in special homes for foreign workers, most old immigrants live in their families, either only with a spouse or with children. Veisse and Aina [15] emphasize “greater prevalence of certain serious medical and psychological conditions, deeper social insecurity than in the rest of the population, legal barriers and specific difficulties in communication”. The idea that is generally accepted is that immigrant families are very supportive and provide the necessary support and assistance in case of illness or other disability. This does not mean, however, that they do not need institutional assistance and are able to provide all the necessary care and treatment on

their own. There is also a stereotype that immigrants are reluctant to seek help outside the family circle. However, less use of services does not mean that they are not necessary. Research has shown that this is primarily due to a lack of information and difficulties in communication[12].

For these reasons, immigrants, especially the elderly, may have difficulty exercising their civil rights.

The PRI survey [9] showed the importance of the role of children in immigrant families, as they help parents in all areas from an early age, especially administrative matters, because they speak the language better and are better adapted to life in the host country. In addition to this family, intergenerational support, important assistance is also provided by transnational sources, when it is necessary to deliver something to the country of origin or to provide accommodation to a newcomer from the homeland.

This, of course, does not mean that such autosolidarity is enough.

Immigrants who came to the host country in their late years, after the 50s or 60s have special problems. This is less common, but there are a number of those who have come for a variety of reasons: for professional reasons, to live on their pension in France, to join children who have already lived there. This is a time when it is harder to adapt to such drastic changes. This is especially true for those who have "pulled out" of their former environment in order to join the children. For them, the attention of children and grandchildren is primordial, because they did not have time to create other connections and get used to France. According to the PRI, most of them live with children, or in their immediate vicinity (12% live with children and 46% within 10 km) [9].

However, most refuse to leave their former homes and join the children abroad. Thus, an old woman who lived alone in Poland, refused to join her children in France with the words "You can't transplant an old tree" [12].

The retirement of immigrants in the host countries takes place in the context of the overall ageing of the population, so their stay in the host country leads to an increase in the need for health and social protection. On the other hand, the return of pensioners and the elderly in general to the country of origin puts it in a situation where the population that left as young and most capable to contribute to the country's development, returns when old and demands the greatest support from social and health care [16].

Purchasing power parity (PPP), or the relative cost of living between countries, has an impact on the planned length of stay in the host country and on return migration rates [17], [18]. In most cases, greater purchasing power can be achieved in the country of origin, because pensions and savings accumulated in the host country will generally buy a larger basket of goods and services in the country of origin compared to the host country. Taxes can also be a significant item in retirees' decisions to relocate. Higher property taxes encourage retirees to move to areas with lower property taxes [19].

However, purchasing power is not the only determinant behind the decision to return. Local amenities (mild climate and quality of public infrastructure, health system of the country) are also important for the decision to return home or stay in the host country. Countries of origin, traditionally poorer than host countries, have poorer benefits in this regard. Therefore, the decision to return to the country of origin will in many cases depend on an assessment of the ratio of higher purchasing power to lower quality local amenities in those countries.

The solution to avoid this dilemma is in frequent departures and returns, but this is feasible in the period of "earlier old age" when the mental and physical condition of pensioners allows it. However, this is not a solution that is feasible in the long run, when health conditions weaken, and personal mobility becomes limited.

Family, children and grandchildren have a significant role in choosing a place of residence for the elderly, but all mentioned elements could be important in their personal choice.

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