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Life Satisfaction Among Italian Migrants, Italian Stayers, and Swiss Natives: Who Fares Better?

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Abstract: Although reasons for migration may differ, it can be argued that international migrants have a common goal: improving the living conditions and well-being for themselves and their families. However, we still know relatively little about how older migrants evaluate their well-being and the implications of migration for their life satisfaction. This paper aims to contribute to this body of research. In a first part, we focus on two comparisons: 1) The life satisfaction level of older Italian migrants in Switzerland compared to that of older Swiss natives, and 2) The life satisfaction level of older Italian migrants in Switzerland compared to that of older Italian stayers in Italy. In a second part, we investigate the determinants of life satisfaction in each of these three groups. The article draws on an original survey carried out in Switzerland and Italy (N = 1,654).

Against the current comparative literature on older migrants and non-migrants, we hypothesized that older Italian migrants in Switzerland display lower life satisfaction than older Swiss natives, and that older Italian migrants in Switzerland display higher life satisfaction than older stayers in Italy. We expected to observe these differences even when accounting for sociodemographic characteristics. While migrants' average life satisfaction levels are lower than the levels of Swiss natives, this difference is fully mediated by sociodemographic variables. Migrants also report slightly lower life satisfaction levels than stayers; this difference remains significant at the $p<0.1$ level but diminishes as we control for sociodemographic characteristics. When investigating the life satisfaction determinants of each group, we find similarities among the three groups: being in good health and being able to make financial ends meet are positively correlated with life satisfaction, while experiencing age-related discrimination is negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Having a partner is only positively correlated with satisfaction for Swiss natives, and religiosity is only positively correlated with satisfaction for stayers.

The importance of this paper is threefold: 1) it investigates older migrants' life satisfaction, an area of research that is underdeveloped, 2) it compares migrants to stayers, a comparison that is seldom found in the current literature but necessary to understand the implications of having a migratory background, and 3) it highlights the importance of policy interventions addressing the socioeconomic inequalities of older migrants.

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1 Introduction

Migrants are a very heterogeneous group, but they have a similar goal that ties them together: They generally migrate to improve their own lives and that of their families. Migration studies have for long focused on the objective consequences of migration, revealing that migration often results in ameliorated conditions, such as improved economic circumstances (*Nikolova/Graham* 2015), the possibility of sending remittances to the family in the country of origin (*Joarder et al.* 2017), and better educational opportunities for children (*Zuccotti et al.* 2017). However, it is only recently that researchers started studying migrants' subjective evaluations of their lives. The importance of such focus is rooted in what *Graham* (2009) calls the "paradox of happy peasants and miserable millionaires", or the idea that people can lead an objectively good life but still be unhappy (and vice versa). This is because objective measures of well-being do not account for individual differences in the evaluation of objectively similar circumstances (*Hendriks/Bartram* 2019). In the case of migrants, migration can lead to significant objective improvements, but it can also introduce an array of potentially momentous negative situations in their lives, ranging from separation from social networks in the country of origin, lower socio-economic status in the destination country, discrimination (*Hendriks et al.* 2018; *Hendriks/Bartram* 2019), and stress associated with cultural differences (*Tabor/Milfont* 2011). These situations may in turn impact migrants' life satisfaction.

Older migrants in particular may experience a series of compounded risks due to age-related issues, migration background (*Dowd/Bengtson* 1978), and an accumulation of disadvantaged situations throughout their lifetimes (*Norman* 1985) that may impact their general life satisfaction. Yet, they remain a notably underrepresented population in social science research (*Barbiano di Belgiojoso et al.* 2022; *Baykara-Krumme/Platt* 2018). Old age is typically a time when individuals retire or decrease the employment activity for which they first migrated, and it is thus an important period to examine migrants' material, health, and social conditions, and how these reflect on their life satisfaction (*Baykara-Krumme/Platt* 2018). The number of older migrants in European countries is growing (*UNDESA* 2020), and there is thus increased interest by the scientific community in their circumstances (*Baykara-Krumme/Platt* 2018; *Bolzman et al.* 2004; *Warnes et al.* 2004).

Here, we focus on older persons in two countries, Switzerland and Italy. After World War II, Switzerland experienced a period of economic expansion and a shortage of local labor, especially of unskilled and semiskilled labor. This led to the establishment of a bilateral agreement with Italy in 1948, which granted for a rotation model in which Italian seasonal workers were allowed to work in Switzerland for a limited period, before returning to Italy. Originally, this labor migration was seen as temporary, but in the 1960s this rotation model was given up, and migrants then

could settle in Switzerland and could bring over their families (*Riaño/Wastl-Walter* 2006). Today, Italians aged 65 and older comprise one of the largest groups of foreign resident population in Switzerland (*FSO* 2020b).

Our paper contributes to the literature on older migrant life satisfaction by comparing three groups of older adults: Italian migrants in Switzerland, Swiss natives residing in Switzerland, and Italian stayers residing in Italy. We aim to answer the following research questions: 1) Are there differences in life satisfaction levels between Italian migrants and Swiss natives, and between Italian migrants and Italian stayers? And 2) What are the determinants of life satisfaction among each of these groups?

In the next section, we present the theoretical and empirical literature on life satisfaction from which we formulate our hypotheses. We then present the data and our primary results, and discuss the findings.

2 Research on well-being

As the world recovered from the physical, social, and psychological devastation brought about by World War II, a new atmosphere arose: one that encouraged commitment to social welfare and a greater appreciation for the individual's perceptions and viewpoints (*Keyes* 2006). Movements focused on the importance of personal meaning and concerns about life thus emerged, and subsequently subjective well-being developed as a scientific field in the late 1950s when social scientists produced quality of life indicators to observe social change and improve social policy (*Keyes* 2006). Recent decades have consequently seen a shift in research from negative topics like poverty and illness, to more positive topics like well-being, and a shift from objective to subjective measures of well-being (*Bartram* 2012).

Objective well-being is generally defined as "the degree that a life meets explicit standards of the good life, as assessed by an impartial outsider" (*Veenhoven* 2000: 4), which is generally based on quantifiable indicators like income, health, living conditions, and so on. On the other hand, subjective well-being is defined as how people feel about and evaluate their lives, which includes "people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction" (*Diener et al.* 1999: 277). These two variants of well-being are not always correlated, for a person may be in objectively good health but still feel bad (*Bartram* 2012; *Veenhoven* 2000).

Subjective well-being is further divided into two components: the emotional or affective component, and the cognitive component. The former relates to the extent to which a person experiences pleasant moods and emotions, while the latter relates to the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his or her life, and this is commonly referred to as life satisfaction (*Veenhoven* 2012; *Veenhoven/Ehrhardt* 1995). In this study, we focus on this latter component – life satisfaction.

2.1 Main factors contributing to life satisfaction

Why are people satisfied with their lives? Two theoretical approaches have been proposed to explain individual differences in life satisfaction: the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach. The first focuses on the role of individual differences, such as personality traits in life satisfaction, while the second focuses on the role of social contexts, situations, and events in life satisfaction (*Erdogan et al.* 2012; *Heller et al.* 2004). In this paper, we adopt the latter perspective, for life satisfaction is linked to the resources individuals develop and access in their lives, to social norms, networks and relationships, and to the social context in which people live (*Helliwell*/*Putnam* 2004). More specifically, migration – which we will address in more detail below – impacts these sociodemographic characteristics by altering individuals' networks, affecting their access to resources in the destination country and changing the social context in which they lead their lives. These changes may then influence life satisfaction (*Hendriks et al.* 2018; *Hendriks*/*Bartram* 2019).

Research on general life satisfaction has shown that income positively correlates to life satisfaction, but only to a certain extent and in certain situations (*Bartram* 2015; *Clark* 2011; *Clark et al.* 2008; *de Jong* 2015; *Deaton* 2008). *Richard Easterlin* (1974; *Easterlin*/*Angelescu* 2009) pointed out a paradox in the income-life satisfaction relationship: At one specific point in time and in one country, people with higher incomes are on average more satisfied with their lives. However, over time, life satisfaction does not increase as the country's income increases. This is because generally, the life satisfaction gains derived from increases in income are not due to greater purchasing power, but due to an improvement in social status (*Bartram* 2015; *Boyce et al.* 2010; *Clark et al.* 2008). Social comparison thus plays a role, for if everyone's income increases, there is no gain in social ranking, and thereby no gain in life satisfaction. Another phenomenon that explains Easterlin's paradox is that of adaptation: Over time, people get habituated to their level of income, so most of the life satisfaction gains from that initial increase disappear (*Clark et al.* 2018, 2008).

Studies have also pointed out that higher levels of education (*Cheung*/*Chan* 2009; *Clark et al.* 2018; *Salinas-Jiménez et al.* 2011), good health (*Clark et al.* 2018; *Deaton* 2008; *Helliwell* 2003; *Helliwell*/*Putnam* 2004; *Kööts-Ausmees*/*Realo* 2015), employment (*Clark et al.* 2018), social capital like marriage and social networks (*Amati et al.* 2018; *Elgar et al.* 2011; *Helliwell*/*Putnam* 2004), and religiosity (*Amit* 2010; *Clark et al.* 2018; *Pargament* 2002) are positively correlated to life satisfaction. On the other hand, discrimination is negatively correlated to life satisfaction (*Bălţătescu* 2005; *Safi* 2010).

2.2 Life satisfaction among migrants

Migration can impact income by presenting migrants with better economic opportunities in the destination country, which can positively reflect on their life satisfaction (*Bartram* 2011; *Hendriks et al.* 2018; *Nikolova*/*Graham* 2015). Simultaneously, migrants may find themselves in worse socioeconomic conditions than their peers in the host country (*Bartram* 2011). Over time, migrants may change

their reference group and may start comparing themselves to wealthier individuals in the host society (*Bartram* 2011), which can have negative implications for their well-being (*Dumludag/Gokdemir* 2022).

Moreover, migration can disrupt social networks (*Arpino/de Valk* 2018; *Hendriks et al.* 2018). Separation from friends and family in the country of origin can result in feelings of loneliness (*Cela/Fokkema* 2017; *Fokkema/Naderi* 2013) and social isolation (*Hendriks et al.* 2018), which are correlated to lower life satisfaction (*Ambrosetti/Paparusso* 2021; *Barbiano di Belgiojoso et al.* 2022). Furthermore, having a migratory background can engender discrimination, which has been shown to have deleterious repercussions on migrant well-being (*Bălţătescu* 2005; *Kirmanoğlu/Başlevent* 2014; *Safi* 2010). Migration can also influence health (*Gerritsen et al.* 2013; *Lassetter/Callister* 2009). Migrants are a self-selected group and are generally in better health than the native-born population, a phenomenon referred to as the "healthy migrant effect" (*Domnich et al.* 2012; *Loi/Hale* 2019; *Sserwanja/Kawuki* 2020). However, soon after their arrival in the destination country, migrants' health begins to deteriorate due to the psychological, social and contextual shocks introduced by migration (*Domnich et al.* 2012; *Loi/Hale* 2019; *McDonald/Kennedy* 2004; *Sserwanja/Kawuki* 2020; *Trappolini/Giudici* 2021). Migrants' health can also be impacted by their economic status, as migrants in unfavorable economic conditions report a worse health status compared to migrants in better economic situations (*Loi/Hale* 2019).

Given the complexity of migrants' situations and the importance of these above-mentioned factors in life satisfaction, the question arises, to what extent and under what circumstances are migrants better off because of migration?

2.2.1 The migrant-native comparison

Most studies on adult migrants show that, when comparing life satisfaction of international migrants to that of natives in the destination countries, migrants generally report lower levels than natives, even when accounting for sociodemographic covariates (*Arpino/de Valk* 2018; *Bartram* 2011; *Hadjar/Backes* 2013; *Hendriks* 2015; *Kirmanoğlu/Başlevent* 2014; *Safi* 2010). This can be in part attributed to migrations' disruptive effect on social relations (*Arpino/de Valk* 2018), the psycho-social shocks it induces (*Safi* 2010), as well as migrants' ability to integrate in the destination country (*Hadjar/Backes* 2013).

Safi (2010) investigated the disparities between first- and second-generation migrants and natives in 13 European countries, and found that second-generation migrants are just as dissatisfied as first-generation migrants, and both groups report lower life satisfaction levels than natives. This demonstrates that migrants' relative dissatisfaction in comparison to natives' does not diminish over time and across generations. More specifically – and relevantly to this paper's study population – she revealed that, although Switzerland has one of the highest average life satisfaction levels, it is also one of the European countries in which migrants are the least satisfied with their lives. This may be due to perception of discrimination and feelings of unfairness. *Bartram* (2011) focused on migrants in the United States and confirmed

Safi's (2010) findings on the migrant-native difference. *Arpino* and *de Valk* (2018) and *Hadjar* and *Beckes* (2013) further replicated this migrant-to-native discrepancy across European countries. Furthermore, *Hadjar* and *Beckes* (2013) showed that the life satisfaction difference between migrants and natives is higher in countries with a high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and lower in countries with a higher Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), suggesting that integration-friendly policies are important to migrant well-being.

There are also several studies that found different relationships between life satisfaction and migration status depending on the migration stream and time since migration. *Obućina* (2013) showed that, in comparison to German natives, Eastern European migrants in Germany are more satisfied with their lives, while Turkish-born migrants are less satisfied, highlighting the importance of taking into consideration migrants' heterogeneity. Moreover, some studies revealed that the disparity between native-born Europeans and migrants does not diminish with time or across generations (*Amit* 2010; *Kogan et al.* 2018; *Safi* 2010), while others found that this difference does diminish over generations (*Arpino/de Valk* 2018). Furthermore, *Monteiro* and *Haan's* (2022) research on migrants in Canada found no difference between the life satisfaction of migrants and that of Canadian natives when controlling for sociodemographic variables, and year of arrival in Canada has no significant effect on life satisfaction. The implications of having a migration background are therefore still unclear, and migration may influence life satisfaction differently for different populations.

The literature referenced heretofore focuses on migrants of all ages, but there is a particular scarcity in research on the life satisfaction of older migrants (*Barbiano di Belgiojoso et al.* 2022; *Sand/Gruber* 2018). The few studies that exist concern people who left their country of origin at different points in their lives and are now aging in their country of destination, and they focus on different migration flows as well as different (older) age groups, making it difficult to concretely understand the relationship between migration and life satisfaction among this population.

Sand and *Gruber* (2018) found that the difference in life satisfaction levels between older migrants and natives depends on region of origin. They focused on migrants and natives aged 50 and older in 11 European countries and revealed that migrants from Northern and Central Europe have similar satisfaction levels as natives, while Southern European, Eastern European, and non-European migrants report significantly lower levels than the native population, even after controlling for sociodemographic covariates. They also replicated *Hadjar* and *Beckes'* (2013) findings, namely that the migrant-native disparity is larger in countries with low MIPEX scores, one of which is Switzerland; they confirmed this result among adults aged 50 and over.

On the other hand, research by *Calvo et al.* (2019, 2017), focused on Hispanics and natives aged 60 and older in the United States, showed that older Hispanic migrants in the US report higher life satisfaction levels than both non-Hispanic US natives and Hispanics born in the US, which is in opposition to the majority of the literature comparing migrants and natives. The authors propose that Hispanic migrants compare themselves with peers from their country of origin, which

explains their higher life satisfaction levels despite their lack of resources vis-à-vis those of US natives and US-born Hispanics. Another explanation is that Hispanic migrants may have strong family support and certain cultural practices that benefit their life satisfaction.

Even though most of the research comparing the life satisfaction of migrants to that of natives shows that migrants display lower life satisfaction levels, these studies often group migrants from several origin countries and migration streams. When differences in migration streams are taken into consideration, research points to more nuanced results, suggesting that the native to migrant comparison is much more complex and needs further investigation. This paper thus aims to add to the limited literature on the life satisfaction of older migrants by analyzing one specific migration stream: Italian migrants who migrated to Switzerland early in their lives and who are aging in place.

This group of migrants moved to Switzerland primarily between the 1950s and 1970s (*Wessendorf* 2007), they generally occupied lower-skilled jobs than Swiss natives, have lower education levels, report feeling socially isolated more often, and report a worse health status than natives (*Bolzman/Vagni* 2018). Based on this and on the existing literature on the relationship between sociodemographic factors and life satisfaction, we expect:

> (H1a) On average, older Italian migrants in Switzerland have lower life satisfaction levels than older Swiss natives.

Moreover, basing ourselves on the migrant-native life satisfaction gap stated in most research to date, and specifically on the findings on the larger migrant-to-native disparity in countries with high GDP (*Hadjar/Backes* 2013) and low MIPEX scores like Switzerland (*Hadjar/Backes* 2013; *Sand/Gruber* 2018), as well as the lower life satisfaction levels of migrants from Southern European countries (*Sand/Gruber* 2018), we hypothesize that:

> (H1b) Older Italian migrants in Switzerland display lower life satisfaction levels than older Swiss natives, even when accounting for sociodemographic characteristics.

2.2.2 The migrant-stayer comparison

Although comparing life satisfaction of migrants to that of natives is important, some researchers have criticized this comparison, arguing that migrants who move from countries with low life satisfaction levels to countries with higher life satisfaction levels may experience increases in life satisfaction, while remaining below natives' satisfaction levels (*Bartram* 2015). The migrant-native comparison thus does not allow for the measurement of change in life satisfaction, and longitudinal data would be optimal to measure this change. However, longitudinal data on international migrants are scarce, so to circumvent this issue, research has compared migrants to

people in the country of origin who did not migrate, referred to as "stayers" (*Gruber/Sand* 2022; *Hendriks* 2015).

Hendriks and colleagues (2018) approached the migrant-stayer comparison by matching migrants with demographically similar people in their country of origin who wished to migrate, as well as with demographically similar stayers who had no such desire. They found that most migrants report higher life satisfaction levels post-migration, and that these levels tend to converge to those of natives in the country of destination, though remaining below that of natives. However, their research also demonstrated that for several migration streams, migrants' life satisfaction did not improve following migration. *Erlinghagen* (2011) also found that German migrants across Europe show increased life satisfaction levels compared to German stayers. *Nikolova* and *Graham* (2015) and *Bartram* (2013) presented similar results on the migrant-stayer gap, suggesting that migration does improve life satisfaction. Yet, research by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that the migrant-stayer comparison is more complex. According to the *IOM* (2013), migrants who move towards or between developing countries become, in general, less satisfied with life. On the other hand, those who move to or between developed countries become more satisfied with life.

Once again, aforementioned studies focus mainly on younger, working-age migrants, and very few compare older migrants to stayers. *Baykara-Krumme* and *Platt* (2018) revealed that older Turkish labor migrants who are now aging in place in several European countries experience higher life satisfaction levels than stayers. *Gruber* and *Sand* (2022) similarly reported that migrants from less affluent to more affluent European countries are better off than stayers. Despite these two similar results on older migrants, results on the life satisfaction of this population are still sparse, and due to the expanding number of older migrants in Europe, there needs to be further research on their circumstances.

Notwithstanding the inconsistent results on the migrant-stayer comparison, considering the two studies focused on older migrants, we hypothesize that:

> (H2) Older Italian migrants in Switzerland report higher life satisfaction levels than older Italian stayers, even when accounting for sociodemographic variables.

2.2.3 Differences in determinants of life satisfaction

In view of the aforementioned studies on the relationship between various socioeconomic characteristics and life satisfaction, we expect similarities in the determinants of life satisfaction among migrants, natives, and stayers. We hypothesize that:

> (H3) Being in good health is positively correlated with life satisfaction among all three groups.

(H4) Better economic status is positively correlated with life satisfaction among all three groups.

However, we also expect certain differences between the groups. A large part of older Italian labor migrants in Switzerland migrated for economic purposes (*Bolzman*/*Vagni* 2018). They migrated from regions of Italy that lacked sufficient economic opportunities, with the hopes of improving their circumstances (*Dones*/*Ciobanu* 2022). They started their lives in Switzerland in lower skilled jobs, and while a few of them were able to move to better socioeconomic positions, most remained in a lower socioeconomic class in comparison to Swiss natives (*Bolzman*/*Vagni* 2018). Their aspirations for better economic conditions may therefore have gone unmet in the long term, and they may thereby assign more value to their financial situation than natives and stayers, who did not embark on a migration journey to improve their economic circumstances. In support of this theory, a study on migrants in the United States revealed that the association between income and life satisfaction is stronger for migrants than for U.S. natives (*Bartram* 2011). We therefore hypothesize that:

(H5) Financial situation has a greater association with the life satisfaction of migrants than natives.

3 Data and methods

3.1 Data

This study draws on an original survey stemming from the project "Transnational ageing among older migrants and natives: A strategy to overcome vulnerability (TransAge)", which collected data from four different populations in Switzerland and Italy, all aged 65 and older: a) Swiss natives, born and residing in Switzerland, b) Italian international migrants, born in Southern Italy and residing in Switzerland, c) Italian non-migrants (from here on referred to as "stayers"), and d) Italian internal migrants, born in Southern Italy and residing in Northern Italy. This paper focuses specifically on the first three groups. Swiss natives had to meet the following criteria: They had to be born in Switzerland and had to have parents who were also born in Switzerland. Similarly, Italian stayers had to be born in Southern Italy and had to have parents who were born in Italy. Italian international migrants had to be born in Southern Italy and had to have migrated to Switzerland, where they now reside.

We chose these populations for several reasons. First, Italians are one of the largest foreign national groups aged 65 and older in Switzerland (*FSO* 2020a/b). Second, a large part of older Italians migrated to Switzerland between the 1950s and 1970s for economic purposes or to reunite with family members who moved as labor migrants (*Bolzman et al.* 2004; *Riaño*/*Wastl-Walter* 2006; *Wessendorf* 2007), and most came from regions of Southern Italy that lacked economic opportunities

(*Wessendorf* 2007). We thus group together migrants of a very specific migration stream. Third, comparing migrants from the south of Italy to stayers from the south of Italy allows us to compare individuals who were socialized at a young age in the same place, during the same period, and who thus grew up in similar contexts.

All the data were collected through two economic and social research institutes. The institute MIS Trend was responsible for the data collection in Switzerland, while the institute Demetra Opinioni oversaw the data collection in Italy. The sample for Swiss natives and Italian migrants residing in Switzerland was obtained from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office and given to MIS Trend. Since almost 70 percent of the total Italian resident population resides in six Swiss cantons (*FSO* 2018), data were collected in the following regions: Zurich, Bern, Aargau, Vaud, Geneva, and Ticino.

The sample for Italian residents was extracted from the Italian national public telephone directory. Demetra Opinioni contacted the study participants through a method of random telephone calling. Participants had to reside in the following areas of Southern Italy: Abruzzo, Basilicata, Molise, Campania, Sicily, Apulia, Calabria, or Sardinia.

For the sample residing in Switzerland, data were collected using two methods: online questionnaires and paper questionnaires, and these were filled out in either Italian, French, or German. For the sample living in Italy, data were collected through telephone interviews, and these were conducted in Italian.

It could be argued that the different data collection modes between Switzerland and Italy may have led to a certain level of social desirability bias: Italian participants in Italy, who were administered the telephone-based questionnaire, may have answered questions in a manner that may be seen as more desirable to the interviewer (*Krumpal* 2013). Although some research has found that participants tend to respond to subjective well-being questions less positively in web-mode or paper-mode in comparison to face-to-face mode (*Piccitto et al.* 2022; *Zager Kocjan et al.* 2023), this difference does not seem to be universally true (*Hendriks et al.* 2018). *Martin* and *Lynn* (2011), for instance, did not find differences in questions on life satisfaction between face-to-face modes and other interview modes, such as web-based and telephone questionnaires. Furthermore, research comparing paper/web and telephone survey modes, which are the ones used in our study, are scarce. To test for a social desirability bias in subjective well-being indicators, we therefore turned to the Swiss Household Panel (SHP), which is conducted largely by telephone, and compared the results of subjective well-being questions in the SHP to results of the exact same variables in our Swiss sample, collected by paper/web. We did not find evidence of a social desirability bias, so we conclude that our two methods of data collection are indeed comparable. The process and results of this analysis are detailed in the Appendix.

Each population sample was stratified by age and gender. The data were collected between June and November 2020, between the first and second wave of infections related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 2,354 older adults participated in the study, of which 689 are Italian international migrants, 836 are Swiss natives, and 829 are Italian stayers. After eliminating missing values for all the dependent and

independent variables outlined in the next section, we arrive at an analytic sample of 1,655 observations, of which 447 are international Italian migrants, 640 are Swiss natives, and 567 are Italian stayers. At this stage, we deem it important to note that the variable largely responsible for the restricted sample was the one indicating whether participants carried out a physically demanding job, detailed below. To ensure the robustness of our model, we carried out two sensitivity analyses without this variable and we conclude that sample size does not impact our results. Sensitivity analyses are shown in tables A4 and A5 of the appendix.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Dependent variable

The dependent variable for this study is life satisfaction, measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (*Diener et al.* 1985), a 5-item scale assessing the cognitive dimensions of subjective well-being, and one of the most frequently used scales in subjective well-being research (*Maddux* 2018). The scale is composed of the following items:

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Respondents were instructed to indicate their level of agreement with each item on a 7-point scale, ranging from "1=strongly disagree" to "7=strongly agree". The answers for each item were then added to create an individual score, ranging from 5 to 35, and in the analysis life satisfaction is kept as a numerical variable.

3.2.2 Independent variables

The first main predictor variable is migration status, which consists of the three categories of the three populations being studied: Swiss natives, Italian international migrants residing in Switzerland, and Italian stayers.

Along with the main independent variable, we also adjust for several other determinants of life satisfaction based on the existing literature (*Bartram* 2013, 2012; *Hendriks/Bartram* 2019; *Paparusso* 2019; *Safi* 2010). The sociodemographic variables we include in our analyses are age, gender, level of education, financial situation, relationship status, children, network size, self-rated health, and religiosity. We also control for risk attitudes, age-related discrimination, physically demanding job, and finally worry with COVID-19 and COVID-19 related deaths in the region of residence, given that our data were collected during the pandemic.

Age is kept as a continuous numerical variable, and gender as a dichotomous categorical variable. Level of education is coded into three categories: "Low", "Medium" and "High". Financial situation is measured with the question, "Thinking

of your household's total income, including all the sources of income of all the members who contribute to it, how difficult or easy is it currently for your household to make ends meet?" The final variable includes two answer categories: "Easy" and "Neither easy nor difficult/Difficult". We measure financial situation in this way because our data contain too many missing values for the questions related to household income and household savings.

Relationship status is a dichotomous variable measuring whether the respondent has a partner. Children is also a dichotomous variable, measuring whether the respondent has any children.

Network size is measured by asking respondents to list up to five people who played an important role in their lives in the last 12 months, and these could be family members, friends, colleagues, or anyone else they deemed important (adapted from the question on family configurations of *Widmer et al.* (2013), and (*Widmer* 2016)). The final variable is numerical, ranging from 0 to 5, and represents the total number of people that played an important role in the participant's life.

To measure self-rated health, we asked respondents to rate their general health on a 5-item Likert scale with the following answer categories: "Very good", "Good", "Average/So-So", "Bad" and "Very bad". We then recoded responses into two categories: "Good", which includes the first two answer categories, and "Average/Bad", which includes the last three.

To measure religiosity, we asked participants how often they pray. Answer categories were "Daily", "At least once per week", "At least once per month", "Less than that", and "Never". We then created a dichotomous variable with "Regularly" representing the first three answer categories, and "Not regularly" representing the last two.

We control for risk attitude, as being relatively willing to take risks is associated with an increased probability of migrating (*Jaeger et al.* 2010), and higher risk tolerance is associated with higher life satisfaction (*Baláž/Valuš* 2020). For this, we asked, "How do you see yourself: in general, are you a person who is risk taking or do you try to avoid risks? Please answer on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'Risk avoiding' and 10 means 'Taking risks'." The final variable is kept as numerical.

Age-related discrimination is measured by asking respondents how often in the previous 12 months they felt discriminated against or badly treated by anyone because of their age. Answer categories were "Never", "Rarely", "Sometimes," and "Often". We recoded responses into two categories: "No", which represents those who responded "Never", and "Yes", which includes the other answers.

Physically demanding job is evaluated with a dichotomous variable by asking respondents whether their current or last job was physically demanding.

To measure COVID-19-related worry, respondents were asked to rate their worry with the pandemic on an 11-point Likert scale, and we kept this as a numerical variable. Lastly, COVID-19 related deaths in the region of residence indicates the total COVID-19 deaths in the respondent's region of residence per 100,000 citizens that occurred from the beginning of the pandemic until the respondent's interview. To avoid daily variations, we use the weekly average. For the sample residing in Italy, data for this variable come from official data from the Italian Department of

Civil Protection and is published daily. For the sample residing in Switzerland, the data come from the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (*Ludwig-Dehm et al.* 2023). These two COVID-19 variables are not shown in the final regression models due to their non-significance, but we deem it important to specify that we controlled for them, considering the period when the survey was conducted.

When analyzing the life satisfaction determinants for each of the three groups, we also add three migrant-specific variables: discrimination due to origin, length of stay in Switzerland, and satisfaction with the migration decision. Origin-related discrimination is measured by asking migrants how often they felt discriminated or badly treated because of their origin in the previous twelve months. Answer categories and recoding are the same as the variable indicating age-related discrimination. The resulting variable is dichotomous, with categories "No" (never) and "Yes" (once or more). Length of stay in Switzerland is a numerical variable measuring how many years they have lived in Switzerland. Satisfaction with the migration decision is a numerical variable ranging from 0 (Not at all satisfied) to 10 (Completely satisfied).

3.3 Statistical analyses

To answer our first research question, we rely on t-tests to compare the means of life satisfaction between the different populations. Then, we compute a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions to estimate the relationship between life satisfaction and various independent variables (Tab. 2). In model 1, we include only the main independent variable: migration status. In model 2, we include age, gender, and economic-related variables, such as making ends meet and level of education. In model 3, we include social network variables, such as relationship status, children, and network size. In model 4, we add health. In model 5 we include the remaining variables described above. We had also run a model with the variables related to COVID-19, but this model is not shown, as it does not help further explain the dependent variable's variance. We choose to iteratively add these variables to better understand which determinants better explain the difference in life satisfaction between the three study groups. We also ran a multicollinearity test to ensure that no two independent variables are strongly correlated.

To answer our second research question, we compute an OLS regression for each of the three populations, including all the variables included in the previous step, as well as the three migrant-specific variables described above. We report the standardized coefficients of all OLS models in order to determine which variables have the largest association with life satisfaction within and between models. Tables with unstandardized coefficients can be found in the Appendix (Tab. A2 and A3).

4 Results

4.1 Description of the samples

Descriptive statistics of continuous and categorical variables are shown in Table 1. In all three groups, there are slightly more men than women, but gender differences between groups are not statistically significant. All three groups have a mean age of 74 with similar standard deviations.

On other characteristics, the three groups are quite distinct. Stayers for instance have a significantly smaller network than both Italian migrants and Swiss natives. Although this seems counter-intuitive, research has shown that individuals in Southern European countries – including Italy – report fewer people in their social networks, while Switzerland is one of the countries that reports the highest average number of people in the network (*Tomini et al.* 2016: 9). Moreover, migrants have a significantly lower educational level than both Swiss natives and Italian stayers, and Swiss natives have higher educational levels than stayers. Results also show that natives report being in better health than both migrants and stayers. Natives also report praying less regularly than both other groups, while stayers pray the most among the three groups.

In terms of family composition, we observe that a significantly higher proportion of stayers does not have a partner in comparison to both migrants and natives, and that nearly all migrants in our sample (95.8 percent) have children, while there is a higher proportion of natives and stayers without children. We also observe that significantly more migrants held physically demanding jobs in comparison to both natives and stayers. In terms of age-related discrimination, a higher proportion of Swiss natives reports having experienced it during the year preceding the questionnaire in comparison to both migrants and stayers.

In relation to migrant-specific variables, migrants in our sample have lived in Switzerland for an average of 51.7 years (SD=11.0), with a median length of stay of 54 years (IQR=8.5). Most of them do not report experiencing origin-related discrimination in the prior year.

4.2 Differences in life satisfaction

Life satisfaction levels are generally high among all three groups, with migrants reporting a mean life satisfaction score of 26.4 (SD=5.8), stayers reporting a mean of 27.8 (SD=5.8) and natives reporting a mean of 28.2 (SD=4.9). However, there are significant differences. An initial t-test shows that international Italian migrants are significantly less satisfied than both Swiss natives and Italian stayers ($p<0.01$), and no statistical difference exists between natives and stayers.

These results confirm hypothesis (H1a) on the lower mean levels of life satisfaction among migrants in comparison to natives, but also reject hypothesis (H2), which proposed that migrants would report higher life satisfaction levels than stayers in Italy. At first glance, this seems to demonstrate that migrants do not reap the benefits of migration, as opposed to what is shown in most of the literature

Tab. 1: Sample descriptive statistics

Variable	Italian Migrants		Swiss Natives		Italian Stayers	
	Mean or N	SD or %	Mean or N	SD or %	Mean or N	SD or %
Life satisfaction[a, b]	26.4*	5.8	28.2*	4.9	27.8*	5.8
Age	74.4*	6.3	74.6*	6.5	74.6*	6.9
Network size[a, c]	3.5*	1.6	3.7*	1.6	1.4*	1.6
Risk attitude[a, b, c]	3.2*	2.8	5.1*	2.3	3.8*	3.3
COVID-19 worry[b, c]	7.5*	2.7	5.7*	2.7	7.4*	3.0
COVID-19 Deaths in Region of Residence[a, b, c]	47.8*	34.6	21.1*	23.1	10.5*	8.0
Length of stay	51.7*	11.0				
Satisfaction with migration	8.3*	1.8				
Gender						
Male	262	58.6	376	58.8	303	53.4
Female	185	41.4	264	41.2	264	46.6
Education[a, b, c]						
Low	280	62.6	47	7.3	216	38.1
Medium	119	26.6	344	53.7	210	37.0
High	48	10.7	249	38.9	141	24.9
Making ends meet[a, b, c]						
Difficult/Neither	326	72.9	231	36.1	304	53.6
Easy	121	27.1	409	63.9	263	46.4
Having a partner[a, c]						
No	102	22.8	132	20.6	196	34.6
Yes	345	77.2	508	79.4	371	65.4
Having a child[a, b]						
No	19	4.3	97	15.2	78	13.8
Yes	428	95.7	543	84.8	489	86.2
Health[b, c]						
Average/Bad	231	51.7	159	24.8	314	55.4
Good	216	48.3	481	75.2	253	44.6

Tab. 1: Continuation

Variable	Italian Migrants		Swiss Natives		Italian Stayers	
	Mean or N	SD or %	Mean or N	SD or %	Mean or N	SD or %
Praying[a, b, c]						
Not regularly	181	40.5	367	57.3	144	25.4
Regularly	266	59.5	273	42.7	423	74.6
Demanding job[a, b]						
No	199	44.5	467	73.0	391	69.0
Yes	248	55.6	173	27.0	176	31.0
Age-related discrimination[a, b, c]						
No	387	86.6	510	79.7	523	92.2
Yes	60	13.4	130	20.3	44	7.8
Origin-related discrimination						
No	384	85.9				
Yes	63	14.1				
N	447		640		567	

[a] Significant difference between migrants and stayers

[b] Significant difference between migrants and natives

[c] Significant difference between natives and stayers

[*] Arithmetic mean (numeric variable)

Source: own calculations based on TransAge Survey 2020

(*Bartram* 2013; *Erlinghagen* 2011; *Hendriks et al.* 2018; *Nikolova/Graham* 2015). On the contrary, they seem worse off than both natives and stayers.

Tab. 2: OLS regression: Determinants of life satisfaction; standardized coefficients

	Model 1: Empty	Model 2: Demographic & Economic variables	Model 3: Social network	Model 4: Health	Model 5: Additional determinants of LS
Italian migrants (Ref:)					
Swiss natives	0.166***	0.061+	0.061+	0.015	0.020
Italian stayers	0.127***	0.073*	0.085*	0.105**	0.062+
Age		0.041+	0.059*	0.078**	0.079***
Female (Ref: Male)		0.012	0.033	0.047+	0.041+
Making ends meet (Ref: Difficult/Neither)		0.244***	0.241***	0.218***	0.198***
Education: Medium (Ref: Low)		0.025	0.024	-0.001	-0.002
Education: High		0.032	0.027	0.002	0.002
Having a partner (Ref: No)			0.081**	0.077**	0.070**
Child: No (Ref: Yes)			0.004	0.005	0.012
Total network			0.004	0.007	-0.002
Good health (Ref: Average/Bad)				0.256***	0.237***
Praying regularly (Ref: Not regularly)					0.065**
Risk attitudes					0.051*
Physically demanding job (Ref: No)					-0.058*
Discrimination: Age (Ref: No)					-0.150***
Observations	1,654	1,654	1,654	1,654	1,654
Adjusted R^2	0.018	0.075	0.079	0.137	0.165

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Source: own calculations based on TransAge Survey 2020

However, Table 2 shows that the difference between the life satisfaction of Italian migrants and Swiss natives is fully mediated by sociodemographic variables, thereby rejecting hypothesis (H1b) and suggesting that, when controlling for covariates known to correlate to life satisfaction, migrants are just as satisfied with their lives as natives.

In contrast to our predictions in our second hypothesis, migrants are less satisfied than stayers, and the difference remains significant at the p<0.1 level, even when accounting for all independent variables. However, the coefficient is quite small, especially considering that the life satisfaction score ranges from 5 to 35.

Results also show that making ends meet and being in good health are the factors that have the largest positive correlation with life satisfaction, while experiencing

age-related discrimination has the largest negative correlation, and these results are in line with the life satisfaction literature (*Clark et al.* 2018; *Deaton* 2008; *Helliwell*/*Putnam* 2004; *Kööts-Ausmees*/*Realo* 2015). Furthermore, we observe that having a partner, praying regularly, and being more likely to take risks are positively associated with life satisfaction, while having had a physically demanding job is negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Gender, education, having children, and network size are not related to life satisfaction.

4.3 Determinants of life satisfaction by group

Since the three groups differ in composition from one another, we then looked at determinants of life satisfaction by group using OLS regressions (Tab. 3). The results show both similarities and differences among the three groups. Consistently with the literature on life satisfaction (*Clark et al.* 2018; *Deaton* 2008; *Helliwell*/*Putnam* 2004; *Kahneman*/*Deaton* 2010), making ends meet and being in good health have the largest positive correlation with life satisfaction across groups, confirming our third and fourth hypotheses. However, our fifth hypothesis is rejected; financial situation has a greater association with life satisfaction for Swiss natives in comparison to both migrants and stayers.

Having experienced age-related discrimination has the largest negative correlation with life satisfaction across the three populations. However, we also

Tab. 3: Determinants of life satisfaction by group, standardized coefficients

	Migrants	Natives	Stayers
Age	0.082+	0.090*	0.085+
Female (Ref: Male)	-0.093+	0.110**	0.089*
Making ends meet (Ref: Difficult/Neither)	0.161***	0.251***	0.146***
Education: Medium (Ref: Low)	0.031	-0.100	0.032
Education: High	-0.031	-0.044	0.015
Having a partner (Ref: No)	0.005	0.163***	0.026
Child: No (Ref: Yes)	0.046	0.027	-0.019
Total network	-0.014	0.048	-0.067
Good health (Ref: Average/Bad)	0.147***	0.267***	0.232***
Praying regularly (Ref: No)	0.038	0.053	0.096*
Risk attitudes	0.039	0.013	0.055
Physically demanding job (Ref: No)	-0.049	-0.027	-0.056
Discrimination: Age (Ref: No)	-0.132**	-0.107**	-0.169***
Discrimination: Origin (Ref: No)	-0.060		
Length of stay in CH	0.007		
Satisfaction with migration	0.302***		
Observations	447	640	567
Adjusted R^2	0.240	0.221	0.121

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Source: own calculations based on TransAge Survey 2020

observe certain differences in life satisfaction determinants. Italian migrant women have a slightly lower life satisfaction than migrant men, while women have slightly higher life satisfaction than men in the other two groups.

Praying regularly is positively correlated with life satisfaction only among stayers, while having a partner is positively correlated with life satisfaction only for Swiss natives. Finally, for migrants, length of stay and having experienced origin-related discrimination are not correlated to life satisfaction. This may be because most of our sample migrated a long time ago, and only a small percentage experienced origin-related discrimination. Satisfaction with the migration decision is positively correlated to life satisfaction.

5 Discussion

National governments have started considering and adopting measures of subjective well-being to inform policy deliberations, and life satisfaction scales provide a valid and reliable assessment of subjective well-being (*Diener et al.* 2013). Studies on migrants' life satisfaction are still in their early stages, and the life satisfaction of older migrants is a particularly underdeveloped field of research. Europe is experiencing a growing number of older migrants (*Ciobanu et al.* 2017), and a large part of this population is comprised of individuals who moved at a young age to the industrial economies of Central and North-West Europe between the 1950s and 1970s, and are now ageing in place (*Ciobanu et al.* 2017; *King et al.* 2017). Throughout their lifetimes, they often encountered harsh working conditions, lived in deprived neighborhoods, suffered from worse health status than their native counterparts, and experienced discrimination (*Bolzman et al.* 2004; *Ciobanu et al.* 2017; *King et al.* 2017). These accumulated stressors can have negative implications for their well-being in later life, which presents a health care and welfare challenge for governments around Europe (*White* 2006). Nonetheless, they are a heterogeneous population: They come from different origin countries, have different cultural backgrounds, and vary in their ability to form networks and integrate in the host country (*Ciobanu et al*. 2017; *King et al.* 2017).

While existing research often groups migrants from different countries of origin (*Arpino/de Valk* 2018; *Calvo et al.* 2017; *Monteiro/Haan* 2022), we focus on a very specific migration stream. This article thus aims to contribute to the scarce literature on older migrant well-being by 1) examining the difference in life satisfaction levels between three groups of older adults: Italian migrants living in Switzerland, Swiss natives, and Italian stayers living in Italy, and 2) analyzing the differences in the determinants of life satisfaction across these three groups.

Our study produced somewhat unexpected results. Italian older migrants report lower life satisfaction levels than Swiss natives, which we anticipated, but this difference disappears once sociodemographic variables are considered. This outcome is in contrast to the majority of the research on migrants of all ages (*Arpino/de Valk* 2018; *Hadjar/Backes* 2013; *Hendriks* 2015; *Hendriks et al.* 2018; *Safi* 2010), as well as certain studies on older migrants specifically (*Sand/Gruber* 2018).

Despite these contradictions, our results fall in line with the analyses by *Monteiro* and *Haan* (2022), who did not find a difference in life satisfaction between migrants and natives in Canada.

Older Italian migrants also report slightly lower life satisfaction levels than stayers in the country of origin, contrary to our predictions and in opposition to the existing literature (*Baykara-Krumme/Platt* 2018; *Gruber/Sand* 2022). However, a key distinction must be made between these cited studies and ours: Italian migrants in Switzerland are in a worse financial situation than stayers, whereas in *Baykara-Krumme* and *Platt* (2018) and *Gruber* and *Sand's* (2022) research, migrants were economically better off than stayers. According to *Veenhoven's* (1995) livability theory, conditions that make an environment "livable" relate to life satisfaction. In other words, if human needs are met, life satisfaction increases. Our measure of financial situation encapsulates this factor of "livability" by asking respondents how easy or difficult it is to make ends meet. Italian migrants in our sample are in financially less "livable" circumstances, and this reflects on their lower life satisfaction when compared to stayers. In fact, when socioeconomic variables are introduced in the analyses, the difference in life satisfaction decreases. The migrant-stayer life satisfaction gap further diminishes as other sociodemographic variables are added to the analyses, and although it is rather small, it remains statistically significant to the $p<0.1$ level.

This difference could be attributed to *Festinger's* (1954) social comparison theory, which argues that life satisfaction can be influenced by comparisons to others. The reference groups to which one compares him or herself can change, and migrants can compare themselves to both people in the country of origin, and people in their destination country (*Hendriks* 2015). We postulate that the labor migrants in our research may, at least in part, compare themselves to their peers in Italy who they may perceive as holding a higher socioeconomic status. Unlike the migrant groups in other studies, who are financially better off than stayers (*Baykara-Krumme/Platt* 2018; *Gruber/Sand* 2022), Italian labor migrants in Switzerland may feel they were not able to fulfill the economic aspirations for which they migrated (*Bolzman/Vagni* 2018), leaving them in worse financial conditions than their peers in Italy. This perception may engender negative evaluations of their migration decision, thus having negative implications for their life satisfaction.

Our first set of analyses suggest that migration in itself has little to no correlation to the life satisfaction of older migrants, it is rather sociodemographic characteristics, such as financial situation and health, that most strongly relate to it. In comparison to previous studies on older migrants that focused on individuals who migrated at various points in their lives (*Calvo et al*. 2017; *Hadjar/Backes* 2013), most of our respondents have lived in Switzerland for many decades and thus have had the chance to adapt and integrate, so while the disruptive effect of migration may have influenced life satisfaction earlier in their life course, it no longer has a substantial relation to the way they evaluate their lives. At the same time, migration played a role in the opportunities and resources that Italian migrants could access in Switzerland. Older Italian migrants in Switzerland moved as labor migrants into a country that provided them little possibility for vertical socio-economic mobility, and this lack

of opportunities has perpetuated itself throughout the life course (*Bolzman/Vagni* 2018; *Wessendorf* 2007), leaving most Italian labor migrants in lower socioeconomic conditions than Swiss natives and thereby having important consequences for their life satisfaction.

When looking at the determinants of life satisfaction of each of the three groups, for the most part, the three groups resemble each other. Making ends meet and being in good health are the factors that most positively correlate to life satisfaction, while age-related discrimination negatively relates to it, which is in line with the existing literature (*Bartram* 2015; *Clark et al.* 2018; *Kang/Kim* 2022). However, being able to make ends meet has a greater relation to the dependent variable for natives than for migrants and stayers. Contrary to our hypothesis and to *Bartram's* (2011) findings, our results lead us to presume that Swiss natives attribute more value to their financial situation than migrants and stayers. Research has shown that personal values act as mitigating factors in the relationship between income and life satisfaction, and that income plays a greater role in life satisfaction for individuals who hold materialistic values rather than for those who hold intrinsic ones (*Georgellis et al.* 2009). We therefore deduce that the greater importance of financial situation for Swiss natives is related to their personal values.

Our results also show that, in the case of migrants, women report lower life satisfaction levels than men, while for natives and stayers, the relationship between being a woman and life satisfaction is positive. The literature on gender and life satisfaction has been largely inconsistent (*Batz-Barbarich/Tay* 2018), but a study has found that Southern European female migrants report significantly lower well-being levels than males (*Gruber/Sand* 2022). This is possibly due to "gender-specific acculturative stress as a consequence of the migration decision that is usually taken by the male partner" (*Gruber/Sand* 2022: 980-981). In fact, a qualitative study focused on older Italian migrants in Switzerland revealed that Italian women often described migration as a passive experience rather than something they actively decided to do (*Dones/Ciobanu* 2022). We therefore propose that Italian women's inactive choice in their migration decision plays a role in their life satisfaction.

Other determinants of life satisfaction differ across groups. Family ties and social networks are not related to life satisfaction for migrants and stayers, while for Swiss natives, having a partner is positively significant. This might be due to the differing personal values of the groups and might reflect the weight that natives assign to romantic relationships. Praying regularly is positively related to life satisfaction only among stayers, which is consistent with studies showing that the religion-life satisfaction correlation is stronger in Southern European countries than Western Europe (*Georgellis et al.* 2009). These differences in determinants of life satisfaction, as well as the greater association between income and life satisfaction among Swiss natives, underline the role that cultural background and personal values play in well-being.

These findings do not come without limitations. Although life satisfaction is influenced by life events, health, and social relations (to name a few), research has found that about 30 percent of life satisfaction is determined by genes and personality traits (*Bartels* 2015; *Røysamb et al.* 2018). This means that a significant

degree of unobserved variance remains present. A way to circumvent this problem would be to control for personality traits; unfortunately, these data were not available in our dataset.

Furthermore, it would have been better for the Swiss and Italian data collection to have been carried out using the same survey methods. However, as outlined in the data and methods section, we did not find support for the existence of a social vulnerability bias. Moreover, interview mode has been found to have little to no effect in the association between sociodemographic variables and subjective well-being (*Piccitto et al.* 2022; *Sarracino et al.* 2017). For these reasons, we maintain the validity of our results.

Cross-sectional studies like this are limited in determining whether migrants gain life satisfaction as a result of migration, and longitudinal studies would be more adequate for analyzing the changes in life satisfaction throughout the migration trajectory. However, longitudinal studies following individuals pre- and post-migration are rare, and it has been argued that the inclusion of stayers in the country of origin provides a good benchmark for understanding the role of migration in life satisfaction (*Baykara-Krumme/Platt* 2018; *Gruber/Sand* 2022; *Hendriks* 2015). Other methodological concerns relate to reverse causality and self-selection: Migration may impact life satisfaction, but at the same time, those with lower levels of life satisfaction may be more likely to migrate (*Graham/Markowitz* 2011). Moreover, migrants differ from stayers in terms of risk tolerance, wealth, and motivation (*Jaeger et al.* 2010; *Nikolova/Graham* 2015). We cannot claim causality, as it can only be determined in experimental designs, nor can we fully exclude a self-selection effect. However, we control for risk tolerance to attempt to minimize it.

Lastly, our dataset does not include a variable identifying the specific reasons for migration of our participants. Nonetheless, we base ourselves on the existing literature showing that Italian adults who migrated to Switzerland in the 1950s and 1970s – as is the case in most of our sample – migrated out of economic necessity or to reunite with their families who migrated as labor migrants (*Bolzman/Vagni* 2018; *Dones/Ciobanu* 2022; *Riaño/Wastl-Walter* 2006; *Wessendorf* 2007). This literature has documented the lack of socioeconomic opportunities this population encountered in Switzerland, as we detail above, and it allows us to confidently discuss our results within the context of this labor migration.

6 Conclusion

Despite these limitations, our study reaches important conclusions on the life satisfaction of older migrants who have been living in the host country for decades. Although having a migratory background itself has little to no relation to life satisfaction, older Italian migrants in Switzerland have lower average life satisfaction levels than both Swiss natives and Italian stayers. This is partially because they find themselves in lower socioeconomic positions than both natives and stayers, and these socioeconomic disadvantages play an important role in their life satisfaction. Life satisfaction in later life is expected to originate from the

opportunities to accumulate resources throughout the life course (*Calvo et al.* 2019), but older Italian migrants in Switzerland have had less opportunities to accumulate such resources than the native population. This is likely due to path dependency, a concept that holds that "a position in the social space is defined by its structure of opportunities and constraints that leads or not to a further step in the life course that engenders new opportunities or new constraints" (*Bolzman/Vagni* 2018: 68). Although some Italian migrants were able to mobilize their resources and improve their socioeconomic standing, many Italian labor migrants entered Switzerland in low social positions that limited their opportunities for vertical socio-economic mobility (*Bolzman/Vagni* 2018). These disadvantages accumulated themselves throughout the life course, leaving Italian migrants with limited chances to reduce their socioeconomic inequalities vis-à-vis Swiss natives (*Bolzman/Vagni* 2018), which in turn had meaningful ramifications for migrants' life satisfaction.

Our results call for policies to 1) address the socioeconomic inequalities faced by older migrants, and 2) support programs that promote socioeconomic opportunities for migrants of all ages to ensure the well-being of future older adults, regardless of migratory background. In an increasingly mobile world, our findings on the different determinants of life satisfaction also urge for policymakers to 3) consider the diversity of the population in efforts to promote life satisfaction for all constituents.

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The Transnational Ageing dataset analyzed in this study is not yet available publicly. For now, it is available from Ruxandra Oana Ciobanu (Oana.Ciobanu@hetsl.ch) on reasonable request.

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Appendix

Testing for social desirability bias

To address the issue of differing data collection methods and the possibility of a social desirability bias when measuring subjective well-being indicators, we turned to the Swiss Household Panel (SHP). It is a unique and nationally representative longitudinal study in Switzerland that is mostly carried out through computer-assisted telephone interviewing (*Tillmann et al.* 2022). The SHP includes five subjective well-being variables that are identical to the ones included in the TransAge project, although these are not included in the main portion of this article. These five variables concern satisfaction with the following life domains: 1) Satisfaction with state of health, 2) Satisfaction with leisure time activities, 3) Satisfaction with personal, social, and family relationships, 4) Satisfaction with accommodation, and 5) Satisfaction with the financial situation of the household. Each of these is measured on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means not at all satisfied, and 10 means completely satisfied. Since these measures of subjective well-being are strongly linked to life satisfaction (*Heller et al.* 2004), they should respond to the introduction of a social desirability bias in the same way that life satisfaction questions would.

If telephone interviewing leads to a social desirability bias, we would expect the mean of each of these variables to be significantly greater among the SHP sample than among the sample of Swiss natives in the TransAge project. To test this, we took wave 22 of SHP data collected between September 2020 and February 2021, which overlaps with the period of data collection done in the TransAge survey. To compare SHP data to Swiss natives in TransAge data, we restricted the SHP sample to include only individuals who completed the survey by telephone, were 65 years old or older at the time of interview, have Swiss nationality, have parents who also have Swiss nationality, and live in the cantons of Zurich, Ticino, Bern, Aargau, Vaud, or Geneva. The resulting SHP sample consists of 1,343 individuals. We then computed the mean of each aforementioned subjective well-being variable for the SHP sample and for the TransAge sample and carried out a Wilcoxon rank-sum test to test whether the difference between the two samples is statistically significant. The results of this analysis are in Table A1.

Although the difference between the samples is statistically significant for four out of the five variables, it does not support the social desirability bias hypothesis, as the SHP sample, collected through telephone interviews, presents lower subjective well-being than the paper/web sample. We therefore maintain that our data collected in Italy and Switzerland are comparable due to the lack of evidence supporting the existence of a social desirability bias.

Tab. A1: Social desirability bias testing: SHP and TransAge subjective well-being variables

Variable	SHP mean (N=1,343)	TransAge mean (N=836)	P
Satisfaction health	7.617 (SD = 1.69)	7.966 (SD = 1.80)	$p < 0.01$***
Satisfaction leisure	8.44 (SD = 1.70)	8.40 (SD = 1.79)	$p = 0.89$
Satisfaction relationships	8.48 (SD = 1.35)	8.73 (SD = 1.43)	$p < 0.01$***
Satisfaction accommodation	8.82 (SD = 1.30)	9.06 (SD = 1.29)	$p < 0.01$***
Satisfaction finances	8.27 (SD = 1.70)	8.36 (SD = 1.88)	$p < 0.05$**

Source: Swiss Household Panel, 2020; TransAge Survey 2020

Tab. A2: OLS regression: Determinants of life satisfaction, unstandardized coefficients

	Model 1: Empty	Model 2: Demographic & Economic variables	Model 3: Social network	Model 4: Health	Model 5: Additional determinants of LS
Italian migrants (Ref.)					
Swiss natives	1.869***	0.683+	0.684+	0.172	0.220
Italian stayers	1.466***	0.849*	0.986*	1.217**	0.717+
Age		0.035+	0.049*	0.065**	0.066***
Female (Ref: Male)		0.129	0.364	0.523+	0.459+
Making ends meet (Ref: Difficult/Neither)		2.687***	2.645***	2.392***	2.176***
Education: Medium (Ref: Low)		0.283	0.270	-0.010	-0.028
Education: High		0.394	0.338	0.023	0.022
Having a partner (Ref: No)			1.019**	0.968**	0.873**
Child: No (Ref: Yes)			0.061	0.094	0.210
Total network			0.010	0.021	-0.006
Good health (Ref: Average/Bad)				2.839***	2.632***
Praying regularly (Ref: Not regularly)					0.728**
Risk attitudes					0.096*
Physically demanding job (Ref: No)					-0.667*
Discrimination: Age (Ref: No)					-2.356***
Constant	26.358***	22.892***	20.918***	18.469***	18.685***
Observations	1,654	1,654	1,654	1,654	1,654
Adjusted R^2	0.018	0.075	0.079	0.137	0.195

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Source: own calculations based on TransAge Survey 2020

Tab. A3: Determinants of life satisfaction by group, unstandardized coefficients

	Migrants	Natives	Stayers
Age	0.075+	0.067*	0.071+
Female (Ref: Male)	-1.088+	1.094**	1.029*
Making ends meet (Ref: Difficult/Neither)	2.087***	2.556***	1.680***
Education: Medium (Ref: Low)	0.410	-0.983	0.376
Education: High	-0.587	-0.440	0.194
Having a partner (Ref: No)	0.069	1.964***	0.319
Child: No (Ref: Yes)	1.326	0.369	-0.321
Total network	-0.051	0.149	-0.245
Good health (Ref: Average/Bad)	1.703***	3.018***	2.684***
Praying regularly (Ref: Not regularly)	0.451	0.519	1.262*
Risk attitudes	0.082	0.028	0.098
Physically demanding job (Ref: No)	-0.574	-0.295	-0.691
Discrimination: Age (Ref: No)	-2.229**	-1.300**	-3.640***
Discrimination: Origin (Ref: No)	-0.989		
Length of stay in Switzerland	0.004		
Satisfaction with migration	0.982***		
Constant	11.732**	17.382***	19.257***
Observations	447	640	567
Adjusted R^2	0.240	0.221	0.121

Source: own calculations based on TransAge Survey 2020

Tab. A4: Sensitivity analysis 1 without physically demanding job variable, unstandardized coefficients

	Model 1: Empty	Model 2: Demographic & Economic variables	Model 3: Social network	Model 4: Health	Model 5: Additional determinants of LS
Italian migrants (Ref.)					
Swiss natives	1.767***	0.559	0.551	0.036	0.186
Italian stayers	1.399***	0.745*	0.921*	1.104**	0.711+
Age		0.037+	0.052**	0.067***	0.069***
Female (Ref: Male)		0.038	0.262	0.431	0.371
Making ends meet (Ref: Difficult/Neither)		2.761***	2.717***	2.471***	2.326***
Education: Medium (Ref: Low)		0.258	0.243	0.019	0.083
Education: High		0.329	0.269	-0.007	0.145
Having a partner (Ref: No)			1.022**	0.971**	0.885**
Child: No (Ref: Yes)			0.149	0.156	0.289
Total network			0.028	0.037	0.009
Good health (Ref: Average/Bad)				2.725***	2.556***
Praying regularly (Ref: Not regularly)					0.815**
Risk attitudes					0.096*
Discrimination: Age (Ref: No)					-2.480***
Constant	26.358***	22.839***	20.783***	18.456***	18.104***
Observations	1,771	1,771	1,771	1,771	1,771
Adjusted R^2	0.017	0.077	0.081	0.135	0.163

+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001

Source: own calculations based on TransAge Survey 2020

Tab. A5: Sensitivity analysis 2 without physically demanding job variable, unstandardized coefficients

	Migrants	Natives	Stayers
Age	0.069+	0.069**	0.077*
Female (Ref: Male)	-1.097*	0.905*	1.014+
Making ends meet (Ref: Difficult/Neither)	2.218***	2.724***	1.687***
Education: Medium (Ref: Low)	0.528	-0.925	0.413
Education: High	-0.460	-0.499	0.320
Having a partner (Ref: No)	0.117	1.978***	0.302
Child: No (Ref: Yes)	1.057	0.482	-0.276
Total network	-0.089	0.163	-0.224
Good health (Ref: Average/Bad)	1.725***	2.777***	2.707***
Praying regularly (Ref: Not regularly)	0.582	0.468	1.379*
Risk attitudes	0.068	0.026	0.109
Discrimination: Age (Ref: No)	-2.445**	-1.351**	-3.610***
Discrimination: Origin (Ref: No)	-1.283+		
Length of stay in CH	0.001		
Satisfaction with migration	0.928***		
Constant	12.664***	17.234***	18.358***
Observations	503	697	571
Adjusted R^2	0.244	0.217	0.118

Source: own calculations based on TransAge Survey 2020

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