

## **Active ageing of migrant elders in the city of Hannover**

Before I add something to the situation of elderly immigrants in Hannover, I want to quickly reveal my specialized background: Since there is no tradition for a department concerning senior citizen even in major cities, the performed tasks don't explain themselves.

In terms of numbers of employees does the stationary care in nursing homes dominate the department for seniors: The city offers 670 spots for stationary care in 7 locations.

For about 2500 people from Hannover we also provide the necessary social help in the stationary care.

In addition to this on stationary care, the department also includes 2 senior residential buildings with all in all 118 senior apartments, which offers up-to-date service-living.

Rather dominating in the outward appearance of the department is the miscellaneous field formerly included in "senior care". This term – as the term "open senior work" – is rarely used nowadays. We have developed this task field not only by name to the "Communal Senior Service Hannover", with social work, meeting places and support through roughly 600 for the communal senior service working volunteers.

With the "Communal Senior Service Hannover", the city also provides an administration unit, which understands itself as the connection between welfare organizations, charitable organizations and associations and otherwise in senior work actives.

Therefore we form a city-wide network and additionally district-wide networks for seniors. In these networks we also work with –for example – the AWO in various fields. We are convinced that only in the team-work of all organizations utmost efficiency can be achieved. Fitting to this is that the AWO as the host of this workshop has planned a visit to two other charitable organizations, namely a Caritas facility and a visit to Arkadas, an association especially for Turkish people.

The idea of a network is popular in senior work, for we all know that it is useful to be able to rely on working structures in old age.

This foundation is traditionally the family, supplemented by the neighbourhood. But we also realise that these networks without care and investment in the inventory possess holes.

In the city of Hannover we work on strengthening these networks through organization of volunteer help.

Not all seniors are in need of help, instead there are quite many seniors who are willing and able to become active for others. We try to aid these, for example through 2 senior offices sponsored by the city and financial support of 4 other senior offices funded by charitable organizations. It is the group of highly-motivated and competent seniors working as volunteers which offer a broad range of services for senior citizen in these senior offices.

With this introduction I have almost reached the workshop topic.

I want to focus slightly on

the active ageing of migrant elders in the city of Hannover.

For this I will explain a few terms beforehand:

The workshop topic speaks of "elders", which is on one hand a fitting on the other hand a cloudy term. Whenever we talk of senior citizen, we usually mean people from 60 years on. Only with such a caesura can one acquire statistically evaluable data. The 60<sup>th</sup> year of one's

life more or less goes hand in hand with the retirement from active working conditions. Therefore I want to use this age limit in spite of possible justified critique.

The immigrant history includes in the here discussed age group, that these people themselves came here from other states, whereas in most cases one omits immigration before 1949. Today's common term of a "person with immigrant background" is especially important in the youth department, but can be neglected here.

Most important immigrant groups of advanced age in Hannover are:

- people with legal status as foreigners from various countries
- Germans as late repatriates  
(for example from areas which don't belong to Germany anymore since the end of WWII), mainly returned from Poland and from countries of the former USSR, which are statistically only easily accounted for if they have kept another citizenship
- quota refugees (Jews)
- nationalised former foreigners.

The overall amount of immigrants of 60 years or more in Hannover should be located more than 15.000 people by now, with a rising tendency.

First to arrive – between 1955 and 1973 - were migrant labourers due to recruitment agreements with their states of origin; at first from Italy, then Spain, from the mid-60ies on an increasing number from Turkey, as well as other adjacent states of the Mediterranean Sea, to only mention the most important groups in terms of numbers. Back then, those people were all between 20 and, at most, 35 years old, but they have reached or are about to reach old age now.

At the beginning mostly males arrived, but the gender ratio has evened out through female migrant labourers and most importantly through residence permission for partners and children. Entire families have come as late repatriates from East Europe and the former USSR, particularly since 1989. Quota refugees have arrived as well, primarily from Russia, to strengthen the local Jewish communities.

The latter were often already in an advanced age upon the time of arrival. Based on numbers, two cultures of origin in particular emerge under the seniors in Hannover:

On one hand the Turkish/ Muslim-influenced with ca. 3000 people, on the other hand people from the – roughly put – Russian language area with ca. 5000 people.

To the living conditions of these people in Hannover:

An uneven distribution of the elderly people over the city area can be noticed, whose apartments are rather oriented around the industrial areas, which are in the western or north-western districts and in the large residential areas from the 70ies. This uneven distribution is partly a consequence of inconvenient distribution through a certain law. In exchange for public funding for the building of houses the city-government was allowed to assign tenants to the owners of the local apartments. Many times this also applied to immigrants. But since not the construction of a single apartment was aided, but rather the construction of an entire building, those cases massed in one place. It only became possible later for the owners of the apartments to trade inside their inventory.

The tendency to separation was also partly chosen by the immigrants themselves, who moved close to relatives and friends.

The concentration on certain quarters was then favoured further by the prices in the housing market. Immigrants often belonged to the people with lesser income, were looking for cheap homes and as a result are represented disproportionately high in rather unpopular living quarters.

In a recently published sampling to “Life and living in old age” in Hannover, in which over 7.300 people participated - of them 450 immigrants – by sending back filled-in surveys, it became apparent that on average the elderly immigrants are less satisfied with their current living conditions than the comparable German population group. Unfortunately there are only limited possibilities for the city-government to counteract this development.

Under elderly immigrants, too, is the language problem is a very special barrier, for example for the quota refugees, which arrived already in advanced age: language training is too late for them. The answer of the federal government last year to a broad inquiry to senior citizen in Germany cites a scientific study, according to which - and the survey concerns the self-evaluation of the participants – 100% of the elderly Turkish women associate themselves with few or no knowledge of the German language at all.

To the late repatriates:

Only the older people (born around and before 1932), in particular from Russian areas knew German, but more the spoken German than the written word; which is explained by homogenous German-based settlements and collective forced relocation inside of the USSR; the German language was passed on to the next generations only limitedly - local government required the use of the national language.

Under the migrant labourers, even at the beginning, were still a number of people whose command of the German language was inadequate, in spite of their long stay in Germany. A supposable reason: Their plans for the future envisioned a return to the home country, this return was put off over and over again and finally, instead of returning, their families were fetched and taken to Germany.

By the way: In Hannover it is possible to manage everyday life in Turkish or Russian because of the large number of speakers of these languages.

As for the Turkish heritage it is the Muslim upbringing which is an additional obstacle in getting in touch with the rather Christian-based host society. At this point I want to praise the AWO and the association Arkadas for their dedication and their superb work. It is no coincidence that the AWO was awarded with the 1<sup>st</sup> price for their inter-cultural senior work. As the capital of the state of Lower Saxony, we have recognised the value of this work early on and for several years, have financially supported it.

In comparison to the German population, the health of elderly immigrants is worse, the immigrants need help earlier in life, especially with men is the ageing process accelerated. A supposable reason: Inappropriate working conditions and from our point of view today shortcomings in the health protection in early working conditions. Consequences: Immigrants tend to need help earlier.

What does the city do?

Of course I have to mention the local integration plan of the city here, which accounts for the entire range of integration of all immigrants.

Mr Weil, mayor of the city of Hannover, has boosted this issue under personal commitment. In the past year were employees of almost all administrative areas involved in the creation of this plan, but the work is not finished yet by doing so, instead only the target direction is given. We will still have to work on the realisation for quite some time. In this local integration plan is a subsection addressing the elderly immigrants.

I don't want to mention all the formulated goals and recognised operational fields of it, I want to just state the main goal for our entire work:  
People shall lead a worthy and independent life in Hannover in old age. Of course, this applies to immigrants as well.

Secondarily to this goal, there are several offers for senior - and for immigrants. With clubs, interest groups, trips and courses, all usually lead by volunteers, we wish to activate elderly people, give a meaning to volunteer work or being together. Thus inter-human relationships are formed which are especially important considering that particularly in old age there is a tendency to isolation.

In working with seniors we have the disadvantage that there is no universal law, which – as in the field for helping children and youngsters – defines national tasks. Senior citizens are not seen as in need of help, most, in fact, *do not* need help, but instead have their potentials. The negative part is that the work for seniors mostly belongs to the legal category “volunteer work” of the city and in times of short budgets money is saved particularly here. For this reason we have problems to meet the rising demands in the work for seniors with relatively few full-time workers. We rely on volunteer work not only for this reason. But we lack volunteers from immigrant groups. Volunteer work of this kind is either less common in their original cultures than in ours or such activities have only arrived here in small number. Surely the possibility of voluntary involvement is also based on a secure economic existence, which is often times not granted for immigrants. With immigrants, we experience a retreat into the family here.

Our survey of known offers for immigrants in the city area is only pleasing on first sight, on closer examination we come to sobering realisations:

Although we know and – most of the time – the city also supports over 70 groups and offers for elderly immigrants, more than half of them are addressing the Russian language area, only 6 the Turkish/Muslim one. In several districts we don't have any offers at all, neither from the city nor from any association.

Thus, we have a relatively good distribution for the involvement of people from the Russian language area, against scarcely noteworthy contacts to Turkish/Muslim-based senior citizens. All in all there is still a lot to do.

Also to note: The actual demand of our offers from immigrants is - I don't want to say: bad – but at least increasable. Maybe this disproportional low participation is caused by the immigrants (already in their home countries) not noticing the administration (state) as a system providing help, but rather connecting it with force and order.

Associations like the AWO and free sponsors can be especially good places to go/facilities for immigrants here. Nonetheless, we won't be discouraged:

I will name offers in other languages. We realise offers in foreign languages as a (first) step to integration and as a chance, and make room for them. The employment of social workers with foreign language skills is on the list of the city; we currently have – purposefully employed – a social worker of Russian heritage, a spot for a worker of Turkish heritage is approved of and to be filled. We want to break the noticeable separation through mediators like these (full-time and volunteer) in the department for seniors, too. That is surely a long-term process  
- Example: senior office in the district “Roderbruch”: Two very active immigrant people are engaged there but it is difficult to draw further people into the group of immigrants, even for fellow countrymen.

But the destruction of access difficulties to the help network opened to all seniors is important.

Another topic:

By and by the immigrants also develop the need to be cared for. Many times this need is met by the family, if necessary supported by nursing service. 10 home services offer especially care for elderly immigrants as well. As for the stationary care, the city is preparing a survey of all nursing homes in the city. We want to know how many immigrants are cared for already and how many times there are inquiries from immigrants, as well as of what kind these inquiries are, which are directed at the nursing homes.

At the moment, there is only one nursing home in which immigrants are even the majority. It is the Lola-Fishel-Haus sponsored by Jews, in which mostly quota-refugees from the Russian language area are located.

A house with Muslim orientation is planned, but not under construction yet.

If I can draw conclusions from the staff of the municipal nursing homes, there are probably only few immigrant inhabitants of nursing homes. In terms of workers, though, do most houses have quite a number of assistants with migrant background.

I could only outline a few topics and not go into detail in my contribution and therefore I want to conclude with an appeal:

A step to integration would be if, additionally to the institutional work, every person – in their place and their surroundings – takes a step in the direction of just one immigrant. That is a task for all of us, for every single person. I gladly quote the phrase: We are all foreigners – almost everywhere!

From my own experience I can only encourage to such a first step; I have not only learned by doing so, I have also made friends.

I wish this international workshop success in this direction as well.

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