

Ageing in Exile: Francophone Elders in Manchester

Ambition for Ageing “Ageing Equally?” Research Project

by MaCO

Simpler summary report

This is an easier to read summary of the “Ageing Equally?” research report by MaCO.

It contains some background to the research, the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The Equalities Board team have written it to help people understand the research more easily, and to make it easier to use the findings to make places better for older people.



Glossary

Ambition for Ageing (AfA) = a Greater Manchester programme that aims to make communities more age-friendly and improve older people's quality of life

Anonymised = when personal details such as names are removed so that participants cannot be identified

Baseline = information gathered at the beginning of research to see if there are any changes over time

Coding = a way of analysing research data to find common themes

Communities of identity or experience = a group of people who share a common identity or experience (e.g. Bangladeshi people, LGBT people, or people living with dementia)

Community assets = buildings, organisations and other social spaces that belong to a particular community of place or identity

Data = information

Exile = a person who is forced to live away from their home country

Family reunion = a legal process that allows people from other countries to come to the UK to live with family members

Forced migration = moving to another country because you are in danger

Francophone = speaking French, or coming from a French-speaking country

GMCVO = Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations, the organisation that is responsible for managing the Ambition for Ageing programme

Identity = your sense of your self

Marginalised = the result of being pushed to the margins of society: excluded or ignored

Minority = a group of people who are different in some way from the majority of the population

Participant = someone who takes part in a project

Qualitative data = information about how people think and feel

Quantitative data = information in the form of numbers and amounts

Weak ties = social connections that are not as deep as family or friends

1. Introduction and background

MaCO

MaCO (Manchester Congolese Organisation) supports Congolese people in Manchester to reconnect and rebuild their lives so they can lead the lives they want and contribute to their local community.

Context

There are about 2,500 French speaking African people living in Manchester. Most of them are exiles who were forced to move here because their lives were in danger. Many have complex feelings about where they live now and a sense of loss about their home country. This can include the loss of friends, family, culture, social position, communicating in their first language, familiar environment and climate.

For many exiles the situation in their home country, the journey to the UK, and the asylum system has also affected their health and wellbeing. This can affect how they interact with where they live now, and what they need to age well.

Elders in these communities have had many different experiences, depending on whether they arrived in the UK when younger or as elders with experience of ageing in another country.

Aims of the research

The project aimed to identify the key issues which have affect ageing for people over 50 in the French-speaking African exile community in Manchester, and how they can age better in Manchester.

Summary of findings

Social connections and a sense of belonging were important to Francophone African elders. Many people found these through African and refugee organisations rather than in their local community. Feeling safe in their neighbourhoods was very important. People used local shops and health services but were also confident travelling to other localities to meet others or access specific services for their community.

2. Method: How MaCO did their research

Thirty elders took part in the study, 16 women and 14 men, who came from Congo (DRC), Ivory Coast or Cameroon. Eighteen came to the UK seeking asylum or through family reunion, and eight for work reasons. Their average age was 59. Twenty-five participants had lived in the UK for more than ten years.

Participants attended monthly Elders Council meetings to participate in discussions on the research topics. There was a baseline survey about health and wellbeing, and two further surveys at the middle and end of the project to see if there had been any changes. Participants helped the project to review data and shape the report recommendations.

Ten participants (five men and five women) completed diaries on alternate weeks. They also met the project worker every two weeks to develop more detailed case studies of their lives and views on ageing in their neighbourhoods.

Three people collected data. Data was recorded in the participants' preferred language and translated by the project worker. All the data was anonymised, and then analysed using statistics for the quantitative data and coding for the qualitative data.

3. Findings: What MaCO found out

a) Social connections

Family and friends, along with good health and the Church, were seen as important for happiness, but half of the participants only contacted friends once a week or less, including four who had no friends in Manchester. Most people's contact with friends was by telephone or online - only 14 said they visited friends. Fourteen participants had no contact with friends outside Manchester. Family issues and loneliness were a source of sadness for many people.

Most people reported that they knew their neighbours, but this was mostly limited to friendly greetings and waving. Many felt their confidence in English was a barrier to developing stronger relationships.

b) Sense of belonging

Most people saw their neighbourhoods as friendly even though their ties with neighbours were weak. However, some had experienced racist hate crime, and some had general safety concerns about groups of young people in neighbourhoods.

Although more than one third of participants did not feel part of their local communities, all felt a sense of belonging in Manchester through local African communities, refugee organisations or the African church.

c) Use of local services

Everyone used local shops and post offices, most using them more than once a week. Everyone had easy access to health services, although interpreter services were sometimes a problem. Some people also use leisure facilities, restaurants / fast food outlets, parks, or schools.

All except two participants said they travelled to other areas, for example to go to African shops, the African church in Ancoats, or central Manchester. All participants thought that travel was easy in Manchester, 14 travelled only by car and others used public transport all or some of the time. Some would like better bus services, and cost was a limitation to those on low incomes.

The wellbeing surveys did not show any changes through time, but participants said they felt less lonely through participating in the research.

MaCO's recommendations

- Neighbourhoods need more police and youth centres to help prevent anti-social behaviour.
- Raise awareness in local communities about refugees and their cultures to reduce discrimination.
- Develop age-friendly local English classes.
- Create more activities for people over 50 in local community centres.

4. What can we learn from this research about what makes a good place to grow older for people in minority communities?

- Marginalised people may have a stronger sense of belonging to their community of identity and its organisations than to a local community.
- People in marginalised communities need to feel safe in order to develop a sense of belonging.
- Having weak connections with neighbours may be enough for someone to describe their neighbourhood as friendly, but not enough to feel like they belong.
- Members of dispersed minority communities may become more confident at using local transport through being motivated to travel outside their local area to access community assets and socialise.

About the “Ageing Equally?” Research Programme

Depending on their backgrounds, culture and life circumstances, different people need different things to feel socially connected and supported in their daily lives. Ambition for Ageing funded the ‘Ageing Equally?’ research programme to find out more about this by asking: “What makes a good place to grow older for people who belong to minority communities?”

More information

This is a simpler summary of the full report, which contains a lot more information about the background of the research, and details of MaCO’s findings. You can read and download this summary, the full report, and all the ‘Ageing Equally?’ project reports and summaries from the Ambition for Ageing website here: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/ageing-equally>

Photo: Courtesy of MaCO

