

The Role of Migrant Health and Social Care Workers in Ageing Societies

Synopsis

This international collaborative two-year project focuses on the current demand and future need for migrant workers to care for older people in the UK, USA, Ireland and Canada. The project will examine the employment of migrant care workers in different care settings, including care homes and private households. Although mainly focusing on receiving countries, the research will also address the implications of care workers' mobility for source countries and for the international care market. The project aims to provide evidence to inform the development of policy and practice across migration, integration and care for older people.

Background

Policy makers have identified a shortage of care workers in many industrialised countries, where population ageing is generating increasing demand for care. One of the responses to the shortage of care workers is to employ migrant workers.

There is little known about the roles that migrant care workers play in a variety of care settings, including in the provision of home care and care in residential and nursing homes. There are questions around the economic and social integration of migrant care workers, and there has been limited consideration given to options that could maximise the benefits of the employment of migrant care workers.

Given the reliance of the health and social care systems of many industrialised countries on migrant workers, these gaps in knowledge leave policy makers without an adequate evidence base for policy development. It is these gaps that the research aims to bridge.

Aims

The project aims to provide new data and analysis to inform future migration, integration and employment policies in the care sector for older people.

Among other considerations, the research will explore:

- the factors determining the demand for migrant workers in health and social care of older people;
- the implications of employing migrant care workers within the care sector in relation to the quality of care;
- the experiences of migrants employed in the care sector for older people, including the relationships between migrant carers and care users.

A key objective of the project is to engage with policy makers, care agencies, professional bodies, trade unions, and NGOs working with older people and with migrants.

The ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford conducts high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform public opinion and contribute to policy debates on migration.

www.compas.ox.ac.uk



Methods

A major strength of the project is its multi-disciplinary empirical approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. Our collection of new empirical evidence will include:

- *interviews with migrant carers for older people* working in different care settings, including residential homes and private households. Interviews will explore the reasons for and the means of migration, the impact of immigration controls and legal status, the mechanisms of employment, the working and living conditions of migrants, and their relationship with care users. Some fieldwork will be carried out jointly with Kalayaan, an organisation that supports the rights of migrant domestic and care workers;
- *a survey with employers*, including residential and nursing homes and home care agencies, to explore the current and future demand for migrant workers;
- *focus group discussions with older people* to explore their care needs and use of migrant carers.

The research will be supported by quantitative analysis of current and future trends of demand for health and social care resulting from demographic ageing and changing health conditions, family patterns and living arrangements of the elderly population. The role of migrant care workers in the labour market will also be analysed using existing data sets.

Finally, the project will address the impact of care workers' mobility on developing countries and on the international care market, drawing on the existing literature and through interviews with government officers, health and social care staff and recruitment agencies in four major source countries of migrant care workers.

Research team

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- George Leeson (Oxford Institute of Ageing – OIA, University of Oxford)
- Kieran Walsh, Eamon O'Shea (Centre for Social Gerontology, National University of Ireland)
- Ivy Bourgeault (McMasters University, Canada)

Work in progress

A two-day seminar was organised in April 2005 by COMPAS and ISIM, bringing together health workers, unions, officials and academics from the US and EU to explore the issues and gaps in knowledge.

The data collection and analysis is currently being carried out.

Planned outputs

- National reports for the UK, the USA, Ireland and Canada.
- An international overview report including analysis across all the four countries and policy recommendations.

Main funders

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Timetable

October 2006 to September 2008