

# Bridging the Gap: Accessibility and Inclusion for Older Migrants in Frankfurt's Ageing Policies

HOMeAGE Policy Brief Series

No. 3

## What is the purpose of this policy brief?

This policy brief examines the accessibility of ageing policies at the municipal level in Frankfurt, highlighting challenges and opportunities for inclusion, particularly for older adults with a migration background.

## Why is this topic important?

Frankfurt am Main is one of the most international and diverse cities in Germany, with approximately 36% of its population being immigrants, according to the 2022 Census ([citypopulation.de](https://citypopulation.de), 2022). In 2015, 51% of Frankfurt's residents had a migration background, meaning they were either born abroad or had at least one parent who was. A more recent 2024 survey reveals that this percentage has now exceeded 57%, reflecting a growing trend of diversity in the city. ([Stadt Frankfurt am Main, 2024](#)). Given this demographic shift, assessing citizen representation and its impact on ageing policies in the German context becomes crucial. More inclusive ageing policies are expected to emerge in cities like Frankfurt, which continues to actively embrace and reflect its multicultural richness. The city's commitment to diversity and representation plays a pivotal role in shaping policies that cater to the needs of its evolving population.

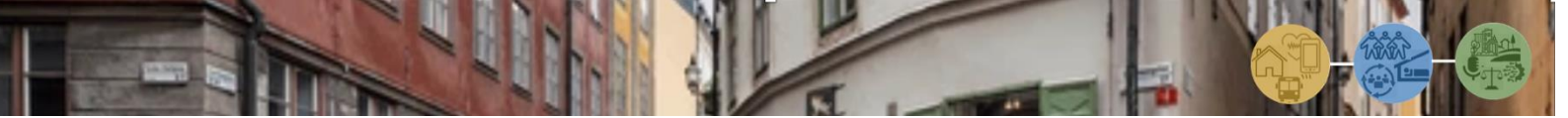
Moreover, as Frankfurt is recognized for its international environment, any efforts to develop and implement inclusive ageing policies will likely benefit from clearer and faster feedback mechanisms. This allows for a evidence based analysis that can refine and enhance policy frameworks more efficiently. Beyond benefiting Frankfurt, itself, these efforts could serve as a model for other cities, fostering replicable and scalable approaches to inclusive ageing policies across Germany and beyond. Having said that, having an overview on those policies utilizing a critical analytic lens will not only help identifying the gaps and the areas of improvement but will also enhance the sensitivity of the policymaking process for the future.

## Who should read this policy brief?

This policy brief is intended for policymakers at the municipal, state, and federal levels, including the Municipality of Frankfurt, the Hessian Ministry for Work, Integration, Youth and Social Affairs, and the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth (BMFSFJ). It is also relevant for the Frankfurter Verband, the Department of Youth and Social Services, and the Department of Multicultural Affairs (AmkA). Additionally, it addresses advocacy groups such as Frankfurt's Senior Citizens' Council, intercultural community organizations, and NGOs focused on ageing and social inclusion. Furthermore, this brief is relevant for academic researchers specializing in gerontology, social policy, migration studies, and urban ageing.

## Key messages

- 1- Older migrants in Frankfurt face significant **language** and **cultural barriers** in accessing ageing services.
- 2- A lack of **targeted outreach** and **inclusive programming** limits the participation of older migrants in senior services.
- 3- Enhancing **accessibility** and **cultural competence** in ageing policies requires concrete action.



## What was found so far?

Frankfurt, as one of Germany's most diverse cities, recognized early on the importance of reaching and supporting residents from different cultural backgrounds. In 1989, it became a pioneer in multicultural governance by establishing the Office for Multicultural Affairs (Amt für multikulturelle Angelegenheiten, AmkA). This office goes beyond assisting newcomers in integrating into their new home; it actively works to create an inclusive environment where people of all cultural backgrounds can coexist and thrive within a cohesive society.

In alignment with its commitment to inclusivity, AmkA offers a wide range of services, including targeted initiatives for older adults. Recognizing the growing population of older migrants, the city of Frankfurt conducted a study in 2005 to examine their engagement in senior centres, migrant organizations, and volunteer work. The findings revealed that language barriers and cultural differences significantly hindered many older migrants from fully accessing social and senior services. ([Stadt Frankfurt am Main, 2005](#))

These insights highlight the critical role of **language inclusivity** and **culturally sensitive policies** in enhancing accessibility for older migrants. With this in mind, we now turn our attention to the key actors in senior support organizations and facilities in Frankfurt today—identifying areas where improvements can be made to ensure greater inclusivity.

## Language inclusivity

- [“Älterwerden” \(Getting Older\) information centre/ Youth and Social Welfare Office](#)

"Älterwerden" Information Centre offers a diverse array of important services for older adults, including resources related to housing, healthcare, legal counselling, and opportunities for day trips and cultural excursions. The centre also organizes events such as the annual "Aktionswochen Älterwerden in Frankfurt" (Getting Older Activity Weeks), among many other initiatives designed to support and engage the ageing population. However, while these services are commendable, there is a lack of detailed information available online for many of them. Upon clicking on individual service categories, the provided descriptions often lack sufficient depth. Additionally, despite the website offering multiple language translations, this multilingual accessibility does not extend to important informational flyers, which are predominantly available only in German.

- [Rathaus für Senioren – Municipal Senior Citizens' Advice Service and Frankfurter Verband](#)

The *Rathaus für Senioren* and the *Frankfurter Verband* offer a comprehensive range of services aimed at supporting Frankfurt's elderly population. These include sheltered housing, ambulatory care, home emergency call services, and a variety of leisure activities under the *Aktiv Älterwerden* (Aging Actively) initiative.

The institution publicly expresses a strong commitment to inclusivity, as reflected in a statement from the chair of the *Frankfurter Verband*, displayed at the introduction: ***“As individual and multicultural as the city itself. People from all over the world with a wide variety of cultures, lifestyles, and orientations work together in our team as a matter of course.”***



However, despite this commitment, the website lacks translations into other languages. Interestingly, on individual service pages, the **"Frequently Asked Questions"** section includes inquiries about service availability in different languages. This suggests that people from diverse cultural backgrounds are actively seeking these services and that the institution is aware of the demand. While this acknowledgment is promising and a few other languages are used for some services, it remains unclear whether concrete steps are being taken to improve multilingual accessibility in practice.

- [\*Magazine for senior citizens/ Stadt Frankfurt im Blick – Informationen für Älter werdende\*](#)

This information brochure is designed specifically for older residents of Frankfurt, providing valuable insights and updates on various topics relevant to aging in the city. The online version of the magazine is well-structured and highly accessible, featuring user-friendly elements such as adjustable font sizes, an audio reading option, and visual modifications tailored for individuals with optical and visual impairments.

However, the magazine still lacks a translation option. The content is entirely in German, which poses a significant barrier for non-German-speaking older residents. This absence of multilingual support limits the reach of the publication and may hinder the engagement of individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Expanding language accessibility would enhance the magazine's inclusivity and better reflect the multicultural demographic of Frankfurt's aging population.

## Culturally sensitive policies

While language barriers are relatively easy to identify, cultural inclusivity in aging policies is more complex to assess. Older migrants often prefer community organizations that align with their cultural or religious backgrounds rather than general German-led senior centres. Many traditional senior centres operate on schedules and activity plans that may not reflect the social habits, dietary needs, or religious customs of migrant communities, creating an implicit barrier to participation.

One significant challenge is **awareness**. Many older migrants are either unaware of available services or assume that they are primarily intended for German citizens. While some intercultural organizations have worked to bridge this gap, participation rates remain low. Surveys indicate that over **70% of senior centres in Frankfurt report little to no regular engagement with older migrants**, highlighting the need for targeted outreach and culturally tailored services. ([Stadt Frankfurt am Main, 2005](#))

Among the few exceptions in gerontological research with a direct urban focus were the 2010-2012 study 'Hier will ich Wohnen bleiben' (BEWOHNT) (Oswald et al., 2013) and its follow-up and in-depth studies, which, among other things, also looked at the special features of the neighbourhood experience of people with migration experience (Liederbach & Oswald, 2016), as well as the participatory EU project EQualCare (Leontowitsch et al., 2023; Werny et al., 2024).

A crucial aspect of culturally sensitive aging policies is recognizing the diverse ways people conceptualize aging and their expectations for later life. For instance, caregiving norms vary widely across cultures. In many migrant communities, elder care is traditionally seen as a family responsibility, making institutional senior care a less desirable option. Policies and services must adapt to these cultural preferences by offering **family-oriented support structures, intergenerational engagement initiatives, and culturally competent caregiving models**.



## Recommendations or next steps

### 1- Improve Multilingual Accessibility

- Implement AI-assisted translations and chatbots on institutional websites to facilitate access to information for non-German-speaking older migrants.
- Ensure key documents, flyers, and service descriptions are available in multiple languages.

### 2- Enhance Culturally Inclusive Website Design

- Incorporate visual representation of diverse cultural backgrounds to foster a sense of belonging.
- Adapt website structures to be user-friendly for older adults with different literacy and digital competency levels.

### 3- Empower Older Migrants as Active Contributors

- Organize cultural exchange workshops where older migrants can share knowledge, traditions, and experiences.
- Facilitate volunteer and mentorship opportunities that integrate older migrants into community initiatives.

### 4- Develop Intergenerational Programms

- Encourage events that include younger family members to strengthen cross-generational engagement.
- Establish programs that connect older migrants with younger generations for knowledge-sharing and support.

### 5- Strengthen Outreach and Awareness Efforts

- Implement direct outreach initiatives, such as multilingual ambassadors and personal invitations, to increase participation.
- Collaborate with community-based organizations and religious groups to improve trust and engagement.

### 6- Integrate Older Migrants into Policy-Making Processes

- Move beyond symbolic inclusion by explicitly addressing the needs of older migrants in ageing policies.
- Regularly assess and adapt policies to ensure their effectiveness in supporting diverse ageing experiences.

### 7- Enhance Cultural Competence in Senior Services

- Provide staff training on religious, social, and familial traditions relevant to migrant communities.
- Develop culturally tailored service models that align with the expectations and values of different ethnic groups





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## About HOMeAGE

HOMeAGE is a Marie Skłodowska Curie doctoral training network on 'Advancing Research and Training on Ageing, Place and Home. It aims to institute an interdisciplinary, intersectoral, and international programme of doctoral training and research that drives the development of new leaders in excellence for the advancement of evidence-based innovation on ageing in place.

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