

# CHALLENGES AND RESOURCES: MIGRANTS AND EXPATS IN THE TIME OF CORONA

AN INFORMAL SURVEY LAUNCHED BY

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# FRAMING THE ISSUE:

**COVID-19 presents us with unprecedented challenges but also opportunities to see the strengths of local communities in action.**

With a sensitivity to the challenges of local integration, and a connection to a wider community of internationals living in Switzerland, I began hearing some common, additional stressors expressed by foreigners facing quarantine measures.

For that reason, as well as to support my involvement in a grassroots community task force, **Covid – Wir für Thalwil**, I launched the survey “Challenges and Resources: Migrants and Expats in the time of Corona” on April 6, 2020 with the goal identifying areas which could be relatively quickly and easily addressed by small actions at the local, community level.

**As of April 30, 2020 we received 147 responses.** The survey was primarily promoted via word of mouth within my professional and personal networks, as well as through various English speaking, local expat and migrant groups on Facebook. Therefore, it's important to call attention to the fact that my own socio-economic, racial, and educational background have certainly influenced which audiences have been reached.

I would love support to spread the net even wider, in order to obtain a better and more balanced understanding. Thus, I am leaving the survey open, and appreciate support continuing to spread the word.

The survey remains open, and can be accessed here in English and German: [“Challenges and Resources: Migrants and Expats in the time of Corona”](#)

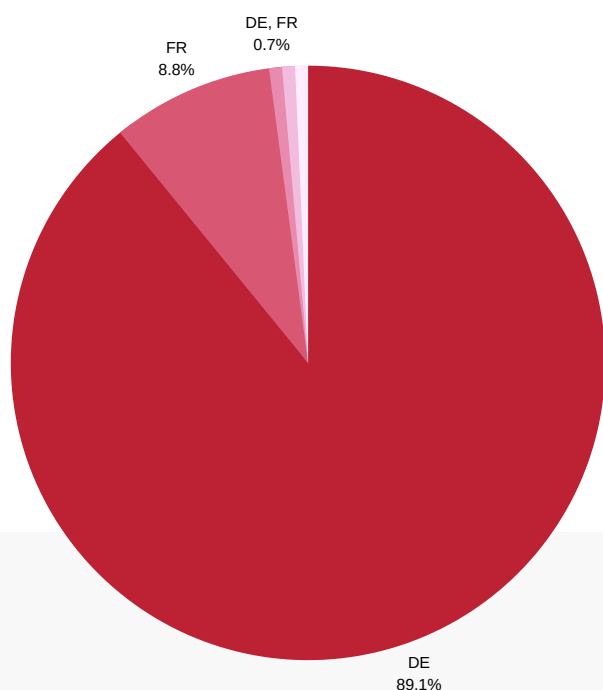
A [Video Presentation](#) sharing these results was made in English on May 14, 2020

# PROFILE

The **top 5 mother-tongue language groups represented** amongst survey participants were Hungarian (65 people), English (43), Spanish (8), Polish (6), German (6) and French (3)

Other language groups represented include Latvian, Tamil, Norwegian, Russian, Danish, Catalan, Portuguese, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Arabic, Swedish, Thai, Hindi, Czech, Greek and Italian.

The vast majority of respondents (89.1%) live in a **German speaking region** of Switzerland



The majority of people surveyed have lived in Switzerland longer than 2 years, with 21.8% having been resident here for more than 10 years.

**61% of Thalwilers responding have lived in CH for more than 5 years.**

Survey participants defined themselves as...

**45.6%**

*Expats*

**34.0%**

*Migrants*

**10.9%**

*Dual Citizens*

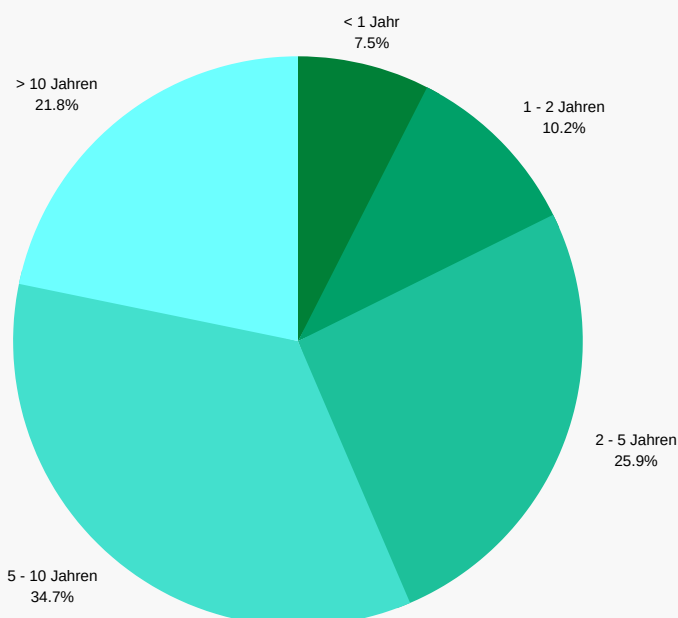
**0.7%**

*Refugees*

**8.8%**

*Other\**

\*ex. Student or Family Visa, EU Citizen,



# CHALLENGES: OVERVIEW

*Respondents were offered a preselected list of challenges from which they could choose as many as they felt had affected them. They were also given the option to provide additional suggestions, for options that were not on the list. See "Challenges: Additional Insights" on the next page.*

Stress related to travel bans; Inability to care for Family in foreign countries - **49%**

Social Isolation (no local family or networks) - **45%**

Difficulties finding updated information in a language which I can understand. - **16%**

None - **15%**

Inability to support children with distance learning because I don't speak the local language - **13%**

Difficulties understanding my options for receiving short-term financial support - **12%**

Job uncertainty that effects my residency permit - **12%**

No idea where to find information relevant for my situation - **11%**

Ineligibility for short-term financial support - **11%**

Economic challenges specific to working the gig-economy - **10%**

Lack of access to counseling or mental health support in a language I can understand - **8%**

Difficulties filling out forms for short-term financial support - **6%**

Inability to support children with distance learning because we don't have enough devices for all our household needs - **5%**

Delay in a decision-making process that effects my residency permit - **5%**

Difficulties respecting important cultural and religious traditions - **4%**

Difficult domestic situation that effects my residency permit - **3%**

# CHALLENGES: ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

*Within the additional options given by participants, we also saw some trends in terms of thematic groups. However, one might argue that these challenges may not be explicitly linked to a person's migration status.*

*The following theme groups summarise additional challenges which were which were offered by multiple survey participants:*

- Finding space (physical and mental) for both work and childcare / schooling at home (also holds implications from a gender lens perspective)
- Childcare: paying for unused nursery or other services, needing to hire additional childcare at home to support work from home
- Coping with pre-existing mental and physical health conditions
- Fear of discrimination, that resources shortages will result in a "Swiss first" mentality
- .
- Difficult or dangerous ongoing employment conditions
- Additional complications for (new) business owners
- Increased concern for others, most notably Refugees locally and abroad

# THE TOP 5 CHALLENGES:

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## Stress related to travel bans / Inability to care for family in other countries (49%)

Almost half of total respondents expressed difficulties related to being present for family members living abroad, whether as a caretaker for those who got sick or in the worst-case scenario, to attend the funeral of family members killed during the pandemic.

Some respondents also expressed the reverse, the worry that their family would not being able to come and help if something were to happen to them.

*"I worry that I will not have help if needed."*

*"Ich könnte nicht Zuhause reisen für mein Vater seiner Beerdigung..."*

*"I worry about who could care for our child if we both get sick."*

2

## Social Isolation (45%)

The second highest stressor for migrants and expats during this time is the lack of family or local networks. Even those with friends and family nearby found social distancing to be particularly difficult

Additional insight would be welcome to assess whether a) this feeling was pre-existing and thus sharpened during the crisis and b) if this feeling is specific to non-Swiss residents or if Swiss communities struggle(d) similarly with feelings of isolation.

*"I have friends and family here but trying to keep social distance is still difficult and stressful. Also I cannot visit my parents in Hungary."*

### Schwierigkeiten, aktuelle Informationen in einer Sprache zu finden, die ich verstehen kann (16%)

3

When launching the survey, I assumed that this would be the most challenging issue faced by International residents. While some additional support was called for, the global impact of the epidemic made it possible to seek out alternative information channels in various language. Additionally, local community groups as well as official integration departments made a concerted (and seemingly successful) effort to make critical information available in many languages.

*'It's also difficult communicating in our rudimentary German especially when it comes to official work. We are most comfortable communicating in English with basic German language skills. Thankfully our boys help us with all our paperwork but sometimes we really feel lost.'.*

### None (15%)

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Several of the respondents polled felt that, all things considered, there were no additional stressors related to their status as a Migrant or Expat. Many also expressed their concern for others, especially those living in precarious conditions.

*"Ich bin wunschlos glücklich, aber freue mich bald normal leben zu dürfen!"*  
*"At the moment all is fine, but as the time passes this may change and my needs may change."*

### Inability to support children with distance learning because I don't speak the local language (13%)

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Distance learning is already challenging for families attempting to adjust to work and school at home. It is even more challenging when the responsibility to support children falls on the shoulders of parents who are not (yet) able to understand communications from their school district or help their children to organize themselves to study at home.

*"We can't teach our kindergarten or 2 year old child German however... this is a tricky one. But we still have some methods. And Kiga teachers are lovely here."*  
*"My French is good enough for my son but I'm reaching my limits with my 5th year daughter."*  
*"Fehlende Zeit für Unterstützung des Schulkindes neben der Arbeit. Kinderbetreuung kann auch nicht in allen Fächer helfen - z.B. Englisch. "*

# COMMUNITY

Respondents were given the opportunity rank the following statements on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (fully agree).

*"I have access to the information I need."*

*"I have access to the support I need."*

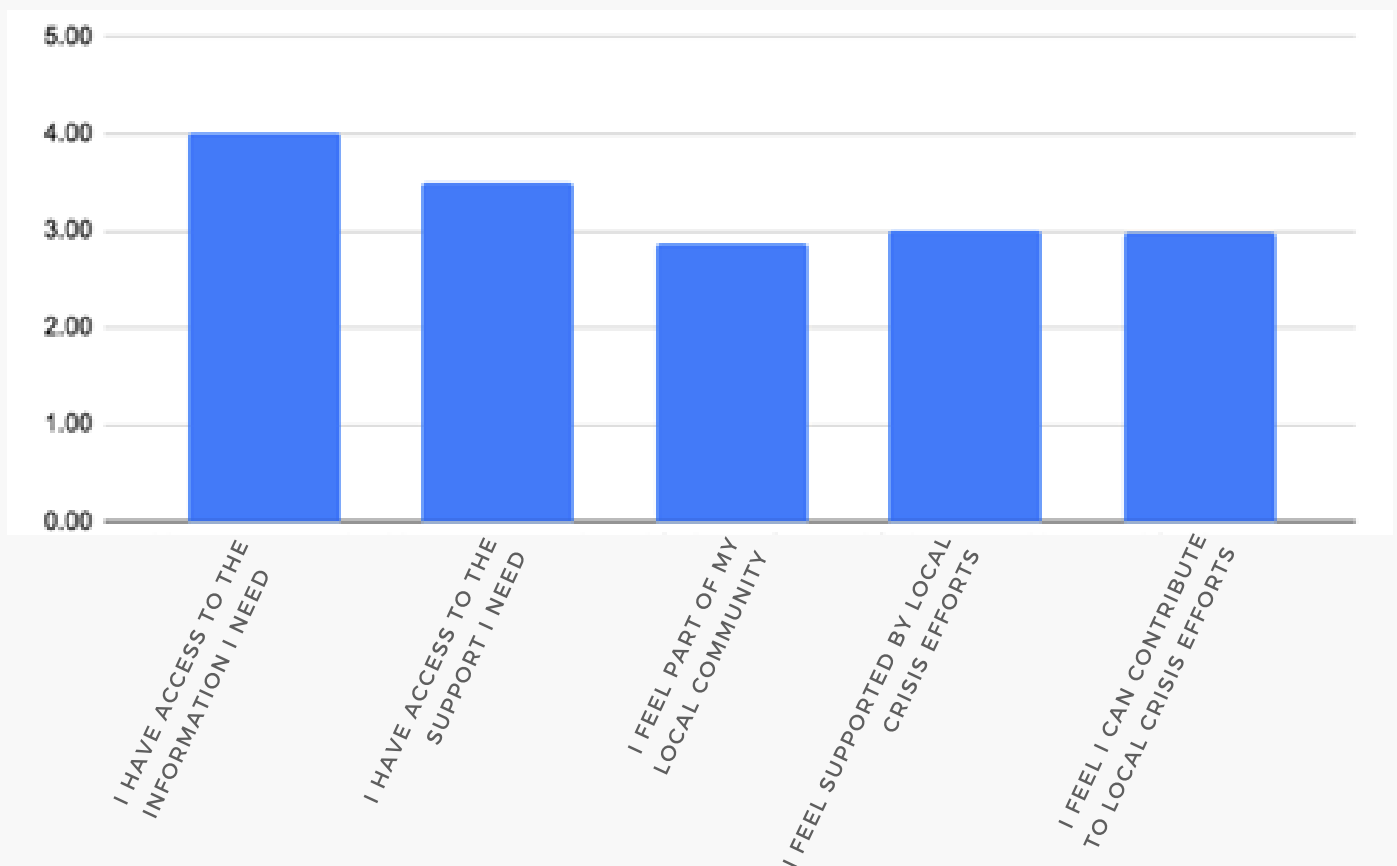
*"I feel part of my local community."*

*"I feel supported by local crisis efforts."*

*"I feel I can contribute to local crisis efforts"*

In general, respondents felt positive about their general access to information (average score 4) and support (average score 3.5).

However scores when viewed on a local level were slightly lower. This seems to indicate a disconnection from feeling part of local communities (average score 2.8) both in terms of support received (average score 3) as well as ability to offer support (average score 3).





# INFORMATION CHANNELS:

The vast majority of people polled participate are getting their information from official government resources.

Social Media, community groups and online newspapers and journals also play an important role, especially where language may pose additional hurdles.

A NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF RESOURCES IN VARIOUS LANGUAGES WHICH WERE SUGGESTED BY SURVEY PARTICIPANTS CAN BE FOUND IN THE APPENDIX OF THIS REPORT.

**85%**

*Official Government Sources*

**78%**

*online Journalism*

**71%**

*Social Media*

**46%**

*Friends and Family*

**31%**

*Work Sources*

**23%**

*Television*

**14%**

*Print Media*

## FURTHER READING

*If you are curious to learn more about the situation for migrants in Switzerland, or how you might be able to get more deeply involved in the field, the following are some additional resources that may assist in your learning curve:*

### **NCCR: National Center of Competence in Research – Migrant Mobility Nexus**

- **Transnational Entrepreneurs: Between Vulnerability and Solidarity:** *tracking the effects of immobility on migrant entrepreneurs*
- **The Migration-Mobility Survey:** *providing a better understanding of migrant flows and the circumstances of foreigners living in Switzerland*

**Schweizerischer Flüchtlingshilfe:** *umbrella organisation for local and international refugee and human rights organisations.*

**The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR):** *a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people*

**Volunteering with a Purpose** (a presentation from **Capacity Zürich**): *Orientation to volunteer opportunities in Zürich in the field of migration.*

## SPECIAL THANKS...

...to the **COVID-Wir für Thalwil Facebook Group and Team** for supporting this effort, especially to my Wir für Thalwil colleagues **Patrick Hungerbühler** for proofreading my German, and **Zsuzsa Pamper** for mobilising her community; to my colleague **Agota Balai** (founder of **Mamagora**) for being a sounding board and cohost of our video presentation, to my husband **Christof König Beatty** for sharing his insights from the Swiss perspective, and to all the survey respondents who gave of their time to offer their voices to the mix.