

Migrants, languages and inclusion: empirical study of a Russian-speaking community in Tarragona, Spain

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The large-scale European project on multilingualism MIME: Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe (FP7-SSH-2013-1, 2014-2018), tried to identify the best language policies that include both “mobility” and “inclusion”. Our research group that belonged to Work Package 4 “Mediation”, carried out a research project in the Tarragona area, Catalonia, Spain, where some 51 respondents from ex-Soviet countries were interviewed, mainly about how languages contribute to their inclusion. Questions were asked about how these individuals deal with simple, day-to-day issues, such as going to the doctor, lawyer, government offices, since many of these individuals have very limited (sometimes null) knowledge of the local languages (Spanish and Catalan). Also key questions were asked about whether and how the respondents interact with professional and non-professional translators and interpreters, translation technology and language learning. The results show a perceived lack of provision of professional translators in administration and government and free Spanish and Catalan language courses. Also, the Russian language and culture are only supported through private clubs and organizations, which are very few in the region.

This necessarily creates social inequalities, since the majority of these individuals are permanent inhabitants of Spain who may not have access to basic services due to their language limitations. These social inequalities become even more apparent when the respondents are asked directly whether they feel excluded from the host society. And since 53% say they do, social cohesion seems to be under real threat.

Catalonia is a region where language tensions have arisen between Spanish and Catalan as a consequence of the recent Catalan pro-independence movement. In this scenario, non-regional languages like Russian are neglected. However, it should be advocated in favor of maintaining the Russian language and culture through the inclusion of these into primary and secondary school curriculum in areas where there are large populations of Russian-language speakers.

References

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