RESEARCH REPORT

Putting Language on the Map in the European Refugee Response

September 2017

This report was produced by Translators Without Borders in the framework of the Mixed Migration Platform.

The Mixed Migration Platform (MMP) is a joint-NGO initiative providing quality mixed migration-related information for policy, programming and advocacy work, as well as critical information for people on the move. The platform was established by seven partners – ACAPS, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Ground Truth Solutions, Internews, INTERSOS, REACH and Translators Without Borders (TWB) – and acts as an information hub on mixed migration in the region.

For more information visit: www.mixedmigrationplatform.org

About Translators Without Borders

Translators without Borders (TWB) is a non-profit organization working to ensure that refugees and migrants receive information in a language and format that they can understand. We provide translation and language capacity building services to help facilitate appropriate two-way communication between affected communities and the non-profit organizations supporting them. We believe in a world where knowledge knows no language barriers. For more information, visit our website: www.translatorswithoutborders.org

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A failure to communicate

Communication is a fundamental component of effective humanitarian response. Yet humanitarian organisations and policy makers are responding to complex crises without adequate information on:

- which languages affected populations speak;
- how well they understand the languages used by responders; and
- which formats and channels will be most effective for communicating complex information.

These language barriers have life-changing consequences at the heart of the European refugee response. Recent research by REACH and UNICEF highlights the risks when refugee and migrant children do not receive information in a language they understand. It leads them to make high-risk choices, including dropping out of the formal reception system, out of ignorance of their rights and options.[1] Lack of access to objective information - because it is not provided, or not available in the right language, format or channel - also affects adult refugees and migrants. It makes them reliant on word-of-mouth and social media for decisions, and potentially more vulnerable to rumour and misinformation.[2]

This report examines why refugees and migrants are not receiving the language support they need to communicate with service providers. It sets out practical solutions, starting with collecting better data on the languages people understand.

Scope of research

Translators without Borders (TWB) conducted rapid assessments of language support at two major European entry points in May and June 2017: Sicily, Italy and Chios, Greece. TWB also conducted a similar assessment in Istanbul and Izmir, Turkey, focusing on populations still considering or attempting to make the crossing into Greece. The research used a mixed-methodology approach, focusing on:

- desk research;
- key informant interviews with humanitarian workers and government officials; and
- semi-structured interviews with affected populations.

TWB interviewed 46 humanitarian organisations, 26 refugees and migrants, and four government agencies. Field work took place in five cities and three countries over 20 days. TWB's earlier research into language and communication in the refugee response in Greece also informed this study.

TWB intended to gather evidence and consolidate available datasets to map language needs and resources in major transit and entry points in Europe. However, it quickly became apparent that this would not be feasible given the lack of data on refugees' and migrants' languages and communication preferences. Instead, this report examines the gaps in the data and the impact this has for service providers' efforts to communicate with people arriving at the major entry points to Europe. It has profound implications for

[1] REACH (2017) 'Children on the Move in Italy and Greece,' June 2017.

[2] Internews (2017) 'Lost in Translation: The Misinformed Journey of Migrants Across Italy,' April 2017.

the assistance and protection available to vulnerable people seeking refuge on the continent.

Findings

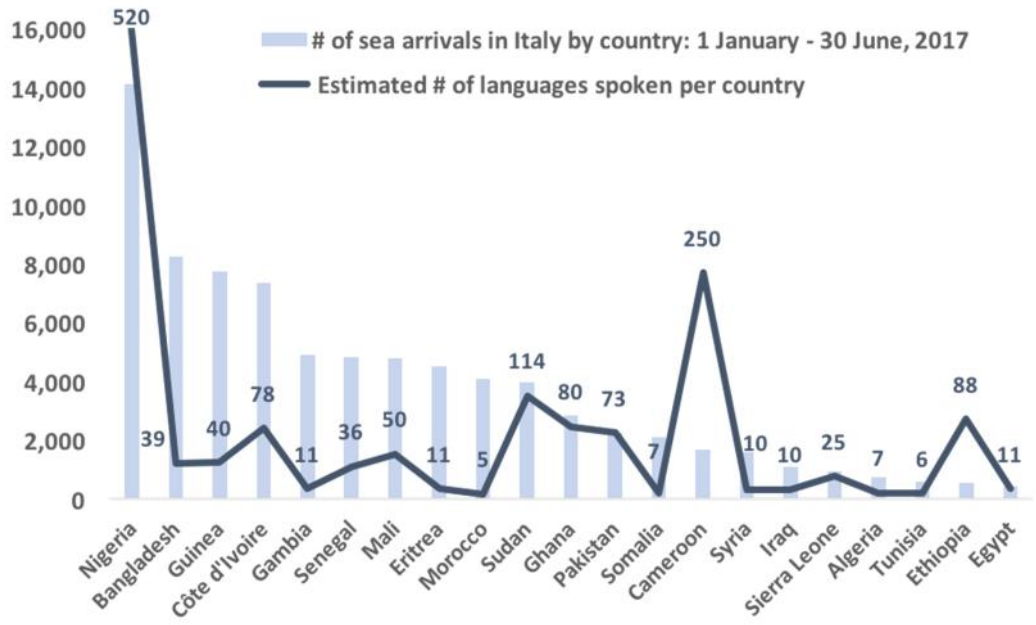
Where there is no data

None of the 46 humanitarian organisations consulted for this research routinely asked refugees and migrants their first language or which other languages they understand. One agency in Turkey produced a small dataset of 'languages spoken' by users of their services, but this did not specify their mother tongue or indicate comprehension levels. Potentially inaccurate assumptions based on country of origin consequently seem to be the most common basis for planning language support. This section examines what data is available, and how small steps to improve it could provide responders with a stronger basis for communicating with their target group.

The limitations of country of origin as a proxy

Without data on refugee and migrant languages, responders use country of origin as a proxy. Figure 1 illustrates the challenges of this approach. It shows that registered migrants[3] entering Italy in the first six months of 2017 came from 21 countries, including Nigeria. Yet Nigeria is home to over 500 first languages, suggesting that country of origin is not a reliable indicator of the languages that migrants speak.

Figure 1: Most common countries of origin of sea arrivals in Italy from 1 January to 30 June 2017, and estimated number of languages spoken in each country (arrivals data source: UNHCR; language data source: Wikipedia)



[3] While the term 'refugee' covers those fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution for specific reasons defined in international law, the term 'migrant' covers a broader population. Migrants may not qualify for the protections afforded refugees, but often require protection and urgent humanitarian attention. Our use of the term 'migrant' in this report is without prejudice to the question of whether a particular individual or group falls within the refugee definition.

Given this linguistic diversity, data on refugees' and migrants' countries of origin would seem a precarious basis for developing meaningful strategies for communicating with them.

More granular data is needed

Responders and policy makers need access to more granular data. They need more detailed information on where refugees and migrants are from and what languages they are likely to speak.

One option is to identify place of origin at a more local level, to allow a more accurate approximation of probable first languages. Figure 2 illustrates this approach by summarizing data from the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) in Serbia[4]. It shows the percentage of Iraqi migrants from three Admin 1 levels[5] (province / governorate), and the languages likely spoken in each.

TWB's interviews indicate that many responders assume Iraqi refugees and migrants all speak and understand Arabic. Yet 19 percent of the DTM sample were from the primarily Sorani (Kurdish) speaking Dohuk governorate. Twenty-nine percent were from a linguistically diverse area, and no data was available for a further 33 percent.

Figure 2: Percentage of sampled Iraqi migrants in Serbia by the top three governorates of origin, and probable languages in each governorate. Sampling is likely not statistically representative of overall population. (Origin data: IOM DTM; language data: Wikipedia)

Iraqi governorate of origin	% of sampled migrants in Serbia	Languages likely spoken in the governorate
Ninewa	29%	A mix of Arabic and Sorani (Kurdish), plus minority Turkmen languages
Baghdad	19%	Primarily Arabic
Dohuk	19%	Primarily Sorani (Kurdish)
Other	33%	No data

As this example suggests, this gives a better approximation of the languages refugees and migrants are likely to speak. However, understanding language preferences for linguistically diverse administrative units such as Ninewa may require origin data at Admin 2 level (district).

[4] Maintained by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

[5] Administrative unit hierarchies vary between countries. Generally the smaller the unit, the easier it is to determine the likely languages spoken. However, language data may not be available for the smallest units such as town or village. Wikipedia gives a comprehensive global list of administrative unit designations here.

Any approach that relies on place of origin as a proxy for languages spoken will be limited by the lack of reliable, open-source language data. The only global geospatial dataset for language is Ethnologue, owned by SIL International.[6] This is subject to strict copyright restrictions on sharing, reusing, modifying, or even viewing the data. Using available data from Wikipedia or national censuses can be moderately effective, but it is labor-intensive, and data quality and consistency are hard to verify.

The case for including language indicators in needs assessments

An assessment-based data collection approach is likely to be more effective at highlighting language needs than place of origin data. Assessment data can provide greater accuracy for people on the move and capture the languages they understand. This is important, as assumptions can be unreliable. For example, a small sample of Kurmanji-speaking Syrian migrants was interviewed in Greece about their language preferences. Fifty percent preferred to receive written information in Arabic rather than Kurmanji. Many Kurds in Syria were educated primarily in Arabic and read more easily in that language as a result. It is common for people schooled in a language that is not their mother tongue to have different comprehension levels for spoken and written communication.

Where there is (little or) no communication

The current lack of language data leaves service providers ill-equipped to provide adequate language support and to communicate with many of the people they aim to help. This section outlines the main challenges with language support for refugees and migrants, as reported to TWB in the three countries surveyed. It offers a snapshot of how the resulting gaps affect the lives and choices of the people concerned.

Limited language support

Many respondents expressed concern about the limited language support available to refugees and migrants when they first arrive in Europe. Many of the large international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have devoted considerable resources to interpreting. However, they are unable to predict which languages new arrivals will speak when a boat comes in. It is therefore difficult for them to have enough interpreters or cultural mediators[7] available with the right languages at the right time.

One Italian government official argued that initial registration requires only basic information, such as name, age, and country of origin. He felt that calling on family members to interpret, pointing to a map, or using universal hand gestures seemed to suffice. Yet migrants TWB spoke with did not share this perception. Only one of the 13 migrants interviewed in Italy said that an interpreter who spoke their mother tongue was available at their initial registration.

[6] Ethnologue: Languages of the World.

[7] Interpreters and cultural mediators are distinct roles. Typically, interpreters verbally translate spoken information from one language to another and nothing more. Cultural mediators facilitate mutual understanding between groups by interpreting as well as providing advice to both parties regarding cultural behaviours. Both roles are commonly called on by service providers working with refugees and migrants in Europe. TWB has created this field guide for interpreters and cultural mediators with more information on the difference between the two.

'I don't know… Could have been Chinese for all I know. I just couldn't understand a word of what they were saying [at the registration centre] and they looked at me like I was an idiot. I'm not an idiot, I just speak a different language.' - Palestinian man aged 33, Catania, Sicily

Profile: Palestinian cultural mediator, male, 20

Mother tongue: Arabic

Also speaks: English, Italian, Spanish, German, Swedish and some Russian

Location: Rome, Italy

He arrived in Sicily three years ago as the oldest child in a family of six, all speaking only Arabic. Their intended destination was Sweden, but the only information they had about how to get there was from a people smuggler. When they were rescued from the sea and taken ashore, they didn't know which country they were in. They were spoken to only in Italian and hurried through a registration process without any knowledge of what they were being told to do or why. He vividly remembers the fear and frustration of being forced to provide fingerprints and not knowing why.

After the registration process, they were taken to a nearby camp. They could find no one who spoke Arabic, so they left and took the first train. 'We had no idea what they wanted us to do so we just went north and looked for anyone who could give us more information.' The only Arabic speaker they could find was a mafia member at Milan train station who promised them information and safe passage.

The family ultimately made it to Sweden but were robbed of all of their money in the process. After two years in Sweden, where our informant went to school, made new friends, and learned new languages, authorities recently deported him back to Italy. He is now waiting for a legal ruling on whether he can stay in Europe.

In this context, and with budgets often tight, most organisations interviewed decided which languages to support based on what they felt could have the largest reach. Inevitably, UN agencies and some international NGOs are able to support more languages than smaller service providers, so coverage varies widely. Figure 3 indicates the main languages of communication with refugees and migrants in the three countries surveyed, and the languages most widely reported to be unsupported.

Figure 3: Estimations of commonly and less commonly supported languages in Italy, Greece, and Turkey

Country	Main languages of communication	Less commonly supported languages
Greece	Arabic, English, Greek, Persian	Bengali, French, Lingala, Kurmanji, Pashto, Sorani, Urdu, Uzbek
Italy	English, French, Italian	Amharic, Arabic, Bambara, Bengali, Berber, Fulani, Kurmanji, Ika, Mandinka, Oromo, Pashto, Somali, Tigre, Tigrinya, Temne, Urdu, Wolof, Zawa
Turkey	Arabic, English, Turkish	Kurmanji, Pashto, Persian Somali, Sorani

'One of my friends went to the hospital and went home thinking everything was okay because he couldn't speak with the doctor, only to find out later that his arm was broken.' - Syrian man aged 27, Izmir, Turkey

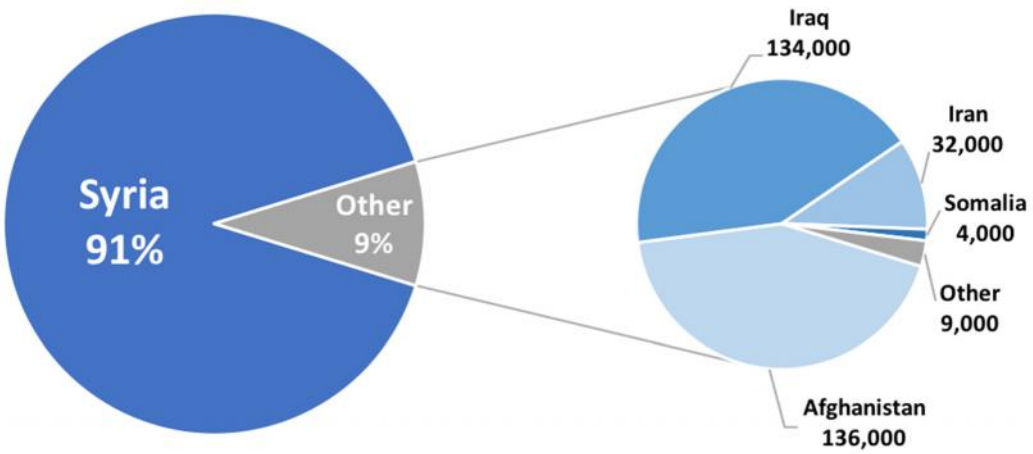
Assumptions about Arabic

In Izmir in western Turkey, many humanitarian organisations stated that they use Arabic almost exclusively to communicate with Syrian refugees and migrants. Most justified this on the basis that over 90 percent of the more than 3 million registered migrants in Turkey are Syrian. Yet this does not take account of the linguistic diversity of the Syrian population. A small organisation working with the Syrian community in Izmir reported that over 70 percent of the population they support identify as Kurdish, speaking Kurmanji as their mother tongue. Without suggesting that this proportion is representative of the Syrian population in Izmir overall, the case highlights that they cannot all be assumed to speak Arabic.

When asked what percentage of the affected population were Kurdish, one humanitarian worker stated: 'I have no idea and I'm pretty sure no one has any idea. The vast majority speak Arabic, and the ones that don't, still understand Arabic.'

While the majority of registered migrants to Turkey are Syrian, almost 315,000 of them (around 9 percent) are not. (See Figure 4.) This is a large and linguistically diverse population to disregard.

Figure 4: Migrants in Turkey by nationality as of 30 June 2017. Data: UNHCR



The importance of dialect

Arabic is a national language in more than 20 diverse countries and territories from northwest Africa to the Persian Gulf. In spoken form, it is a dialect-rich language and speakers from different regions cannot always readily understand each other. An Iraqi migrant in Izmir, Turkey, described how he often struggles to communicate with interpreters speaking a different dialect of Arabic. Recently, a hospital interpreter from Egypt had such a different accent from his own that each was continuously asking the other to repeat or rephrase.

Farsi and Dari are both dialects of Persian. They are very similar when written, but quite different when spoken. Important political and cultural distinctions exist between the dialects, owing to complex historical tensions between Iran and Afghanistan. Yet many humanitarian organisations surveyed did not understand the difference between Farsi and Dari, and did not make a distinction when offering translation or interpreting services.

> 'They only hire Iranians to speak to us. They often can't understand what I'm saying and I don't trust them to say what I say.' - Dari-speaking Afghan man in Chios, Greece

Former colonial languages

When migrants speak languages which are hard to find interpreters for, such as the southern Nigerian language of Ika, responders often default to communicating in 'international' languages such as English. Although English is a national language of Nigeria, it is rarely a migrant's mother tongue and many Nigerians with lower education levels have only basic English skills. One legal aid provider in Italy estimated that migrants who speak English or French as a second language misunderstood at least half the legal information provided in those languages.

'Keep in mind these are often Italians speaking English as a second language, trying to communicate with migrants speaking English as a second or third language. […] If we can only communicate with populations in basic ways then we can't get a good understanding of the situation. The migrants get frustrated that no one can speak to them so they protest the system and leave the formal mechanisms.'- Social worker, Catania, Sicily

Limited written information

Many organisations reported that they had decided not to produce written information, in response to constantly changing demographics, limited resources for preparedness, hard-to-source languages, and uncertainty about how to access professional translation services. In one case, a large international agency reportedly took six months to source a four-page translation into Bengali and verify its quality.

Research from Greece suggests that recently arrived refugees and migrants remain desperate for information on a range of issues, including:

- asylum interviews and family reunification procedures;
- education rights for their children; and
- how to get to their desired destination country in Europe.[8]

Several humanitarian organisations interviewed were apprehensive about having such information translated, as procedures and entitlements seemed to be constantly changing. One large humanitarian agency in Chios, Greece reasoned that a lack of written legal advice would keep smugglers from knowing how to 'beat the system.' This is poor justification for depriving migrants of their basic right to timely and useful information.

All the migrants interviewed stated that, before leaving their home country, they had no access to official information on the risks of the journey to Europe, or the realities on arrival. Instead they found information through informal channels. Without information they can trust to weigh the risks and benefits, they will be less able to judge the accuracy of informal reports, making them vulnerable to misinformation and rumor.[9] Migrants who spoke to TWB generally cited people smugglers as their most common source of information.

Staff of humanitarian organisations TWB spoke with frequently argued that low literacy levels among migrants made written information ineffective, although none could provide evidence to support this argument. Recent comprehension testing in Greece by TWB and Save the Children suggests the situation is more complex.

TWB's research found that self-identified literacy levels are not accurate predictors for whether a person will understand written information. Yet written information can have

[8] Translators Without Borders and Save the Children (2017) 'Language & Comprehension Barriers in Greece's Migration Crisis,' June 2017; BBC Media Action (2016) 'Voices of Refugees: Information and Communication Needs of Refugees in Greece and Germany,' July 2016; Refugee Rights Data Project (2017) 'Life in Limbo: Filling data gaps relating to refugees and displaced people in Greece.'

[9] Internews (2017) 'Lost in Translation.'

value even where assessed literacy levels are low.[10] Only 22 percent of a sample of Dari and Farsi speakers in Greece could understand written information in their mother tongue. However, 81 percent said they would prefer to receive information in the format of written documents or posters. When asked to explain their reasoning for wanting texts that they could not read, migrants often claimed they had more confidence in written information. They felt they could ask a friend or family member to read it to them, and they could refer back to it. Information relayed orally:

- is harder to retain;
- enables gatekeeping by the messenger;
- is subject to distortion as it is disseminated; and
- is much more resource-intensive for responders.

Under-supported language support staff

Without the budgets to pay professional interpreters, smaller organisations, and even some larger ones, call on migrants or volunteers with knowledge of the right languages to provide interpreting or cultural mediation support. Many of these are poorly compensated for their work (if at all) and are performing a stressful function with little or no training. A lack of training and support was reported as a significant barrier, especially for conveying legal, medical, and protection information.

> 'We are not experts in medical terminology. When we often can't speak the word in Turkish then we have to do double translation (Arabic to English and then English to Turkish). It's very hard to do double translation in a hospital.'- Volunteer Arabic Interpreter from Syria in Istanbul, Turkey

Yet without job security and adequate pay, interpreter training risks increasing the rate of turnover among language support personnel. Both large and small agencies reported that, once trained, interpreters often leave to work with organisations that could afford to pay more and provide better benefits. One international NGO hiring and training cultural mediators on Chios in Greece recorded a retention rate of just 23 percent after only four months. Interpreters interviewed stated that colleagues often leave because of precarious working conditions: it is common for interpreters to work on daily contracts with no guarantee of sustained employment.

When paid or volunteer interpreters cannot be provided, responders communicate sensitive issues through family members or friends acting as informal interpreters. One community social worker in Rome illustrated the problems with this approach. They gave the example of a teenage boy who interpreted for his mother when no Bengali interpreter was available at a police station in Rome.[11] The child was placed in the difficult position of having to explain to the police how his mother was sexually assaulted by his own father.

[10] Translators Without Borders and Save the Children (2017) 'Language & Comprehension Barriers in Greece's Migration Crisis.'

[11] A similar trend of children acting as interpreters for their parents was also found to be prevalent in Greece, in research conducted by Translators Without Borders and Save the Children (2017) 'Language & Comprehension Barriers in Greece's Migration Crisis.'

Profile: Syrian migrant, female, 22 years old

Mother tongue: Kurmanji

Also speaks: Arabic, some Turkish

Location: Istanbul, Turkey

She has been in Turkey for four years. Her family planned to travel to Greece last year but when the border was closed following the EU-Turkey agreement[12] they had to settle in Istanbul.

She is the only person in her family who speaks any Turkish, and only she and her younger sister speak Arabic. For the past four years, she has been the designated interpreter and translator for her family.

'At first it was so hard for me because I didn't know Turkish. [...] I couldn't even buy basic things because I couldn't figure out the prices. Speaking Turkish is really helpful, especially in hospitals. Maybe about 50 percent of the hospitals have Arabic interpreters. I've never met a Kurdish interpreter at a hospital or government office. I don't think they exist.'

Gender and language

All interviewees reported a consistent shortage of female interpreters. Most respondents suggested this was primarily due to scarcity rather than a lack of effort or funding. The shortage was particularly acute in hard-to-source languages such as Bengali and Somali in Italy, or Kurmanji and Farsi in Turkey. Respondents also reported difficulties recruiting and retaining female interpreters in more chaotic, less desirable working environments, such as Lesvos and Chios in Greece. The lack of female interpreters is a significant barrier for female refugees and migrants when reporting protection incidents. It is likely leading to the underreporting of sexual exploitation and abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence.

'In Turkey, we can't find any psychologists that speak Arabic. [...] We used to have one female interpreter that helped with psychotherapy sessions, and at one point she left so we had to stop the sessions. We offered to bring our male interpreter in but they [the women in the sessions] were not comfortable with this. Especially for Syrians, this can cause them to not open up.' - Psychologist, Istanbul, Turkey

A recent IOM report indicated that up to 80 percent of young women arriving in Italy from Nigeria may be victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation.[13] This should entitle them to specialist health care, access to legal representation, and psychosocial

[12] The EU-Turkey Agreement came into effect on March 18, 2016. It was designed to end irregular migration between Turkey and Europe.

[13] IOM (2017) 'La tratta di esseri umani attraverso la rotta del mediterraneo centrale: dati, storie e informazioni raccolte dall'organizzazione internazionale per le migrazioni.'

assistance. Trained female interpreters should support all those services. The director of a grassroots organisation supporting unaccompanied youth highlighted the sensitivities of trying to support such vulnerable individuals. He explained how two young Nigerian women sought help at the centre, speaking little English. Staff understood that the women had been victims of trafficking, but could only communicate with them through male compatriots. Without a female interpreter speaking Edo, they felt it inappropriate to ask the women about their experiences and could not offer them adequate support. When TWB visited the centre, the young women were visibly distressed and isolated, while staff felt powerless to help them.

Integration

One reason many respondents gave for not providing more language support was a broad commitment to the concept of integration. The rationale is that immersing refugees and migrants in the host country's national language helps them to integrate into society.

'They think that only speaking to us in Italian is going to somehow make us learn better Italian. But if we have no idea what they are saying and where to go for help then we will never learn the language.'- Iraqi man aged 39, Catania, Sicily

Learning the language of a host country is useful for refugees and migrants intending to stay in that country. Support to language learning is also an important component of integration, particularly in a context of widespread anti-immigration sentiment. However, for many people who aim to settle in other parts of Europe, there is little incentive to learn Italian, Greek, or Turkish, as each is largely of value in one country. Some migrants interviewed spoke of the demands of work limiting the time adults could devote to language learning. There is a clear case for providing language support to new arrivals over a transition period.

'Most people don't have time to learn Turkish - especially adults, who have to work for so long: ten to 12 hours per day, six days a week. This makes it almost impossible to learn Turkish.'- Syrian man aged 29, Izmir, Turkey

Conclusions and recommendations

Humanitarian organisations and government service providers need to improve how language is taken on board in their response strategies.

No humanitarian organisation or government in the 21st century would plan services without knowing basic information about the target population, such as age and gender. A year after the World Humanitarian Summit, at which the importance of communicating with communities and the 'participation revolution' figured prominently, information on the languages people speak still does not form part of this basic dataset.

This report confirms that in the European refugee response the implications of this failure to collect appropriate language data are profound for:

- the effectiveness of assistance and protection;
- people's access to their rights; and
- people's ability to make informed choices.

Changing that situation starts with better data, and using it to develop effective strategies for communicating with affected people. This will require responders, and their financial partners, to listen to refugees and migrants and provide them with information in the widest possible range of relevant languages. Continuing to focus on the languages that are easiest to source, or believed to reach the most people, is misguided. It excludes people from the services, rights, and choices that should be theirs. People who are less educated, less multilingual, less literate, and speakers of minority tongues, are most disadvantaged by this approach.

TWB therefore recommends a three-pronged approach to governments and organisations involved in the European refugee response:

1. Collect data on languages and dialects spoken and understood

Collect data on language and communication (channels and formats) in all assessments and registration processes. It should be standard to ask someone's mother tongue. Applying good data protection practices will minimize any risks to the respondent of divulging that information.[14] Including four simple questions in routine assessments would provide the information to base a communication strategy on:

1. What is your mother tongue?
2. Which language do you prefer to receive verbal information in?
3. Which language do you prefer to receive written information in?
4. How do you prefer to receive information (written document, poster, radio, video, SMS, in person, other)?

Increasing the research focus on language would enable better planning and more effective communication with vulnerable individuals. With population flows shifting towards North Africa and Spain from mid-2017, improved tracking of languages spoken and understood could enhance humanitarian support to those on the move. It will also

[14] Some people may fear discrimination or abuses on the grounds of ethnicity if they disclose their mother tongue or language preferences. Guidance on mitigating these and other risks is available from Oxfam here.

provide valuable advance information for service providers preparing to receive new arrivals.

In addition, further systematic research is required to inform communication strategies. This should measure actual comprehension and its impact on choices. It should confirm the most effective languages, formats, and channels for listening to and informing refugees and migrants from various language groups. Such research will replace assumptions with evidence and allow better use of limited resources.

2. Develop evidence-based communication strategies early

Improved data should be used to develop communication strategies that are geared to the needs of the target population. Preparedness is a critical component of this. Develop information in as many of the likely languages of new arrivals as possible. Use advance data from the tracking of population flows and migration scenario planning to prioritize. Plan early to produce information in appropriate languages before demand is high, recognizing that translations in hard-to-source languages can take time. Not doing this risks communication happening too late to make a significant difference.

Adequate planning and resourcing enable better communication, even without advance notice of language comprehension levels. This is important, for example, in the challenging situation of mass arrivals by sea. Basic messages of reassurance can be pre-recorded in a range of languages, and broadcast through loudspeakers from rescue boats. For example, 'You are in Italy,' 'You are safe,' 'We have come to help you.' Short videos and information leaflets in a variety of languages at reception centers can compensate to some extent if interpreters are not available in a new arrival's mother tongue.

Appropriate format is vital to ensure information is both believed and understood. Research indicates that even less literate individuals often request information in writing, which they trust more than verbal communications. In rapidly evolving contexts, place more focus on providing written information in easily understood web-based formats, with scope for regular updates. People in areas with poor connectivity or prohibitively expensive mobile internet access can benefit from written information provided via:

- centralized distribution points;
- SMS; or
- micro-SD cards which migrants can insert into mobile phones for offline viewing.[15]

Use picture messages, audio recordings, graphics, and videos to complement written information in communities where literacy levels are low and written communication less effective.

'Spoken words fly away, but written words remain.'- Lingala-speaking Congolese migrant in Nea Kavala, Greece

[15] A recent partnership between RefuComm and TWB tested the distribution of mother tongue information via micro-SD cards to recently arrived migrants in Chios, Greece. Preliminary evidence from surveys and focus groups suggests that this approach is both cost-effective and well received in environments with limited internet connectivity or expensive mobile broadband data.

3. Improve resourcing and support for translation, interpreting and cultural mediation

The migrants and service providers TWB interviewed suggest that language support to refugees and migrants is inadequate in all three countries. Interviewees reported that, of the relevant mother tongues, interpreting and translation was widely available only in Arabic and Persian (and the latter not in Italy). They also reported that demand for such services was commonly unmet in at least 17 other languages.

TWB's research identified five priorities for resource allocations to meet the information and communication needs of refugees and migrants:

1. Increase the pool of interpreters, translators, and cultural mediators in all relevant languages. This calls for a concerted effort to budget for and mobilize professional language services wherever possible. Specialist non-profit language providers can contribute where commercial services are unavailable or unaffordable. Training and support programmes can build capacity in languages where the pool of professionals is insufficient.
2. Improve language support to refugees and migrants in public services such as hospitals, police stations, schools, and government offices. TWB's interviewees in all three countries consistently said communication in hospitals was particularly problematic.
3. Recruit, hire, and retain more female cultural mediators. In situations or languages where female interpreters are hard to find, an interagency pool of interpreters could offer a solution.
4. Avoid relying on family members to communicate with vulnerable populations. Favour vetted, trained interpreters and cultural mediators instead.
5. Provide interpreters and cultural mediators with professional development opportunities, including training and sector-specific inductions, and recognize and reward their contribution.