



IR - MultiLing 
Industrial relations in multilingual environments at work

**Industrial relations in multilingual environments at work
(IR MultiLing, VP/2014/04/0129)**

Final Project Evaluation

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Summary

The evaluation of the IR Multiling project set out to assess the extent to which the project had met its objectives and to identify the lessons learnt. Data was collected through the review of project documentation and outputs, attendance at steering group meetings and dissemination events, and via online surveys and interviews. The findings suggested that the project's objectives were largely met, and that the outputs (data, case studies and training videos) have been well received by the social partners involved. The project also facilitated cross-country and cross-disciplinary learning and transnational comparisons of policy and practice. The research design and organisational framework worked well and allowed the social partners to play an active and valued advisory role in the project. Key learning points were the need to clarify the conceptual framework at or prior to the start of the research to ensure consistency of data collection, and similarly to develop a clear dissemination strategy early on to allow time for the project's outputs and recommendations to be promoted more widely.

1. Context

Funded by the European Union's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion the IR Multiling project aimed to provide new comparative information from across six countries (France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and the UK) to address the following five key objectives:

To:

- Establish the trends in the presence of multilingualism at work
- Research the relationship between positive and negative experiences of multilingualism and the industrial relations workplace context
- Develop an analytical framework to help explain strategic decisions by employers and trade unions on the issues of voluntarism or compulsion in relation to language training, the adoption of universal language, and the toleration of multilingualism
- Complete an effective comparison of the context and outcomes across Europe's biggest economies and present recommendations to employers, trade unions and policy makers
- Produce a training DVD/You Tube film for trade unionists showing different ways of overcoming the obstacles to participation by multilingual minorities

The IR Multi-Ling project activities have included:

- Research in each of the six countries into trends and regulatory regimes concerning multilingualism and employer and trade union policies.
- Case study research of multilingualism in the workplace in three different workplace settings in each country
- Developing an analytical framework of employer and trade union strategies and contexts of workplace multilingualism
- Promoting opportunities for dialogue and exchange between academic, NGOs, employers and trade unionists

The project has produced the following project outputs:

- A national report in each of the six countries highlighting the trends in employer responses to multilingualism in the workplace
- Three case studies of multilingualism in the workplace, undertaken in each of the six countries i.e. 18 in total.
- A final comparative report in English covering trends, presenting an analytical framework, and analyzing the six country case studies.
- An eight-page outcomes and recommendations summary document translated and disseminated within each national country.
- The production of a series of training videos for trade unionists translated into each of the partner languages

2. Evaluation of the IR Multi-Ling project

2.1. Purpose

The evaluation had the following objectives:

- To identify the extent to which the project has met its objectives
- To provide an on-going review of the project's processes and progress in order that appropriate adjustments could be made where required

- To assess the value of the project to National Advisory Group (NAG) members
- To identify good practice and lessons learnt in the design and organisation of the project that will benefit similar future initiatives

2.2. Methods

The evaluation involved the following key components:

1. Reviewing project documentation and outputs (reports, case study material, webpage and videos).
2. Two online surveys (via SurveyMonkey) to participants.
 - i. The first survey sent to country leads/participants investigated their reasons for participating in the project, their hopes and expectations. This was circulated prior to the Barcelona meeting and the key findings were reported in the interim report.
 - ii. The second survey was sent after the Paris international conference to attendees and other Advisory Group members (34). This sought to measure participants' expectations of the project and the extent to which these had been met, their level of engagement in it, perceived benefits and likely impact on their work, and their views on key success factors and lessons learnt. A total of 17 responses were received. (For a copy of the survey see appendix A).
3. A focus group discussion with country leads was held as part of the final partner meeting in Budapest in October 2016. This sought to obtain views on the project's progress against objectives, organisation, and the lessons learnt. A copy of the discussion checklist is provided in appendix B.
4. Observation of key project activities and informal interviews with participants

2.3. Evaluation assumptions

There were a number of assumptions that supported the effective implementation of the evaluation:

- International partners and NAG members being willing to provide data for analysis
- The country leads encouraging NAG members participation in the evaluation
- The project coordinator and the country leads ensuring access to relevant documentation

3. Evaluation findings

3.1. The extent to which the project met its objectives

All the project's objectives have largely been met as follows:

i. **Research on trends and experiences of multilingualism and the industrial relations workplace context**

A country report has been completed by each of the five partners. Each followed a common format and highlighted the trends in employer and trade union responses to multilingualism in the workplace in each country.

The research showed that different countries have different definitions of multilingualism, different models and systems for collecting and recording data of relevance to multilingualism in the workplace, and different approaches for dealing with multilingualism. There is also a range of terminology related to migrants which is used interchangeably even within individual countries. For example in the UK migrants are described as immigrants, and/or refugees. This creates confusion and makes comparisons across different countries very difficult.

However the project was able to identify a number of key themes from the research undertaken across the partnership; in particular the use of dominant or dominating languages, as well as the growing use of English.

Fifteen case studies (three from each country) were completed involving 180 interviews and covering four different sectors plus two trade union clinics. These provided rich data of particular workplace practices and were a useful means of highlighting the positive and negative experiences of multilingualism in the industrial relations workplace context. Sectoral differences were identified in the need for language skills. For example for those with customer facing roles such as hotel staff, knowledge of the host country language was important, but was less so for workers employed in recycling centres. Different practices depending on workers position within the workplace hierarchy, and for formal versus informal situations, were also observed.

A loose format for the case studies was agreed at the start but this was interpreted slightly differently across the partnership. For the usefulness and accessibility of the case studies to be maximized further work is required to ensure that each case study adopts a consistent approach. In retrospect the case studies might have benefited from the adoption of a more standardised format at the start.

ii. Development of a shared analytical framework

The project did not start from the basis of a common analytical framework and to some extent this meant that different partners approached the research from their own perspective rather than from a shared understanding of multilingualism. The differing disciplinary backgrounds of the partners both enriched the project but were also a problem in seeking to reach common agreement on terminology.

The research adopted an inductive rather than deductive approach as a result. This had both advantages and disadvantages. It enabled partners to share their particular disciplinary approaches with each other thereby allowing for a wider inter-disciplinary perspective to be developed by the project as a whole. The disadvantages were that cross-country comparisons were difficult as each partner was operating from a different analytical viewpoint and adopting different approaches to data collection. Comparative and thematic data analysis was difficult and time consuming as a result. However, analysis of the case study data, including written and unwritten company policies and their level of tolerance towards informal practices, ultimately led to the identification of three ways of managing linguistic diversity at work which provide a useful classification framework. These are:

- **Assimilation:** A dominant language is implemented by management, which prohibits or denies the use of the migrant workers mother tongue. (Found to be most common in the case studies)
- **Cohabitation** (generally used for business practice) characterised by “laissez faire” or an explicit use of linguistic diversity in business strategies. Diverse cultural and linguistic communities are using their mother tongue but there is a very low level of interaction between each community.

- **Integration:** characterised by a pragmatic management of linguistic diversity, based on cross linguistic and cultural communication. In such a scenario, there is high level of workers participation in decision making with high flexibility and adaptability in the use of diverse languages during the work process. (rarely found)

Further work is needed to test the robustness and wider applicability of this framework, but it provides a useful starting point for analysis. The project has been able to use this framework to identify and classify differences in practices at different levels within a company (e.g. Shop floor versus management), and between different sectors, and formal and informal contexts.

iii. Present recommendations to employers, trade unions and policy makers

A set of recommendations has been developed by the project which are in the process of being tailored to different organisations. These set out key problems and identify recommendations for particular organisations. The recommendations include the need for:

- Explicit company policy regarding the use of languages which is designed to prevent discrimination
- Peer support and language classes to develop language proficiency
- Language training for trade union representatives

An eight page national comparative findings and recommendation dissemination document will be distributed to MEPs, trade unions, government agencies and employers in each of the six countries.

The National Advisory Group members included representatives from trade unions and employers and this structure has helped to facilitate the dissemination of the project's findings and recommendations. The recommendations were also presented at the dissemination event held in London in November 2016. However the project would have benefited from the development of a clearer dissemination strategy from the start with more detailed thought given to specific recommendations for particular bodies and a clear strategy for ensuring that they are taken seriously and acted on.

iv. Production of training videos for trade unionists

The project has produced six video clips highlighting issues relating to managing multilingualism in the workplace with scenarios developed from the case study material. These videos encourage trade unionists and employers to actively engage in thinking about different ways of overcoming obstacles to the participation of minorities in industrial relations in the workplace and ask viewers to consider how the case portrayed can be dealt with more effectively to prevent discrimination against migrants. The videos have been translated into the project's six EU languages. The response to date from NAG members and other trade unionists has been very positive.

3.2. The model of research and project's organisational structure

The research and organisational structure of the project involved:

- A transnational steering group made up of the country leads from different disciplines which met 5 times during the course of the project. This took responsibility for designing, managing, and undertaking the research

- A national advisory group in each country (including trade unions, employers and NGOs) which met 3 to 4 times. This provided advice on workplace practices, facilitated access to case study firms, and reviewed project outputs.

Project management and monitoring was further ensured through regular skype meetings with the country leads (11 in total during the course of the project).

The partners felt that on the whole this structure had worked well. Key benefits were seen as being:

i. Transnational exchange and learning

The project has enabled the sharing of different national perspectives on multilingualism and how it should be managed in the workplace. NAG members have found it useful to learn how issues are dealt with elsewhere. The sessions held at the Paris conference were found to be particularly useful in this respect as they enabled participants to learn about trade union interventions in other countries and allowed for similarities and differences to be identified.

These exchanges and transnational comparisons have enabled some common themes to be identified which have helped inform the development of the training videos and the development of the project's recommendations. These common themes are also being explored further in the development of a number of comparative journal papers.

ii. Cross disciplinary exchanges

Most of the partners are used to working within a particular disciplinary framework. The multi-disciplinary nature of the project steering group encouraged a more cross-disciplinary approach to the research allowing the key issues to be explored from a wider diversity of perspectives. There have also been spill-over benefits with a number of the partners reporting that the project had greatly enriched their own understanding of multilingualism in the workplace and this had informed and benefited their wider research and teaching activities.

iii. Positive collaboration between different social partners

The social partners were actively involved in the NAGs providing invaluable support in identifying issues, case study companies, and in reviewing the project's outputs. The collaboration with the trade union partners was particularly beneficial in allowing for a better understanding of the issues involved and thereby ensuring that the project's outputs were developed in a format that would be of greatest benefit to the target audiences.

3.3. The value of the research outputs

The research outputs have included national reports, a comparative report, case studies and training videos. It is too early to see the real impact and benefits of these materials, however the survey and interview responses suggested that participants and beneficiaries were able to identify a number of immediate benefits from the project as follows:

i. Expanding knowledge

Feedback from NAG members and other participants of the October 2016 Paris conference suggested that the reports and case studies helped to expand their knowledge of multilingualism in the workplace. Responses to the online survey

indicated that they had all found the national desk research and field work research reports useful and in most cases very useful (See appendix A).

The project has enabled the partners to extend the range of their academic specialisms and/or to add further dimensions to existing specialisms. For example one partner whose background included a particular expertise in social diversity and inclusion could now see how this related to labour studies.

ii. Providing useful evidence

Survey responses from NAG members suggested that the country and comparative reports provided useful evidence that could be used to help influence the attitudes of trade unions towards languages in the workplace. The material could also be used to raise issues with business leaders and government departments. They noted that in general language has been a hidden issue in the workplace and not a policy concern. However it was recognized that this project was fairly small scale and more research was required to provide further evidence to support the project's recommendations. One employer felt that the project should continue to expand the number of case studies and perhaps even maintain a permanent observatory on the issue.

iii. Offering strategies for engaging with the migrant workforce

The reports and in particular the videos were seen by survey and interview respondents as offering useful strategies that would help them engage with the migrant workforce. The videos provide a highly innovative tool to support those seeking to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by migrants in the workplace and allow participants to actively engage in the development of solutions to tackling the different scenarios portrayed.

iv. Providing useful training material

Informal interviews held with participants at the London dissemination event, and feedback from NAG members responding to the online survey suggested that the practical tools developed by the project, in particular the case studies and the videos, were seen as being valuable tools for raising awareness and training those working to assist the migrant workforce.

Academic members of the steering group and the NAGs reported that they were also able to make use of some of the case study material in their teaching. For example case studies from the health care sector have been used (in an anonymised format) in higher education courses for health care professionals by the UK partners.

v. Highlighting the positive effect of multilingualism in the workplace.

The research has also been able to highlight some of the positive benefits of a multilingual workforce. For example, being able to interact with foreign patients in the health sector or being able to target clients of different ethnic backgrounds.

However the NAG members noted that the project's recommendations needed to be effectively disseminated and taken seriously by policy makers and employers for the impact of the project to be maximized. The country leads have discussed a dissemination strategy which includes directing the recommendations from the project to key EU directives and other policy makers and TU officials, specialist parliamentary committees, and a number of academic and practitioner journal articles.

4. Lessons learnt/refining the model

A number of lessons were learnt from the project which can usefully be considered in the design of similar future initiatives

i. Design and organisation of the research

Templates for data collection were developed at the start of the research to help ensure a standard format for data collection across the partnership. However these relied on comparable information being available from each country. In reality differences in terminology, methodologies for data collection, and the amount and availability of data in each country led to difficulties in ensuring standardised data collection practices. Identifying these differences was an important part of the project research, but had they emerged earlier (at the bid stage or at the very start of the project) time would have been saved.

ii. Involvement of the social partners

The contribution of the NAGs was seen by the partners as being vital to the success of the project. However some of the partners found it difficult to get NAG members to attend meetings on a regular basis. It was noted that the project should ensure that it gives back something useful to participants in return for their involvement. For example, sponsoring their attendance at the Paris conference acted as an incentive for some NAG members. NAGs also seemed to work best where the group was small, members were already known to the national lead partner, and meetings were not held too often.

5. Conclusions

The data collected for the evaluation suggested that the research design and organisational structure adopted by the project worked well and led to the project's objectives largely being met with a range of useful outputs being developed. Outputs have included vital data and case studies that highlight the issues of multilingualism in the workplace in the six partner countries and provide the evidence needed to support the project's recommendations. The project has also produced innovative training material in the form of video clips that facilitate an active debate about strategies for dealing with the language issues faced by migrants. These outputs have led to important outcomes including an increased understanding of the issues associated with multilingualism in the workplace amongst those involved in the project. Once the project's outputs and recommendations have been disseminated more widely and presented to policy makers, employers and trade unions, the full impact of the project will become more evident.

Key recommendations for the future include:

1. *A more realistic appreciation of what can be achieved in a 2-year time-frame.* The project team were over ambitious in what could be achieved in the agreed time-frame. Future projects need to either scale down their activities and/or improve their efficiency. In this project identifying suitable case study firms and negotiating access to staff took longer than expected, particularly for those partners with limited existing contacts in the field. Allocating more time for organising the research and ensuring that fieldwork preparation starts as soon as the contract is awarded would help future projects keep to a planned timetable.
2. *The development of an agreed conceptual framework* prior to the start of the fieldwork would have ensured better consistency of data collection and reporting across the partnership and has allowed for greater transnational comparison.
3. *The earlier development of a clear dissemination strategy* would have allowed the project's outputs and recommendations to be more widely promoted within the lifetime of the project

Appendix A: Survey invitation for Paris conference participants

Dear Colleague

Evaluation of the IR MultiLing Project

I am inviting you to participate in an evaluation of the EU funded IR-MultiLing project. The IR-MultiLing project set out to research industrial relations in multilingual environments at work in different contexts across Europe. The project's aim has also been to develop recommendations for policy makers, employers and trade unions to help overcome the processes of social and economic domination that are often observed a result of linguistic diversity in the workplace.

The IR-MultiLing project set out to research multilingualism in the workplace in different contexts across Europe and to develop recommendations for policy makers, employers and trade unions that would help overcome the obstacles to participation by multilingual minorities. Now that the project is coming to an end we would like feedback from those who have been involved so that we can develop a clearer understanding of what difference the project is likely to make.

Please could you spare a few minutes to complete a brief online survey which can be accessed from the survey link below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/79Y3WTC>

The survey only has 10 questions and should not take more than 5-10 minutes to complete. **Please complete it by October 3rd at the latest.**

With thanks in advance of your participation

Best Wishes

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Evaluation of the IR MultiLing Project

(Online survey with summary of quantitative survey responses)

1. Which of the following best describes your role, sector, or organisation?

Country	Organisation type					Total
	Academic	NGO/Charity	Employer	Trade Union	Not answered	
France	2			1	1	4
Germany	1			3		4
Hungary						
Italy	1	1				2
Spain		1	1	1		3
UK			1	3		4
Total	4	1	1	7	1	17

2. Why did you get involved in the IR-Multi-Ling project and what did you hope to gain from it?

3. What has been your involvement in the IR-Multi-Ling Project and how useful have you found this?

	Not at all useful	Not very useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Total
Participated in National Advisory group meetings			7	8	15
Participated in the International Workshop			2	7	9
Read the national desk research report			5	8	13
Read the national field work research report			4	9	13
Read the comparative report		1	2	6	9
Watched the DVD		2	2	6	10

4. As an expert, do you feel that your expertise has benefited the project?

Response	Number of respondents						Total
	France	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Spain	UK	
Yes	3	1		2		4	10
To some extent	1	3			3		7
No	0						
Total	4	4		2		4	14

5. Do you feel that the insight you have brought has had an impact on the quality of

....

Project Output	Number of respondents			Total
	Yes	To some extent	No	
The desk research report?	7	7	0	14
The fieldwork report?	5	6	1	12
The comparative report?	4	5	1	10
The project's recommendations?	8	4	0	12

6. Have you gained what you hoped to from the project?

Response	Number of respondents						Total
	France	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Spain	UK	
Yes	1	2		1		1	
To some extent	3	2		1	3	3	
No	0						
Total							

7. Has your knowledge and understanding of issues related to multilingualism at work changed as a result of your involvement in the project?

Response	Number of respondents						Total
	France	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Spain	UK	

8. How has or will your involvement in the project benefit your work and/or your organisation?

9. What do you think the key successes of this project have been?

10. What do you think the project could have done differently?

Appendix B: Topic guide for focus group discussion with country leads

1. To what extent do you feel that the project has achieved its objectives?
2. What have you gained from it?
3. To what extent have you developed your knowledge of the impact and treatment of linguistic diversity in the workplace?
4. What learning has there been within and across:
 - a) countries
 - b) sectors?
 - c) different types of social partners/actors?
5. To what extent has it been possible to develop a common analytical framework?
6. How effective was the organisational framework of the project? i.e. Country leads, NAGs, meetings etc.
7. How well did the research design and methodology work?
8. How valuable are the research outputs produced by the project?
9. What were the key difficulties faced by the project?
10. What could have been done better?