



EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF



MIME—MOBILITY AND INCLUSION IN MULTILINGUAL EUROPE

MIME is a research project on multilingualism in Europe. Using an innovative interdisciplinary approach, MIME will generate an organised body of policy-relevant propositions, identifying the language policies and strategies that best combine “mobility” and “inclusion.”

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INTRODUCTION

MIME is a research project funded by the European Commission within the 7th Framework Programme in the domain of the social sciences and humanities. Its main goal is to reconsider the challenge of multilingualism in a very integrative fashion, allowing, for the first time, the joint consideration of many facets of multilingualism.

Traditionally, multilingualism tends to be approached from a relatively specific angle. For example, multilingualism is often seen:

- as an educational or pedagogical matter. For this reason, much attention is currently devoted to multilingualism in the classroom, since as a result of migration, the linguistic background of children and students has diversified;
- as a legal-political question that requires the formulation of international treaty, domestic constitutional or other domestic legislative responses for the allocation of language rights to or the regulation by other legislative means of the use of particular languages by various groups in society;
- as a sociological issue, where the focus is on linguistic requirements for the socioeconomic integration of third-country nationals;
- as a technological challenge, with an emphasis placed on the potential of language technologies such as automatic translation for solving communication problems in a world where interaction among linguistically different people has become an everyday occurrence;
- as an element of individuals' human capital with an impact on career development; the implication then is that insufficient language skills may impede access to employment.

By contrast, MIME has been designed from the start to address these various dimensions jointly. The first goal of the MIME project, therefore, is to provide an integrative approach to multilingualism as a whole. MIME also examines multilingualism as an object of public policy, just as there are public policies in areas such as energy, transportation and health. Placing the development of an integrative approach at the heart of the project leads to three main consequences regarding the ways in which the MIME project can contribute to shaping and orienting public policy.

- First, MIME deliberately keeps clear of “one-size-fits-all” recommendations. It does not, for example, list “best practices”, whether for multilingual classrooms, migrant integration or minority language rights. Rather, MIME’s main objective is to **provide users with a framework for thinking about multilingualism in an integrated fashion**. This integrated approach can help to go beyond the sometimes fragmentary approaches where political, sociological, educational, and communicational aspects are handled in mutual isolation. Our analytical framework, therefore, is not merely a way station towards other results, but an outcome in itself.
- Second, MIME research products are designed to accommodate the twin realities of “diversity” and “change”. Situations of multilingualism are endlessly diverse, which means that each case is a special case. In addition, we live in a world undergoing accelerated geopolitical, economic and technological transformation. These two facts influence the roles and uses of languages, but they do so in infinitely varied ways. The MIME project, then, is intended to **equip users** (in particular civil servants at various levels, in national administrations as well as European institutions, members of the European Parliament, members of national or local legislative bodies, etc.) **with a toolkit of concepts that can be adapted to their specific and changing needs**. This is one more reason why the project avoids references to “best practices” – what is “best” in one context may not be so in another. Rather, the concepts that emerge from research as particularly relevant for the management of linguistic diversity are illustrated by examples of “successful practice”. These are not intended to be directly transferable. Their role is to provide inspiration and stepping-stones for the selection and design of new, context-specific policies.
- Third, MIME stands out in applied research on multilingualism by combining the inputs from ten different disciplines in order to shape relevant and balanced policy responses to the challenge of multilingualism. MIME facilitates the **anchoring of policy orientations in a particularly broad range of expertise**. This is not just a methodological concern: a multidisciplinary anchoring is necessary for developing language policies that are both relevant and consistent across the various domains (legal, political, sociological, educational, economic, etc.) in which language issues arise.

The foregoing amounts to a very novel approach to the management of linguistic diversity, since the issues addressed in the MIME project are usually handled through the lens of distinct disciplines and in separate projects. Accordingly, MIME engages with issues also discussed in a very large number of policy initiatives and documents.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Language pervades all aspects of human experience, straddling its individual and collective dimensions. This basic fact carries over to the *diversity* of languages, which encompasses individual and societal multilingualism.¹ The integrated approach to the challenges of linguistic diversity developed in the MIME project includes these various aspects.

¹ The term “plurilingualism” has been introduced to denote *individual* multilingualism (the fact that a person knows and uses several languages); the term “multilingualism”, then, is sometimes used specifically to denote *collective* or *societal* multilingualism (the presence of many languages in a given society). Since this distinction is a relatively recent one in the English language, and in order to ensure continuity with most of the literature, this *Policy Brief* uses the term “multilingualism” for both, qualifying it with the adjective “individual” or “collective” where necessary.

Linguistic diversity is neither good nor bad in itself. It is a reality that carries advantages and drawbacks. A parallel can be made with environmental policy, not because of some similarity between biological and linguistic diversity, but because of similarities in the policy questions that they raise. Like environmental protection, diversity advantages and drawbacks, which may be material or symbolic. The policy problem, then, is to **manage linguistic diversity in order to maximise its material and symbolic advantages while minimizing its material and symbolic drawbacks.** What makes this problem a particularly complex one is the fact that different *types* of advantages associated with linguistic diversity are often at odds with each other: having more of one advantage often entails having less of the other. Multilingualism, then, is a challenge precisely because it points towards **two main goals that are not easily reconciled:**

- on the one hand, the European Union promotes high levels of integration between member states. Citizens can freely move between them for work, study, leisure or retirement. This is what we call **mobility**, a notion which denotes a broader range of processes than “migration” and reflects the growing multiplicity of motivations and modalities associated with the movement of people. Such movement is not only physical; it can also be virtual through the use of information and communication technology. Mobility calls for easy communication among people with different linguistic backgrounds. This can be achieved by appropriately combining multiple communication strategies involving various ways of using languages (such as foreign language learning, community interpreting, machine translation or the development of receptive skills in languages related to one’s first language). However, the efficient and fair implementation of these strategies can challenge the association traditionally made between a given language and a given geographical area. This must lead us to reconsider this association in a more flexible, multilingually-oriented fashion;
- on the other hand, the political, economic, social and cultural project embodied in the European Union and its institutions should foster and ensure a sense of **inclusion** of all the residents in the local fabric of the member state where they live. This carries important linguistic implications, not least because the range of languages spoken in Europe is a crucial part of its diversity, which is recognised as a core value of the EU. This diversity is manifested in the linguistic specificity of different parts of the EU, whose member states have different official languages (sometimes more than one, with various internal arrangements, at national and/or sub-national level, to deal with this diversity). Inclusion, then, refers to a sense of being at home in one’s place of residence, whether one was born there or has moved and chosen to settle there, or even to reside there for a less definite period of time. This sense of belonging is usually reflected in participation in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country, region or local area of residence. Such participation, in turn, requires familiarity with the local language – and sometimes local languages. Thus, the conditions for the maintenance and/or emergence of a sense of *belonging* and *connection* imply that the many languages and cultures that make up European diversity must be recognised and nurtured. In addition to respecting European diversity, it helps preserve Europe’s smaller languages. This enables long-time residents to feel secure, also in their capacity to extend inclusion to newcomers. This matters, given the importance that people usually attach to language and culture in identity-building processes. Inclusion implies the integration of newcomers into local conditions but it does not, however, require them to relinquish the linguistic and cultural features that they bring with them.

In the MIME project, social cohesion is seen as a consequence emerging from a good balance between the two goals of mobility and inclusion (let us bear in mind that the form of “mobility” addressed in MIME refers to spatial, not socioeconomic mobility). One key transversal result of the MIME project to date is a confirmation, across a variety of contexts of use, of the validity of the notions of mobility and inclusion as structuring dimensions of multilingualism as a challenge for modern society. **Managing the trade-off between the relevant, but non-converging goals of mobility and inclusion can then be seen as the touchstone of language policy.**

A strict emphasis on the necessities of inclusion in any specific place in the EU could lead to material or symbolic impediments to citizens' mobility. Putting it differently, an exclusive emphasis on inclusion makes mobility more costly for people, whether in material or symbolic terms. More inclusion will generally entail less mobility. Conversely, an exclusive focus on mobility can have a detrimental effect on inclusion, because it may, through the potentially uniformising forces it abets, erode the sense of place, specificity and rootedness associated with different locales within the EU. At worst, if this focus on mobility is perceived as undermining local languages and cultures, it can cause a political backlash among voters who may feel dispossessed of their sense of place. This transversal result is illustrated by research findings of the MIME project in the following areas:

- the protection and promotion of **regional and minority languages**;
- the presence and visibility, in an EU member state, of the **official languages of other member states** (as a result of intra-European mobility);
- the challenges of effective second and **foreign language learning in education systems**, which raise, in particular, the issue of the special role of major languages, including one or more lingua franca(s);
- the language issues surrounding the presence of **other** (historically extra-European) **languages accompanying migration flows** of third-country nationals;
- the problem of efficient and fair **communication in multilingual organisations** – not least in the European institutions themselves;
- the implications of language policy for **social justice** – including between groups defined by their linguistic attributes.

The following paragraphs provide **sample results** illustrating the range of project findings. These sample results are only a reflection of the scope of the research carried out by participating teams. The sample results are arranged in five categories, namely, **politics, society, education, communication, and policy selection and design**. In addition, one sample result is drawn from the set of pilot studies whose function, in the MIME project, is to explore additional facets of multilingualism.

Politics

- In federal states harbouring different autochthonous (i.e. non-immigrant) language groups, and/or groups that identify with competing nation-building projects, **the balance between mobility and inclusion embodies unequal power relations between majority and minority language groups**. Majority groups often grant minorities a robust degree of protection for their language, usually within specific jurisdictional area(s) where the minority is more strongly represented. However, majority language groups also often absorb members of the minority through linguistic assimilation (sometimes called “language transfer”). This creates demolinguistic instability, which can ultimately result in language shift away from minority languages. Flexible approaches that allow for the incremental dosage of mobility-enhancing and inclusion-enhancing policies can help defuse the political tensions that can ensue from such instability.

Society

- A set of case studies on the cities of Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brussels, Luxembourg and Riga has highlighted the importance of local language policies for migrant integration policies. In addition to a degree of decentralization, this suggests shifting the emphasis from the primary (and sometimes exclusive) focus on *economic* integration to integration into a cultural environment. In the implementation of such integration policies, grassroots intercultural initiatives are shown to act as bridges between the different historically entrenched language groups and newcomers. These grassroots initiatives, as well as those carried by other types of actors whose intervention is visible at the local scale (such as municipal administrations, chambers of commerce, etc.) differ from previous organisations in two ways. First, they are no longer grounded in traditional organisations such as political parties. Second, many intercultural initiatives stemming from the action of these categories of players do not view diversity as a problem *per se*. They allow for more pragmatic

approaches that go beyond traditional discourses. The impact of these new initiatives on integration policies **confirms the political capacity of cities to offer alternative approaches to national and European integration policies and discourses.**

Education

- The **integration of formal, non-formal and informal modes of language learning** is a key factor for avoiding problems linked with inadequate language skills. Such problems occur when a person's insufficient degree of proficiency in the various languages present in his or her linguistic repertoire complicates, or even precludes access to employment, social interaction, education, health services, etc. The integration of different modes of language learning can help reaching a certain level of linguistic confidence and comfort in many of the languages present in a person's repertoire. The integration of these learning modes allows individuals to become more mobile or to increase their *potential* for mobility (a feature that the MIME project refers to as "motility") and, at the same time, more attentive to the requirements of inclusion, whether from the standpoint of the host society or of mobile persons. The recognition and portability of language skills between formal and informal settings turns out to be crucial.

Communication

- Four strategies for communication in multilingual contexts have been analysed at close range, namely, the use of language technologies; translation and interpreting; the use of a lingua franca; the development of citizens' receptive skills in languages closely related to their native language (a less known approach known as *intercomprehension*, whose development has been supported by the Directorate-General for Education and Culture, but only marginally implemented since then). All four strategies enhance the trade-off between mobility and inclusion in various complementary ways that increase their mutual compatibility – that is, they allow for more mobility without compromising inclusion or, reciprocally, for more inclusion without impairing mobility. However, results indicate that **the performance of one or another strategy depends on context**. For example, the *duration* of intended mobility is a key variable when choosing to prioritise one strategy or another. Some, such as translation and interpreting, are tendentially better suited to short-term situations.

Language policy selection and design

- Most people are extremely sensitive to matters of justice in the treatment of different languages and their recognition in the public space. On this set of issues, the MIME project has generated a set of formal results resting on the core principles of theories of justice developed in political philosophy. However, MIME applies these principles to language questions, **explaining why and how language policy proposals ought to be vetted also in light of their respective implications for social justice**. An important subset of results concerns the effects of linguistic domination. They show that although such effects may be considered banal and may therefore go unquestioned, numerous manifestations of linguistic domination actually qualify as forms of injustice. In other words, very general principles of justice lead to the conclusion that redressing linguistic injustice is a relevant dimension of language policy. A second body of normative propositions focuses on identifying the nature of the advantages (and drawbacks) resulting from language policies. This enables policy makers to assess policy options in terms of different criteria. Typical criteria are the impact of policies on communicative opportunities, on people's sense of satisfaction under alternative policy scenarios, on people's access to significant resources (material or symbolic), or on whether people, as a result of a given policy choice, feel empowered in their daily life.

“Frontiers” of multilingualism

- The MIME project also includes a set of shorter pilot studies on novel or unusual questions about multilingualism. They are subsumed under the label of “frontiers of multilingualism”, and they include a quantitative investigation of the links between individual multilingualism and creativity. This topic matters, because multilingualism is often invoked as a source of creativity. However, this issue had until now only been partially tested in research. Our pilot study provides a set of novel statistical results, showing that the correlation between them is modest, but positive and statistically significant (correlation coefficients can vary between -1 and +1, where the value 0 denotes the absence of any correlation). In this case, the correlation coefficient stands at 0.2, **confirming the presence of a positive link between multilingualism and creativity**. Most importantly, this result holds even when controlling for multicultural exposure, suggesting that language skills *per se*, alongside other advantages, contribute to creativity, which can, in turn, favour innovation. It follows that such advantages can, through language teaching, be made available to parts of the population that have fewer opportunities to encounter diversity in their community or at work.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the range of issues addressed in the MIME project, it is not possible here to offer an exhaustive list of specific policy recommendations. In addition, as noted in the introduction, the MIME project has *not* been primarily designed to produce such recommendations but, rather, **to equip users with a set of useful concepts that they can adapt and apply to their specific and changing needs, along with examples of successful practice, providing inspiration for specific measures that could be developed in specific contexts**. Nevertheless, three general policy implications stand out.

First, given the pervasiveness of the trade-off between mobility and inclusion, it is relevant for policy makers and other users to **proceed in a step-wise fashion**. The two first steps involve a reconsideration of the issues at hand. Policy makers should start by reinterpreting the specific language questions they are confronted with in terms of mobility and in terms of inclusion, identifying the language implications for both (for example, the changing linguistic landscapes of major cities reflect increased European and worldwide mobility, but linguistic landscapes are a prime locus for the affirmation of a sense of place that defines the terms on which inclusion can be realised). Then, having reinterpreted language questions in terms of mobility and inclusion, policy makers ought to spell out *how* mobility and inclusion come into potential or actual conflict in the context of that specific question. These two steps are a logical prerequisite for defining policy measures aimed at localised, incremental changes in the role and use of different languages.

Second, the processes of policy selection and design examined in MIME involve seeking **solutions that offer particularly balanced, sustainable combinations** of mobility and inclusion under *existing* conditions. An existing combination of mobility and inclusion may not be optimal, and it can sometimes be relatively easily improved. For example, a special emphasis can be placed on making sure that the “naturally inclusive” features of city life (such as the physical mobility of residents through public transport systems) confronts users with signage that effectively communicates the linguistic specificity of the city, using the local languages and associated cultural references, and ensuring their prominence in public signage. At the same time, it is useful to make the transport system equally accessible to the widest possible range of linguistic/cultural groups living in the city and to make space for other languages, in particular the official languages of other EU member states. This “visibilisation” of Europe’s languages eases the linguistic terms on which mobility occurs, and the policy can, for similar reasons, be incrementally extended to additional languages, such as those used by sizeable communities of third-country nationals.

Third, it is possible to go one step further and to **modify existing conditions through well-calibrated public policies that increase the mutual compatibility between mobility and inclusion** and ease the tension between them. In practice, this means aiming for measures (or novel *combinations* of measures) that can increase mobility without impeding inclusion, and/or improve inclusion without restricting mobility, or both. For example, integrative perspectives on the languages represented in the classroom can be developed. Novel pedagogical tools that make immigrant children's languages visible and accessible to all (including majority language children) enhance interaction. They contribute to overall mobility by legitimising a broader range of languages in the school context; at the same time, they can be fitted into a general educational policy that reinforces the acquisition of the local language by all, thus strengthening one of the key conditions of inclusion.

It must, however, always be borne in mind that each case is a special case. Thus, rather than advocating any specific solution, the MIME project provides instruments that helps users to select, among competing proposals, those that are most likely to constitute, in the specific context they are confronting, appropriate responses to the challenges of linguistic diversity.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The MIME project comprises 25 teams from 22 institutions spread over 16 countries across Europe. 23 of the participating teams focus on research tasks; one team is specifically entrusted with project management, communication and dissemination, and another with stakeholder involvement and training, including the practical organisation of the MIME doctoral schools taking place in 2016 and in 2017.

The MIME research teams combine theoretical and empirical work, engaging in desk research on secondary sources as well as terrain research with collection of new data. Most of the empirical research is qualitative, but some teams use quantitative methods and have gathered samples of observations for statistical treatment.

A defining feature of the MIME project is its deep-seated interdisciplinarity, involving researchers from ten different disciplines, namely, political science, general sociology, sociolinguistics, translation studies, education sciences, economics, geography, psychology, philosophy, and law. A crucial point is that none of these disciplines holds a majority in the MIME community, allowing for a genuine, balanced co-operation between the participating disciplines. As noted above, this must not be seen as a peripheral methodological detail; it is, rather, a condition for developing language policies that are both relevant and consistent across the various domains in which language issues arise.

Dissemination plays an important role in the MIME project, which has set up a *Stakeholder Forum* meeting once a year in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, in order to establish and facilitate contact and exchange between research teams and four different groups of practitioners, respectively representing professionals in (i) translation and interpreting; (ii) second/foreign language teaching; (iii) immigrant integration and (iv) language policy agencies and commissioners.

More detail on the MIME project, its activities and research outcomes is available on www.mime-project.org.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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