

Communicational Relations

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Cooperation between the Public Authorities and Migrant Communities in Multilingual COVID-19 Communication in Finland

Päivi Kuusi^a, Svetlana Probirskaja^a & Tuija Kinnunen^b

^a University of Helsinki

^b Tampere university

This article analyses the role of cooperation between the public authorities and migrant communities in multilingual communication on COVID-19 in Greater Helsinki, Finland. It focuses on the multilingual communication efforts of the three largest municipalities in the region (Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa), a public health authority (the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare THL) and the Finnish Red Cross. The article concentrates on the way cooperation with migrant communities and associations shaped and informed these communication efforts. Moreover, it seeks to identify the benefits and challenges of such cooperation. The article draws on Translation Studies research on community translation (public service translation), combining it with relevant studies from other fields such as social sciences and migration studies. In community translation, cooperation with migrant communities is regarded as essential for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the translated communication. The analysis was based on interview data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results demonstrated the importance of cooperation for communicating information on COVID-19 to migrant communities. Nonetheless, the findings also revealed challenges in, for example, managing social risks for migrants cooperating with the public authorities.

Keywords: COVID-19 communication, multilingual communication, migrant associations, community translation, public service translation

1 Introduction

Today, the authorities in many countries consider migrant associations partners in the delivery of social services (Fauser 2024: 366). However, this partnership is not entirely unproblematic. This article analyses the role of cooperation between the authorities and migrant communities in multilingual health communication on COVID-19 in Greater Helsinki, Finland. It focuses on the communication efforts of the three largest cities in the region (Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa), one of the public health authorities (the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare THL) and the Finnish Red Cross¹. Of particular interest is the way cooperation with migrant communities shaped and informed these communication efforts. Moreover, we seek to identify any benefits, challenges, and potential risks involved in this cooperation. The article is based on interview data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic².

In a health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to provide accurate and timely information on the disease to all members of society. However, information provided in a country's national language(s) does not reach all residents. Due to language barriers, many migrants turn to the news media in their country of origin (Backholm & Nordberg 2023: 333, 340). However, the information provided by such media might contradict the recommendations issued in their country of residence (ibid. 336) and therefore could even be harmful.

In Translation Studies, research on public service translation (PST) or community translation³ is an emerging field that explores the translation of public service content for speakers of minority or migrant languages (see e.g. Taibi 2023). Depending on the timing of migratory movements, societies have gradually organised their language services to facilitate communication between public service providers and migrant communities (Taibi 2024: 447). According to Taibi & Ozolins (2016: 11), "community translation is a language service that ensures the rights of all individuals and

¹ The Finnish Red Cross, although not one of the authorities in the strict sense of the word, is an "auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field" (Red Cross 2025) with responsibilities specified in national law (Act on the Finnish Red Cross 238/2000).

² The data was collected in two research projects: *Improving communication with migrants for crisis preparedness: lessons learned from COVID-19* (2021–2022), funded by the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and *Translation, migration and democracy: Managing multilingual access to information in the greater Helsinki area and in Tallinn* (2022–2025), funded by Kone Foundation.

³ In this article, the terms *community translation* and *public service translation* are used interchangeably. Nevertheless, they reflect slightly different perspectives: a community-based one, and one focusing on public service providers (see e.g. Valero-Garcés 2023: 7 for a similar discussion on public service vs. community interpreting).

communities to public information and services.” It supports information exchange and enables minorities or newcomers to participate more actively; however, the extent of this service is a political decision (ibid).

In research on public service translation, the involvement of migrant community representatives has been considered important from the perspective of translation quality (Taibi 2017). Similarly, recent research on multilingual COVID-19 communication has shown that cooperation with migrant communities has helped the public authorities transmit information on the disease to migrants (see e.g. Felberg 2022; Bouyzourn et al. 2023). These findings are supported by research in health communication, emphasising that cooperation with representatives of migrant communities is essential to ensure that health information is both linguistically and culturally relevant to the target communities, whether during the pandemic (Maldonado et al. 2020; Pack et al. 2023) or in other contexts (Berrut et al. 2006; Geldermann et al. 2022). In the social sciences, a systematic review of research on communicating COVID-19 to language minorities in Finland, Norway and Sweden concluded that in future crises, communication activities should be designed “together *with* community representatives, not only *for* them” (Backholm & Nordberg 2023: 341; emphasis in the original).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our research team interviewed communication specialists from 11 Finnish organisations in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors to investigate the way they organised and managed the communication of information on COVID-19 to speakers of non-national languages. The interviewees represent both the public authorities and migrant associations. Our previous analyses of the data focused on the interviewees’ perceptions and explanations of problems with the quality of translations produced and/or procured by the organisations to deliver information on COVID-19 in non-national languages (Kuusi et al. 2024), as well as the nature and sources of their knowledge of the target audiences and the ways this knowledge (or lack of it) impacted their communication efforts (Määttä et al. 2024). That research also highlighted the potential of cooperation with migrant communities to increase the public authorities’ understanding of the target audiences and influence their communication efforts (Määttä et al. 2024). The present article approaches the data through qualitative content analysis to gain insights into the cooperation between the authorities and representatives of migrant communities⁴ and seeks to answer the following research questions: What were the perceived importance and benefits of

⁴ In this article, groups of people who have migrated from the same country of origin or who share the same language are referred to as *migrant communities*. However, it should be noted that these communities are not homogeneous in terms of their language use, neither do they share common views on issues such as language use and communication (see Fauser 2024; Fought 2011).

cooperation for the parties? What were the challenges encountered? Did cooperation entail any (potential or actual) risks?

2 Previous Research on Cooperation in Communicating with Migrants

As noted above, the goal of public service translation is to grant speakers of non-national languages equal access to information and participation in society. To achieve this goal, it is essential that issues affecting the reception of these translations, such as communicating culturally sensitive content or disseminating information through appropriate channels, are considered by both the producers of the texts and their translators (Taibi 2017). This, however, requires knowledge and understanding of the receiving community.

Originally, most community translators and interpreters were ad hoc practitioners of migrant origin who possessed a stronger command of the official language of the host society than their fellow migrants (Lai & Gonzalez 2023: 213). This informal activity often led to communication problems and highlighted the need to train professional interpreters and translators for the public service (ibid.). Community translators operate in various positions; in Finland, they mostly work as freelancers or subcontractors for translation agencies contracted to public authorities. Some may be employed as in-house translators by the authorities or various organisations. Ideally, they possess relevant education and experience, but very often no professional translators are available in the languages of migrant communities (Taibi 2017: 12). While many community translators are members of the migrant communities themselves, they may be proficient in only one variety of the language of the community, which, in turn, can cause communication problems (e.g. speakers of Arabic from North Africa vs. the Middle East; see Taibi & Ozolins 2016: 15). To ensure effective communication, translators should consult representatives of the community to solve problems with cultural issues and language varieties (Taibi 2017: 21).

Previous research indicates that the public authorities may lack knowledge of migrant communities as target groups of communication (Brekke 2021, Määttä et al. 2024). This, in turn, may undermine their efforts to communicate information effectively to these audiences, as the knowledge gap might include issues such as the information the target audience needs, the way information should be presented to elicit trust and the channels the community is accustomed to use to receive information. Our previous analysis of multilingual COVID-19 communication in Finland indicates that the public authorities do not always possess sufficient understanding of migrant communities as the target of communication. Consequently, they rely on migrant associations and other representatives of migrant communities to strengthen this understanding (Määttä et al. 2024: 566,

568, 578). In COVID-19 communication in Norway, the public authorities were also reported to lack understanding of migrant communities, and their competence in understanding the communication needs of these communities was found to be limited (Brekke 2021: 657).

Norway's COVID-19 communication was shown to benefit from involving members of the target audiences in the production of communication measures (Felberg 2022: 135). For instance, Brekke (2021) reports on an information campaign targeting hard-to-reach Somali communities in Oslo during the pandemic. As COVID-19 infections disproportionately affected the Somali population, the public authorities designed an information campaign using Somali-speaking "ambassadors" to reach all parts of the Somali community (ibid. 641, 645–646). The ambassadors possessed good language skills in the community's language and held authority within the community, but they did not represent any migrant association, which ensured their neutrality vis-à-vis the different parts of the community (ibid. 652). The independence of the ambassadors, representing neither migrant associations nor the public authorities, helped create trust within the community (ibid.). This neutrality, however, came with a cost: the ambassadors' volunteer status and minimal compensation for their efforts contributed to their reluctance to continue cooperation with the authorities at a later stage of the pandemic (ibid. 658).

Other initiatives employing the ambassador approach were launched in Norway, and this cooperation proved beneficial for the target audiences and city employees alike, as the latter learned to know their target communities better and adapt their messages accordingly (Felberg 2022: 137). The ambassadors also translated and checked information prior to its dissemination (ibid.). Through cooperation with members of migrant communities, the authorities were able to increase their understanding of the communities' communication needs.

Felberg (2022: 137) suggests that trust was key to the effectiveness of the ambassador approach: for migrant communities, it was easier to trust information received from members of their community and disseminated in their language (see also Felberg 2021: 107–108; Bouyzourn et al. 2023: 87–88). However, the mere act of translating information into their language was insufficient: Felberg (2022: 133) notes that some translations provided by the authorities were of poor quality, undermining the community's trust in the information provided. Eliciting trust has also been linked to choosing the right channels for communication: according to research conducted in Australia during COVID-19, migrant communities were more likely to trust messages received through the communication channels they were accustomed to use (e.g. immigrant community newspapers, social media, or community leaders) (Pym & Hu 2022; Pym et al. 2022).

However, research also indicates that collaboration with the public authorities may entail risks for migrant participants. For example, in the ambassador project discussed above, a potential drawback was the social risk faced by the ambassadors (Brekke 2021: 657). Some ambassadors approached by the authorities were reluctant or unwilling to join the campaign, supposedly because of the associated risks, such as being perceived by their community as representatives of the public authorities (ibid. 653, 657). Their task might also have been overly taxing: in their research review, Backholm and Nordberg (2023: 337, 341) observe that ambassadors were assigned too much responsibility, indicating problems in the division of labour between the authorities and ambassadors. Furthermore, Felberg (2021: 112) discusses the “outsourcing of information measures to NGOs and volunteers” as problematic, potentially serving as “a way for authorities to disclaim liability” (ibid. 105). Thus, Felberg highlights the need for further research on the topic. Another potential issue in such cooperation is the difficulty of objectively assessing the actual reach and effectiveness of the ambassadors’ communication (Backholm & Nordberg 2023: 339).

In the social sciences, Buchert and Wrede (2021) discuss some potential problems inherent in cooperation between the authorities and the third sector. For instance, the authors analyse the ambiguous role of NGOs in delivering social services to migrants. In Finland, the growing digitalisation of public services has led to situations where marginalised groups, such as socially excluded older migrants, are unable to use public services independently and, for instance, require help accessing the benefits they are entitled to. Based on an analysis of interviews conducted with representatives of NGOs, Buchert and Wrede discuss situations where third-sector advisors not only *advise* older migrants in, for example, filing applications, which would be insufficient to solve their problem, but actually complete applications on their behalf, induced by a sense of moral obligation to help (ibid. 66). In doing so, they “emerge as sort of surrogate workers for the public administration” without an institutional mandate and clearly defined responsibilities, with the state “silently endorsing” their problematic role (ibid. 66–67). Based on their analysis, the authors (ibid. 65) question the extent to which the public authorities may or should share their responsibilities with NGOs and the kind of accountability issues that may follow.

3 Materials and Methods

In 2021–2022, we conducted 18 semi-structured thematic interviews with 23 communications specialists and other personnel responsible for or involved in the production, purchasing or dissemination of multilingual information related to COVID-19. The interviewees represented 11 organisations: the three largest cities in the metropolitan area,

the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare THL, the Finnish Red Cross, two migrant associations, the Russian news service of the National Broadcasting Company YLE, the University of Helsinki, a construction company and the Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries. Our focus was the municipal sector (10 interviews, 11 interviewees), because municipalities (cities) played a central role in producing and disseminating information on COVID-19, as well as the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2 interviews, 3 interviewees), which, as one of the public health authorities, played a prominent role in communication on COVID-19.

The interviews focused on the way organisations dealt with the sudden increase in the need for multilingual communication caused by the pandemic. We inquired, for example, about the organisation and management of the translation processes, the monitoring of feedback, and cooperation with other organisations, including NGOs. Interview durations varied between approximately 45 minutes and two hours. The interviews were video- or audio-recorded, transcribed and coded in Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software. We employed a qualitative content analysis approach, including both initial (descriptive) and second-level (interpretive) coding (Saldanha & O'Brien 2013: 188–194). This first round of coding, conducted by one of the researchers, was subsequently checked and complemented by other researchers involved in the research project. To answer the research questions, passages labelled with any code denoting cooperation with representatives of migrant communities were chosen for closer analysis. The topic arose only in interviews with the municipalities, the public health authority, the Finnish Red Cross and the migrant associations. In the analysis of these interviews (N = 12, with 14 interviewees), we identified three broad themes related to cooperation: its perceived importance, the concrete benefits it produced, and the challenges involved or risks identified in it. In the interviews with representatives of other organisations (the construction sector, the University of Helsinki and the Russian news service of the National broadcasting company), cooperation with migrant associations or communities did not emerge as a topic of discussion. This could be explained by the more narrowly defined audience to whom these organisations were communicating (see Määttä et al. 2024).

Most interviews were conducted in Finnish, while two were held in Russian and one in both Finnish and English. The data for the present article were analysed in the original language, and all excerpts from the interviews conducted in Finnish and Russian were translated by the authors.

In the analysis, some migrant groups – speakers of Estonian and Russian – were more prominent than others. This is natural, as they were the largest groups of foreign-language speakers in the capital region in 2021 (Statistics Finland 2021). As the interviewees discussed their personal experience with multilingual communication, it is unsurprising

that they paid more attention to the groups with whom they had the most contact. However, it is important to note that the perspective of the authorities (10 interviews) emerges in the data more forcefully than that of their migrant partners (2 interviews), which can be considered a limitation of the study.

4 Analysis

This section presents the themes identified in the analysis in two subsections. Section 4.1 discusses the perceived importance and benefits of cooperation together, as they are closely connected. In turn, Section 4.2 addresses the challenges and risks related to cooperation.

4.1 The Importance and Benefits of Cooperation

Our data demonstrate that representatives of migrant communities, including migrant associations, played an essential role in shaping the authorities' communication efforts. All representatives of the public authorities interviewed in the present study produced and delivered multilingual information on COVID-19 in cooperation with migrant communities. They considered the importance of this cooperation one of the most important lessons learned during the pandemic and highlighted the value of strengthening and regularising such cooperation in non-crisis settings. Below, this is illustrated by an excerpt from an interview with representatives of the public health authority; however, similar views were expressed in interviews with other public authority representatives as well. In the excerpt, the interviewees respond to the question of what they consider the most important lessons learned during the pandemic.

(1) [INTERVIEWEE 1] Well, good practices have included at least this close cooperation with associations and feedback from the field.

[INTERVIEWEE 2] Yes, and that connections are established with associations and various communities before a crisis situation arises, so that trust is already there. I think it's important to maintain them in all situations, so that when a crisis arises, you don't have to start building those contacts from scratch. I think it's really important. Of course, it has been really great for us that we already had those contacts in place, which has helped us a lot in our work, and we will definitely continue to strengthen them and hope that this will be done elsewhere as well. (The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, February 2022)

The authorities' understanding of the importance of cooperation was also confirmed by a representative of a migrant association (example 2). At the same time, the excerpt highlights a key reason for cooperation: migrant associations possess access to numerous communication channels that are not directly available to the public authorities.

(2) The public authorities have started to understand the importance of a Russian-speaking association that acts as a mouthpiece, and have learned to use the channels of SVK [the Association of Russian-Speakers in Finland], which are effective, to convey information; when the public authorities give information directly to Russian-speaking organisations, they reach speakers of Russian, and speakers of Russian find the information. (Association of Russian-speakers in Finland, February 2022)

Interviewees from the public authorities highlighted the importance of different initiatives that regularly brought together representatives from their organisations and migrant associations in roundtable discussions. Such discussions enabled the authorities to gain better understanding of the communities they wished to reach. The most frequently mentioned of these initiatives was the cross-ministerial Covid Task Force on Multilingual and Multichannel Communication, initiated by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. In the Task Force, several public organisations, including The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, joined forces to address the need for multilingual communication on COVID-19 in close collaboration with members of migrant communities (see e.g. THL 2021)⁵. Representatives from the municipalities also reported having participated in this collaboration.

The interviewees also acknowledged the central role of a Finnish Red Cross project coordinating NGOs' multilingual and multichannel communication on COVID-19 (Finnish Red Cross 2025) through, for instance, monthly meetings for participating NGO's. Similarly, the City of Helsinki organised monthly meetings for representatives of migrant associations, and the mayor of the City of Vantaa organised roundtable meetings with representatives of migrant communities and their religious leaders. Through these dialogues, the authorities received valuable information on the information needs of migrant communities. These dialogues also led to more concrete forms of cooperation that benefited the authorities' communication efforts, such as the dissemination of information, referred to in example 2. Other benefits included feedback on translated materials, the proofreading and checking of translations, the co-production of informative materials and the organisation of events for the target communities. In the following, these benefits are discussed and illustrated with excerpts from the interview data.

For the authorities, the main benefit of cooperation was the help they received from migrant associations and/or key persons from migrant communities in transmitting the authorities' messages (see example 2). This was acknowledged in interviews with all three municipalities and the public health authority.

⁵ The Task Force won the 2021 Democracy Recognition award for their efforts in developing forms of cooperation between the public administration and NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic (TEM 2021).

The public authorities also received feedback from migrant associations on, for instance, the topics on which the community required more information (Helsinki, Espoo) and the information channels best suited to reaching members of the community (Helsinki, Espoo, THL). Moreover, they received feedback on the linguistic quality of the materials translated for the communities (THL, The Finnish Red Cross), which were proofread and edited by migrant associations and community members. For example, the Finnish Red Cross compiled a list of people from migrant associations able to proofread translations into specific languages and, when the need arose, asked them to check the translations procured from a translation agency. Some of the interviewees confirmed that feedback on translated materials was received primarily from migrant associations rather than individual members of the migrant communities.

The practice of proofreading and editing translations was also raised in both interviews with representatives of the migrant associations:

(3) ⁶ [T]ranslations have not been very accurate; there have been quality problems, and there still are big quality problems, because most of the people who translate are not professional translators, just ordinary people who translate, who are maybe working for a translation agency [...] It's still the same, that is, the quality varies from zero to a hundred, and that's how the quality came out too, and we have already pointed this out many times, that translations have gone completely wrong, and then they have been revised and new translations have been produced. (Finland-Somalians Association, May 2022)

(4) THL [the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare] wanted to cooperate with us [...] we could improve the quality of the translations of their materials, because the translations were awful. I don't know where they purchased them. I mean, they told us they had a contract with some agency that produced translations. [...] And the quality of the translations was awful. Sometimes, for example, translations of video materials were so bad we had to rewrite them completely [...] Apparently, they [THL] had a Russian-speaking employee, and we managed to convince her that if [...] the translations were so bad, people would simply not trust this source of information. (Association of Russian-speakers in Finland, February 2022)

The interviewees expressed concern over the inadequate quality of the translation and its potential effects within the migrant community. From the latter interview, it became clear that the association's proofreading activity was extensive and apparently performed as part of a project on the provision of information financed by the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA). In both excerpts, the interviewees blamed the quality issues on the actors producing the translations, namely the translation agencies from which the authorities had procured them (see also Kuusi et al. 2024: 80–81). This raises concerns about the authorities' procurement practices

⁶ In the examples, ellipsis points enclosed in square brackets signify the omission of superfluous words from the quotation.

and the quality assurance of translations into migrant languages – an issue that cooperation was partially attempting to resolve.

In the municipalities, proofreading was partly performed by city employees representing the linguistic communities in question. This practice is discussed in the following excerpt (see also Kuusi et al. 2024: 78).

(5) [W]e've had many instances along the way when we have procured translations from our contracted translation agency and then the quality has not been such that we could have used them directly; we've had to rely on our own multilingual staff to check these translations [...] Luckily, we have those [employees] who know the language and know the target group and say well this doesn't really work here or these concepts will not be understood or something. So sometimes I really feel quite helpless here because I can't possibly know about many of these languages to be able to assess the quality of translation. (City of Espoo, Spring 2021)

The feeling of helplessness experienced by the interviewee reflects the authorities' dependence on the representatives of migrant communities, whether employed by the city or representing a migrant association. However, two interviewees from the City of Helsinki questioned the practice of checking and proofreading translations using native speakers of migrant languages who are not language or translation professionals (for a discussion, see Kuusi et al. 2024: 84–85). One observed that languages like Arabic contain much variation and that critical comments by a native speaker could simply mean that the language did not represent the variety spoken in their home region, which raises the issue of whom to trust: the translation agency that produced the translation or the person commenting on it (*ibid.*).

In addition to improving materials procured by the authorities, cooperation also resulted in the co-production of informative materials for the target communities. For example, the Finnish Red Cross and the Finland-Somalia Association jointly produced a video with an expert panel discussion on COVID-19, which was shown on satellite channels and received over 300,000 views.

Migrant associations also organised events and meetings to deliver information related to COVID-19 and discuss it with migrant communities, often jointly with the authorities. Cooperation with the communities also helped prepare the ground for events organised by the authorities. Indeed, an incident reported by a representative of one of the cities indicated that such preparations could be crucial to the events' success. When the city had situated a mobile COVID-19 testing facility near a mosque without first discussing the measure with community representatives, no members of the community visited it. When events were organised, it proved important that the person presenting information was a representative of the migrant community in question. In an interview with

a representative of a migrant association, the interviewee discussed events they had organised for speakers of Russian, which included a doctor presenting and discussing information related to COVID-19. The interviewee remarked that events with a Russian-speaking doctor were received well, whereas interpreter-mediated events with a Finnish-speaking doctor were not. A similar episode was reported in an interview with the Finnish Red Cross: informative videos with a nurse speaking in the language of the community were well received (see Määttä et al. 2024: 577). Clearly, trust and fluent communication were an issue in these instances (see also Brekke 2021; Felberg 2021: 107–108), and the involvement of representatives from the migrant communities helped the public authorities disseminate their message.

4.2 Challenges and Potential Risks Encountered in Cooperation

In addition to the undisputable benefits of cooperation, the analysis also revealed challenges and risks, including high staff turnover, which hampered efforts to build and maintain relationships with migrant communities, the fear of social risk experienced by migrants cooperating with the authorities, lack of cooperation between migrant communities, the representativeness of migrant associations, and funding. Most of these issues were raised by representatives of the public authorities, with the exception of funding, which was also discussed by a representative of a migrant association.

Even though the public authorities emphasised the importance of maintaining contacts with migrant communities for future cooperation, they also observed that, in practice, their efforts were frustrated by high staff turnover. This issue was discussed in interviews with the cities and the Finnish Red Cross. Regular roundtable meetings (see section 4.1) helped solve this problem to some extent, but the value of personal contacts was still clearly acknowledged in the data.

The data contained a few instances where the interviewees discussed the drawbacks of cooperation for migrant participants. In interviews with the Finnish Red Cross and the City of Helsinki, the interviewees discussed problems related to pronounced vaccine scepticism. The interviewee from the Finnish Red Cross reported that after producing informative videos and organising events in cooperation with an association from the Estonian linguistic community, the association had received many negative and inappropriate comments on social media – in the interviewee’s opinion, many more than was usual after similar events.

Similarly, an interviewee from the City of Helsinki discussed an information campaign the city had ordered from an Estonian-speaking radio station, highlighting that the station had received an influx of hate mail due to the campaign. She also referred to an

instance where vaccine hesitancy impacted migrants' willingness to cooperate with the authorities: the city had attempted to recruit participants for a vaccine-related information campaign but was unable to find willing volunteers. The interviewee assumed that this was because of a fear of negative social consequences in the linguistic community.

(6) I didn't get any willingness to participate, because no one was ready, there were no resources and no willingness to receive the hatred . . . mud-slinging. They already knew that there would be so much mud-slinging that it came to nothing because of that. It's good that the Estonian language radio station agreed to take it, because I was already thinking that they wouldn't. (City of Helsinki, April 2022)

It seems that potential participants were not always willing to speak publicly on behalf of the authorities, anticipating unwanted social consequences (on vaccine scepticism in Estonia, see Escudero & Maadla 2023). This aligns with the reluctance to bridge the gap between the community and the public authorities reported by Brekke (2021).

Some interviewees also reported disagreement and a lack of cooperation between migrant associations. Interviewees from the City of Helsinki and the Finnish Red Cross remarked that migrant associations representing the same linguistic community did not necessarily cooperate with each other, and an interviewee from the City of Vantaa identified dissent and mutual accusations between Russian-speaking migrant associations as one of the challenges they encountered. This confirms the understanding of migrant communities as heterogeneous, but it also raises questions about the representativeness of migrant associations (for a similar discussion, see Backholm & Nordberg 2023: 339; Meylaerts et al. 2024: 16–17). The issue of representativeness was not explicitly discussed by the participants, but we observed a discrepancy in the accounts presented in two of the interviews: both the Association of Russian-speakers in Finland and the Russian news service of the National Broadcasting Company identified themselves as the most important information channel for speakers of Russian living in Finland.

Some migrant communities lacked associations to represent them, and this was considered a problem for the authorities. For instance, an interviewee from the City of Vantaa identified the lack of active associations for one language group as a challenge that hampered the authorities' efforts to reach the target group. The reason for the absence of such associations might lie in the internal dynamics of the community. Migrant communities differ in many ways, partly due to variations in their background, such as education and political opinions, integration, reasons for migrating, and time of arrival (Fauser 2024: 367; Fought 2011). Some migrant groups consist of both permanent residents and temporary labour; consequently, they might not experience a particular sense of belonging to a community despite sharing a common language.

As observed above, these issues did not arise in the two interviews with migrant associations. Possibly, these interviewees did not want to raise issues that might seem to devalue their contribution. The challenge raised by them was funding. For instance, one remarked that even though the public authorities seemed to understand their value, the future of their funding remained unclear. Securing funding for migrant associations was also considered in the interviews with the public authorities. The interviewee from the Finnish Red Cross expressed particular concern over the continuity of funding for small migrant associations, which, in their view, enjoyed the most grassroots contacts with migrants. When discussing the value of migrant associations for municipal communication, the representative of the City of Vantaa, highlighted the importance of the funding provided by the STEA. According to the interviewee, this both motivated associations to adopt a professional working approach and reduced their dependence on municipal funding.

While some of the cooperation reported in our data was based on the voluntary work of migrants (such as migrants volunteering on the city's multilingual helpline during the first wave of the pandemic), some (such as the extensive work performed by migrant associations checking and editing the translations procured by the authorities) was enabled by the funding received from STEA. Thus, the future benefits of cooperation for the public authorities are to some extent dependent on the continuity of funding. In the long run, migrant associations' uncertainty about funding may also endanger the maintenance and development of long-term partnerships with the public authorities.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

The present article analysed accounts of communicating information on COVID-19 to speakers of non-national languages in Finland, focusing on cooperation between the public authorities and migrant communities. More specifically, it aimed to identify the perceived importance, benefits, challenges and potential risks of such cooperation.

In general, cooperation was regarded as important by representatives of the public authorities and migrant associations alike. Regular meetings with representatives of migrant communities proved effective, leading to more concrete forms of cooperation. For example, representatives of migrant communities provided the public authorities with knowledge about the communities' information needs and their preferred channels of communication. Representatives of migrant associations also checked and edited translations procured by the authorities. As reported by one of these representatives, this activity was extensive, and the initial quality of the translations was found to be inade-

quate. This indicates the need to develop the authorities' procurement practices regarding translations (see also Kuusi et al. 2024: 81). Hopefully, cooperation helped the authorities identify shortcomings in their translation procurement practices, which could be considered an additional benefit, as it might prompt them to develop these practices for future crises. On the whole, the benefits of cooperation were indisputable, and the findings align with previous research on multilingual COVID-19 communication, health communication and public service translation that emphasises the importance of involving members of migrant communities in communication.

In previous research on multilingual COVID-19 communication, trust has been specifically identified as a key issue (e.g. Pym et al. 2022; Backholm & Nordberg 2023). This was evident in our data as well. It seemed easier for members of migrant communities to trust information when the person communicating it – a doctor or a nurse, for example – represented their linguistic community. However, the interviewees also reported challenges in finding migrant participants to cooperate with, especially in vaccination campaigns. Potential partners likely anticipated the social risks associated with speaking publicly on behalf of the authorities. This reticence should be given careful consideration if the authorities are to build sustainable cooperation with migrant communities in the future.

Another cooperation-related concern raised by the interviewees was the continuity of funding for the migrant associations. Many migrant associations cooperating in COVID-19 communication received financing from the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations. This project-based funding helped them navigate the pandemic, but it does not provide a solid foundation for future cooperation. Reliance on temporary and ad hoc solutions – also reported by Felberg (2021: 105) in COVID-19 communication in Norway – when organising crisis communication in non-national languages is unlikely to strengthen the authorities' understanding of the migrant communities or promote sustainable cooperation with them. A more permanent solution – also in terms of funding – would support enduring cooperation with migrant associations and reduce dependence on the availability of volunteers (see also Brekke 2021: 658).

Another open question, suggested by reported disagreements and poor cooperation between migrant associations, is the extent to which migrant associations actually represent their linguistic communities. The assessment of the effectiveness of outreach initiatives is often based on feedback from migrant associations, and employees of the public authorities might lack the time or resources to verify this information from other sources. This may result in migrant associations and other key persons in the migrant communities acting as information gatekeepers (see e.g. Pöllabauer 2012), regulating the community's access to and/or exclusion from information.

On the one hand, when communicating information to migrant populations, it seems vital for the public authorities to cooperate with mediators from target communities. On the other, the authorities should strive to develop long-term strategies instead of ad hoc solutions to ensure that knowledge and understanding regarding the target audience accumulates in the organisation and that contacts with migrant communities are established and maintained in non-crisis settings. Moreover, efforts should be made to ensure that translations are both linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target communities and that the authorities' procurement practices support this goal. Additionally, the potential social risks of cooperation for migrant participants should be addressed and thorough consideration given to issues of responsibility and accountability in sharing tasks with migrant associations and communities. Failure to resolve these issues might undermine trust, which is the very foundation upon which cooperation is built.

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