

# **Socioeconomic Differences and Perceived Discrimination amongst Linguistic Groups in Europe (2018)**

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## **Introduction**

The study of minorities in social sciences has a long tradition. While in the US the historical focus has been on the concept of race and, more recently, on the concept of origin (e.g. Humes et al., 2011), most studies in Europe focused so far on migrants (e.g. van Mol & de Valk, 2016). So far, very few studies have put emphasis on the concept of linguistic minorities (Sandovici & Listhaug, 2010).

It has been long known that migrants tend to have a lower socioeconomic status relative to the non-migrant population in the countries of destination (Solé-Auró & Crimmins, 2008); the same argument can be stated for racial and ethnic minorities who have historically been socially excluded (Wright, 1978; Janevic et al., 2012). Both migrant and ethnic minorities, and especially the socioeconomically disadvantaged segments of these groups, experience discrimination more often than the majority population (Zick et al., 2008; André & Dronkers, 2017). However, and to our knowledge, there is no knowledge available on the socioeconomic status of and perceived discrimination amongst minority linguistic groups.

The objective this study is thus to analyse socioeconomic differences between minority and majority linguistic groups, as well as perceived discrimination amongst them across Europe. We distinguish between those groups speaking an official language, those speaking a regional or a historic minority language, and those speaking a foreign language.

## **Theoretical background**

Berry (1997) proposed fourth possible acculturation strategies for migrants based on the interaction of two factors: the maintenance of own culture, and interaction with the non-migrant majority group. We believe a similar model can be applied to linguistic minorities, given that language is often considered as a key component of culture and identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). In our study however, we consider only one dimension, namely cultural maintenance in terms of language. Linguistic groups in Europe, whether they are a result of relatively recent migratory processes or have existed in a given country for centuries, may have adopted one of two possible acculturation strategies with regard to the majority language over time: they may have preserved their linguistic differences (linguistic minorities), or they may have adopted an official language and thus dilute into the majority population. We can thus expect that linguistic minorities (historic or recent) may have lower socioeconomic status and perceive discrimination more often than the majority population.

Castles & Miller (2008) propose different strategies of migrants with respect to the possible creation of distinct communities. While some of them may dissolve into the majority population, others tend to cluster in specific areas and to maintain their language and culture. The latter group, depending on their access to a series of social and political rights, might form either ethnic communities (those who enjoy rights) or ethnic minorities (those who are excluded from rights). As in the previous case, this theoretical model can also be applied to study the current situation of linguistic groups in Europe. We can thus expect that social and political rights might explain differences found in socioeconomic position between linguistic groups across Europe.

### **Data and methods**

Data derive from the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 9 (ESS, 2018). The ESS is a cross-sectional survey on various social indicators, public attitudes and values in different European countries. The ESS Round 9 includes information on 49,519 respondents aged 15 and over residing in 29 European countries (ESS, 2021).

As variables of interest, we focus on self-reported perceived discrimination, and a variety of socio-economic indicators on education (years of education), employment (ever being unemployed), and income (feeling about current household income).

We classified respondents according to the language they speak at home. The ESS allows each respondent to include up to two languages most often spoken at home. We classified each of these languages per country in three categories: official, minority, and foreign. We classified as official languages those languages considered as official in the respective country. We classified as minority languages those languages belonging to historic minorities in the respective country; these include co-official and regional languages, as well as languages belonging to traditional ethnic or cultural minorities legally recognised. We classified any remaining languages in each of the respective countries as foreign. We then proceeded to assign each respondent as a member of a given linguistic group: official, minority, or foreign. We classified respondents reporting speaking at least a minority language or a foreign language as belonging to a minority or foreign linguistic group, respectively. We created an additional variable indicating whether the respondent reported speaking at least an official language, given that some respondents assigned to a minority or foreign linguistic group also reported speaking an official language at home. There were 46 respondents who reported speaking both a minority and a foreign language; in those cases, we classified the respondents based on their first choice of language.

We show some descriptive statistics on the composition and characteristics of the different linguistic groups. We plan to conduct logistic regression models to better assess the differences in socioeconomic status and perceived discrimination of the different linguistic groups across Europe. We will include the following control variables: speaking at least an official language at home, citizenship, migratory background, and belonging to an ethnic minority.

## Preliminary results

The majority of respondents were citizens of their country of residence (Table1). However, this proportion varied from 98.6% amongst those speaking an official language at home, and 71.3% amongst those speaking a foreign language at home. The proportion of respondents being born abroad was very small amongst those who spoke an official language (4.8%), but reached almost half of the respondents who spoke a foreign language. Finally, reporting belonging to an ethnic minority tended to be rare, but the proportion varied from 3% amongst those speaking an official language to 31.6% amongst those who spoke a minority language.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics on being a citizen of the country of residence, being born abroad of current country of residence, and self-reporting belonging to an ethnic minority according to linguistic group (2018)**

	Official		Minority		Foreign	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Citizenship						
Yes	41,075	98.56	2,772	87.01	3,162	71.25
No	601	1.44	414	12.99	1,276	28.75
Born abroad						
Yes	1,989	4.77	647	20.28	2,107	47.39
No	39,684	95.23	2,543	79.72	2,339	52.61
Self-reported minority						
Yes	1,223	2.95	993	31.61	812	18.73
No	40,288	97.05	2,148	68.39	3,523	81.27

Data source: ESS(2018).

As shown in Table2, perceived discrimination was more prevalent amongst respondents who spoke a minority (14.1%) or foreign (15.7%) language as compared to those who spoke an official language (6.1%). Differences in socioeconomic status followed however a different pattern. Respondents speaking a foreign language at home had similar feelings about current household income and reported on average a slightly higher duration of their studies (13.9 years) compared to those speaking an official language. In contrast, respondents speaking a minority language experienced difficulties with their income more often, reported a lower number of years of education on average (11.8 years), and were more likely to have ever been unemployed (39%).

## Conclusion

The preliminary results show that our classification based on language/s spoken at home does not correspond with migratory background nor ethnicity, and thus provides new insights on the composition and characteristics of European societies. Both speakers of minority and foreign languages were more likely to report perceived discrimination as compared to speakers of an official language. In contrast, the socioeconomic profile of speakers of a foreign language tended to be rather similar to that of speakers of an official language, while speakers of a minority language tended to perform worse on the socioeconomic domains analysed.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics on self-reported discrimination, average number of years in education, ever being unemployed, and reported feeling about current household income according to linguistic group (2018)**

	Official		Minority		Foreign	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self-reported discrimination						
Yes	2,530	6.11	445	14.14	686	15.68
No	38,847	93.89	2,703	85.86	3,689	84.32
Years in education						
Average number	12.95		11.83		13.89	
Ever unemployed						
Yes	11,336	27.35	1,236	39.04	1,564	35.30
No	30,106	72.65	1,930	60.96	2,866	64.70
Feeling about household income						
Living comfortably	13,585	33.05	519	16.49	1,533	35.00
Coping	18,810	45.76	1,439	45.71	1,906	43.52
Difficulties	6,423	15.63	778	24.71	734	16.76
Struggle	2,287	5.56	412	13.09	207	4.73

Data source: ESS(2018).

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