

Supporting Migrants through Multilingual Communication: Insights from NGOs

La comunicación multilingüe con personas migrantes: experiencias desde las ONG

Abstract

Language and cultural barriers, along with other factors, prevent many migrants arriving in Spain from accessing the crucial information they need to navigate their new environments. This issue is particularly pronounced in Ceuta, a Spanish enclave on the African shore, which serves as a major transit point for migrants, especially from West African countries like Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and Guinea. These migrants face unique challenges, including the inability to continue their journeys while awaiting decisions from public authorities, which places them in prolonged periods of uncertainty and vulnerability. In this context, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in supporting migrants by providing essential services. However, NGOs must overcome significant linguistic, cultural, and educational barriers to effectively deliver services and information to such diverse populations. This study investigates the information needs of migrants in Ceuta through semi-structured interviews conducted with NGO staff and volunteers. These interviews explored how NGOs manage multilingual and multicultural communication and whether the information provided is appropriately adapted to the specific linguistic and cultural needs of the migrant groups they serve. The qualitative analysis highlights the critical role of translation, interpretation, and intercultural mediation in overcoming communication gaps. Findings reveal that NGOs often struggle to address these barriers due to limited access to professional translation services and often rely on ad-hoc methods or volunteers. The lack of systematic support for translation exacerbates the difficulty of ensuring migrants' access to crucial information regarding healthcare, legal services, and social resources. Additionally, cultural differences, digital literacy gaps, and varying education levels further complicate communication. Migrants from rural areas, for instance, may only speak local languages, requiring additional adaptation of materials and methods. Overall, the study underscores the urgent need for improved professional translation and intercultural mediation resources to reduce migrants' informational vulnerability and support their successful integration in Ceuta.

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Keywords:

Translation; non-governmental organization (NGO); migrant; intercultural mediation; interpreting; health communication; Ceuta; Spain.

Resumen

Las barreras lingüísticas y culturales, junto con otros factores, impiden que muchas personas migrantes que llegan a España accedan a la información que necesitan para adaptarse a sus nuevos entornos. Este problema se vuelve especialmente evidente en Ceuta, un enclave español en la costa africana que sirve como un importante punto de tránsito para las personas migrantes, especialmente de países de África Occidental como Costa de Marfil, Camerún y Guinea. Estas personas enfrentan desafíos únicos, como la imposibilidad de continuar su trayecto a la espera del permiso de las autoridades públicas, lo que les obliga a esperar largos periodos llenos de incertidumbre y vulnerabilidad. En este contexto, las organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG) desempeñan un papel vital en el apoyo a las personas migrantes, brindando servicios esenciales. Sin embargo, las ONG deben superar importantes barreras lingüísticas, culturales y educativas para proporcionar de manera eficaz servicios e información a poblaciones tan diversas. Este estudio investiga las necesidades de información de las personas migrantes en Ceuta a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas realizadas con personal y voluntarios de las ONG de esta ciudad. Estas entrevistas exploraron cómo las ONG gestionan la comunicación multilingüe y multicultural, y si la información que brindan está adecuadamente adaptada a las necesidades lingüísticas y culturales de los grupos migrantes a las que atienden. El análisis cualitativo resalta el papel crítico de la traducción, la interpretación y la mediación intercultural para superar las brechas comunicativas. Los resultados revelan que las ONG a menudo tienen dificultades para abordar estas barreras debido al acceso limitado a servicios profesionales de traducción, y con frecuencia dependen de métodos improvisados o de voluntarios. La falta de apoyo sistemático para la traducción agrava la dificultad de garantizar el acceso de las personas migrantes a información esencial sobre atención médica, servicios legales y recursos sociales. Además, las diferencias culturales, la brecha digital y las diferencias en cuanto a niveles educativos complican aún más la comunicación. Algunas personas migrantes de áreas rurales, por ejemplo, solo se comunican en lenguas locales, lo que requiere una mayor adaptación de los materiales y métodos. En general, el estudio subraya la urgente necesidad de mejorar los recursos profesionales de traducción y mediación intercultural para reducir la vulnerabilidad informativa de las personas migrantes y apoyar su integración en Ceuta.

Palabras clave:

traducción; organización no gubernamental (ONG); migrante; mediación intercultural; interpretación; comunicación en salud; Ceuta; España.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of migration, like any other social event, inevitably has repercussions on society as a whole (Achotegui, 2009), both on migrants and on the host population. Migrants often move to countries whose language they do not know. Consequently, there is a restructuring between what they leave behind and their new life in the host country (Carretero, 2014). Thus, migrants face numerous barriers outside their country of origin such as language and cultural differences, among others (Serre-Delcor, 2021), which prevent them from accessing information.

The arrival of migrant communities in Spain, with their linguistic and cultural diversity, has led to the emergence of new communication needs (Marnpae, 2014), since this plurality can lead to inequalities in access to information and, therefore, to situations of vulnerability.

In this context, translation, as a discipline, and translational activities, in general, become a key tool for the quality of care and inclusion of these individuals (Gil-Salmerón *et al.*, 2021; Jiménez-Castro *et al.*, 2022). These activities play a fundamental role in ensuring that migrants who do not speak the language of their country of destination do not find themselves in situations of misinformation and, therefore, greater vulnerability (Álvaro-Aranda, 2020). Therefore, it is legitimate to question to what extent translation can contribute to strengthening the rights, image or identities of disadvantaged groups (Santaemilia, 2017), as it has traditionally been a tool that has built bridges between peoples and cultures. In this way, the text and the person who translates acquire a growing relevance in an increasingly pluralistic activity that can reduce the distances between languages, cultures and identities (Santaemilia, 2017).

The city of Ceuta (Spain) located on the African shore of the Strait of Gibraltar, is a place of transit for a large migrant population. This area constitutes one of the main gateways to Europe through which people from different origins enter every year, especially west African countries such as Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Guinea Conakry, or Mali, among others. According to recent reports, in 2024, 63,970 people arrived in Spain through irregular channels (Ministerio de Inclusión, 2022), with a significant number coming from West Africa, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa (Caminando Fronteras, 2025; FRONTEX, 2025). Migrants who have irregularly accessed the city are mostly in a situation of blockage, as they cannot continue their journey until the Public Administration decides on their future (Vieyra-Calderoni, 2019). This situation generates constant uncertainty as to when they will be able to continue their migratory journey, while they are unable to access training or work. Consequently, their inclusion and participation in society on equal terms is hindered, as they are relegated to a dynamic of exclusion and vulnerability. Additionally, these official statistics do not fully capture Spain's migration reality, as individuals with irregular administrative status are not included.

This situation generates constant uncertainty as to when they will be able to continue their migratory journey, while they are unable to access training or work. In this way, their inclusion and participation in society on equal terms is hindered, as they are relegated to a situation of exclusion and vulnerability. Thus, NGOs and associations play a fundamental role in the reception and attention of migrants. Therefore, the staff and volunteers of these associations are faced with the challenge of overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers as well as adapting to changes in migratory flows.

There are numerous works focused on the translation and cultural adaptation of informational materials aimed at migrant communities that include migrants throughout the research process, either through focus groups prior to the translation process or after an initial translation phase (Brandon *et al.*, 2018; Byrne *et al.*, 2021; Corvin *et al.*, 2017; Gonçalves *et al.*, 2019; Ko *et al.*, 2014; Liu *et al.*, 2021; Medina-Ramírez *et al.*, 2019; Rodríguez *et al.*, 2017; Simmons *et al.*, 2011a; Simmons *et al.*, 2011b; Solomon *et al.*, 2005). This allows researchers to have “valuable insights into the culture, values, level of health literacy, socioeconomic status, mother tongue, and any other context-specific considerations of this community” (Jiménez-Castro *et al.*, 2022). However, these studies focus especially on the U.S. context, so migrants' profile and, therefore, the multicultural and multilingual situation are far from the one which is the focus of this study.

The general objective of this research is to identify the main information needs of migrants arriving at the city of Ceuta, as well as the professional practices of NGOs' workers and volunteers when dealing with multilingual and multicultural contexts. To meet this objective, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff and volunteers linked to different NGOs and associations working with migrants from West Africa and North Africa. The questions were aimed at collecting data on the information provided to migrants participating in associations, on the use of information materials and on the existence of translated (and, where appropriate, culturally adapted) versions of these materials.

In the context we present, insights from members of NGOs working with migrants are enormously valuable in the process of methodological design of research focused on these communities. Not only do their insights provide first-hand information about the situation of these people, but they also help design methodologies of analysis adapted to the characteristics of this population. In our opinion conducting interviews with NGOs working with these communities can be a very valuable tool and an effective way to mitigate power gaps between researchers and potential participants in later phases of similar studies as the one presented here. Thus, we start from the hypothesis that the mediation of NGOs in the design of empirical research in these situations benefits the collaboration and involvement of participants.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this work is to analyze and assess the situation of migrants arriving in Ceuta in relation their information needs and the barriers they face in accessing it. Specifically, this work will focus on the information provided by associations and NGOs in the field. This general objective is divided into two specific objectives (SO):

SOi) to determine how the associations' staff members and volunteers manage multilingual and intercultural communication with different groups of people.

SOii) to study the extent to which information materials provided by the associations are translated into different languages and whether adaptations are made to take into account factors such as cultural differences.

To this end, a series of semi-structured interviews were carried out with different NGOs and associations that work with migrants, including staff members and volunteers, in order to find out the main information needs of migrants in the city of Ceuta, as well as the translation and adaptation practices that they carry out in their activities and workshops. The purpose of these interviews was to determine which are the main topics addressed in the activities, workshops and trainings carried out by the associations. In addition, it has been possible to identify the extent to which informative materials are used, whether they are translated and whether adaptations are made to consider factors such as culture or literacy level of the target audience.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative approach aimed at analyzing and assessing the situation of migrants arriving in Ceuta with respect to their information needs and the barriers they face, in



alignment with the study's objectives. Specifically, the research seeks to explore how NGOs and associations manage multilingual and intercultural communication, as well as the extent to which their informational materials are translated and culturally adapted.

3.1. Interviews design

To meet these objectives, a total of 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted from September 19 until September 23, 2022. Staff and volunteers were asked about their experiences in the association to which they belong, the information provided to the migrants they work with and the existence of translated (and, where appropriate, culturally adapted) versions of the informational materials they use. After signing an informed consent, these interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Microsoft Office 365 software transcription tool. The transcriptions were then manually reviewed and analyzed by the researchers using the latest version of NVivo software (Release 1.7, 2022).

Prior to conducting the interviews, a script of 17 questions was prepared. Rather than serving as a closed questionnaire, this list of questions was used as a guide to structure the conversations with the interviewees in order to address certain topics. It was thus a flexible script, as some of these questions were sometimes excluded and, at other times, additional questions arose. This script was structured in the two sections shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Content of the sections

Section	Description	E.g.
Section 1	Questions related to the work carried out by the association to which the interviewee belongs and his/her role. It also includes questions about the profile of the people who come to the association. The purpose of this section is to start the conversation with a familiar topic, in order to get the interviewee used to explaining in detail the information he/she knows (Whiting, 2008).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does the work of the association consist of? - What activities are normally carried out? - What is the profile of the people involved in the association? How would you describe them?
Section 2	Questions focused on the information needs of migrants arriving in Ceuta, as well as on the different activities and workshops offered by the associations, the most frequently addressed topics and the information materials used. It also includes questions related to how linguistic and cultural differences are managed in these workshops, i.e., whether translation and adaptation practices were carried out according to the target audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What difficulties/barriers do migrants face in accessing the information they need? - Are they in a disadvantaged or vulnerable situation with respect to other citizens due to these barriers? - Are migrants involved in the association provided with any information materials?

Source: Own elaboration

The purpose of these questions is not only to gather information on translation practices, but also to obtain an overview of the ethical, linguistic and cultural challenges faced in working with migrants, in order to identify information needs, vulnerabilities, good practices and gaps in the implementation

of translational strategies. Therefore, the results provide an overview of the information needs of migrants arriving in the city of Ceuta, as well as the barriers they face in accessing information. In addition, they also detail how associations detect these difficulties and vulnerabilities and how they adapt to them through translation and intercultural mediation strategies.

3.2. Participants

In order to select participants, we contacted those associations in Ceuta that work with migrants and refugees, especially those with a greater presence of people from West Africa. Thus, a total of 8 participants agreed to be interviewed. For ethical reasons and to preserve the anonymity of the organizations and participants involved, the names of the associations will not be disclosed.

The interviews were conducted in person between September 19 and 23, 2022. All participants belonged to associations that either dedicate their entire work to the attention of migrants and refugees or have specific programs in this field. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to guarantee anonymity and signed an informed consent form beforehand. Table 2 shows the attributes that define each participant.

Table 2. Participants information

Name	Sex	Education	Time in the NGO	Role in the NGO	Languages
Dignity	Male	Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education, Superior Technician in Promotion of Gender Equality	1-5 years	Social integrator	Spanish, English, French, Dariya, Bambara, Pulaar, Lingala, Wolof
Peace	Female	Bachelor's Degree in Social Work, Master's Degree in Psychology	1- 5 years	Awareness raising technician	Spanish, English
Solidarity	Female	Bachelor's Degree in Social Integration		Intercultural mediator	Spanish, French
Respect	Female	Bachelor's Degree in Social Education	- 1 year	Social mediator	Spanish, Dariya, English
Justice	Male	Bachelor's Degree in Medicine	1-5 years	Volunteer	Spanish, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Ewondo, Oromifa, Wholof, Creole, Russian, Hindi, Creole-Haitian
Empathy	Female	Bachelor's Degree in Social Work	+10 years	Coordinator and volunteer	Spanish, English, French
Freedom	Male	Bachelor's Degree in Journalism	+ 10 years	Shelter manager	Spanish, English, French
Kindness	Female	Bachelor's Degree in Anthropology, Master's Degree in International Cooperation	- 1 year	Social educator	Spanish, English, French

Source: own elaboration

As can be seen in Table 2, five women and three men of a wide age range, between 26 and 74 years old, were interviewed. All the participants reported speaking at least one language in addition to Spanish at least a basic-intermediate level. However, it should be noted that two of the people interviewed stand out for their knowledge of several African languages. This is especially relevant in the migratory context of Ceuta, as there is an enormous ethnic and linguistic variety among people from the African continent (Blommaert, 2007).

3.3. Use of the NVivo software tool

Once the interviews were transcribed with the corresponding pseudonyms for the interviewees, they were imported into the qualitative analysis software NVivo. These documents were categorized by speaker's name in order to distinguish between the interviewees and the interviewer and to exclude the latter from the analysis. Based on the content of the interviews, key concepts used by the participants were identified in order to carry out an initial coding, i.e., an emergent categorization was carried out (Trigueros-Cervantes et al., 2018). For this, an inductive approach was followed (Mejía-Navarrete, 2011), since the categories that were being created emerged from the language used by the participants themselves. From the central categories, subcategories were also created, so the result was an axial categorization (Strauss & Corbin, 2002) that can be seen in Figure 1.

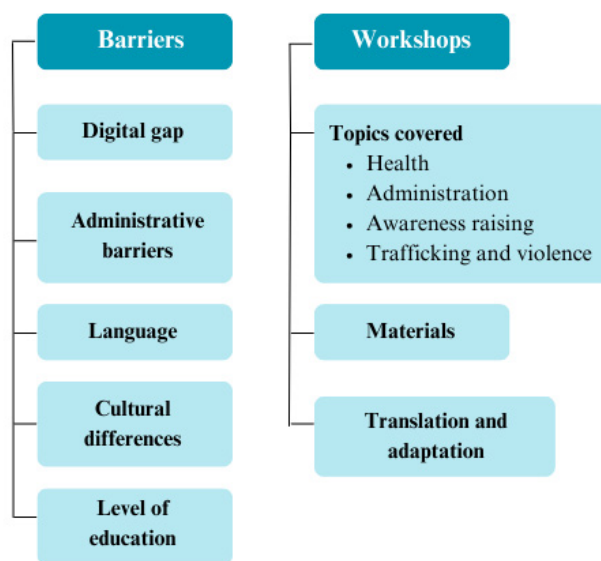


Figure 1. Category tree. Source: own elaboration

To ensure ethical compliance, all participants signed an informed consent form, in which they were informed about the purpose of the research and assured that their participation was voluntary and confidential. The consent form explicitly stated that all personal data would be handled according to Spain's Data Protection Law and that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The confidentiality of their information, as well as the anonymity of the associations involved, was guaranteed.

4. ANALYSIS

Starting from the axial categorization that was manually elaborated, we proceeded to the content analysis by integrating the substantive theories with the formal theories (Trigueros-Cervantes *et al.*, 2018). In a preliminary study (Jiménez-Castro; Gutiérrez-Artacho, 2023), an initial analysis was carried out that provided an overview of the work carried out by the associations interviewed and the profile of the participants.

This section explores the analysis of the interviews through the categories “barriers” and “workshops” and their corresponding subcategories, focusing fully on the factors that limit communication and access to information for migrants and the strategies of the associations in terms of multilingual, multicultural and vulnerability management.

4.1. Barriers

Migrants face numerous barriers in communication and access to information in those countries where they arrive (Serre-Delcor, 2021). This situation also occurs in the city of Ceuta, both within and outside the scope of associations. This section analyzes the different barriers to communication faced by migrants within associations. In the analysis of the interviews, five main barriers were detected: digital gap, administrative barriers, language, cultural differences and educational level.

4.1.1. Digital gap

The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is increasingly common in all contexts, including access to health information (Marnpae, 2014; Gonçalves *et al.*, 2019; Liu *et al.*, 2021). However, people of migrant origin in Spain on numerous occasions cannot equitably access these technological means (Zabala, 2020), so a gap arises. In the case of migrants in the city of Ceuta, the digital gap particularly affects those migrants who have settled with a regular administrative situation and who have difficulties when carrying out administrative procedures. The complexity of the administrative language coupled with the lack of resources and digital skills makes it even more difficult for these people to access the information they need. This is why Peace is the main person who deals with this issue in the interviews, since she belongs to one of the two associations with support services for migrants who have a “NIE” (Foreigner Identification Number, for its initials in Spanish), which is a personal identification number issued to non-Spanish nationals who, for economic, professional, or social reasons, are involved in activities in Spain that require official identification. In her own words:

If for me it already is an odyssey, for a person who has to do it on his own mobile, with a poorer Internet connection, it can be much more overwhelming. (Peace)

This trend towards digitization of access to information and administrative processes, as Peace confirms, has been growing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and is compounded by a lack of clarity in the language of these information sources. Therefore, Peace adds:



The problem is that everything is now digitalized and even more so since the COVID-19 pandemic. I can more or less explain to them how it works, but if they visit the web page of, for example, the Tax Office, everything is in a very technical language and doubts arise.... “Which button do I click on? Which section do I click on? I don’t understand this section...”. (Peace)

4.1.2. Administrative barriers

This section gathers insights from two of the people interviewed (Kindness and Peace), since they belong to associations that focus their work on the assistance of people whose administrative situation has been regularized. However, as Kindness points out, the fact that only migrants with regular administrative situations are allowed to engage in their association’s activities excludes people with an irregular administrative status, who cannot take advantage of the courses, activities and workshops offered by their association:

Within my project in Spanish mainland cities like Algeciras our association can work easily because people leave Ceuta and go to the mainland with a regularized administrative situation and with a “NIE”. In Ceuta, the situation is different. So, if the objective of my project is to assist victims of hate crimes and here the victims of hate crimes do not have a “NIE”... Who can you assist? In theory, everyone, in practice, practically no one. (Kindness)

In addition to the administrative status itself, which prevents many vulnerable people from accessing programs from which they could benefit, Peace emphasizes the comprehension difficulties faced by migrants when completing bureaucratic procedures:

Many times we don’t even understand these procedures ourselves. For example, when I have had to help someone with administrative procedures, it’s a real odyssey... (Peace)

In this way, administrative processes become a twofold barrier: a barrier to the services of NGOs that cannot provide services to people in an irregular administrative situation, and a bureaucratic barrier due to the difficulty of these procedures.

4.1.3. Language

Within the associations, carrying out activities with migrants involves challenges in multilingual communication. In this regard, interviewees highlight the difficulties faced by people who speak local languages such as Peul, Wolof or Bambara. Solidarity comments as follows:

There are many young people who speak Peul, and they don’t speak French, because they may come from a village that is not the city of Conakry and the only language they speak is Pulaar, so you need someone else to be next to them to translate for you. (Solidarity)

The use of French in West Africa today shows great variability depending on various factors, such as the country and region, the dominant religion, the gender of the speaker, the existence of an alternative lingua franca, and the interlocutor (Chumbow & Bobda, 2000). Thus, even for speakers of this language, there are certain differences to be taken into account, as corroborated by Freedom:

Your mission is to convey a message. If you send that message encoded, it will never get through, so you have to do everything you can to get the message across properly. The French spoken in sub-Saharan countries is totally different from the French spoken in the metropolis. So, you have to take a lot of detours to make yourself understood so that they can understand what you are trying to transmit. (Freedom)

Solidarity confirms that gender is one of the factors is one of the main factors affecting French language proficiency, as many women are unable to communicate in this language, even if they come from a country where French is an official language:

There are many women who speak French, but there are other women who speak only Pulaar, so working with them is complicated. Added to this is the pressure they suffer from their compatriots who are in the same CETI (Center for Temporary Stay of Immigrants). (Solidarity)

In other contexts where power asymmetries may occur, such as the healthcare context, linguistic concordance, i.e. the ability of both interlocutors to communicate in the same language, has been shown to not only facilitate the exchange of information, but can also improve the degree of interlocutor satisfaction in interactions and increase their sense of understanding (Hsueh et al., 2021). In the context of associations, Dignity corroborates how linguistic concordance broadens the possibilities for interaction and relationship with the migrants with whom he works:

On a personal and work level, knowing a few words of each language opens up an incredible range of possibilities. People feel accepted, they feel understood, they feel valued, for example, when you say “nanga def” to a Senegalese. It’s another way of starting a conversation because it shows that you know their origin and you accept it. (Dignity)

Ultimately, language barriers are an obstacle to the work of associations. Sharing the same language, even at different levels, facilitates communication and thus the creation of interpersonal relationships. However, it should be noted that none of the interviewees claimed to have professional translators or interpreters within their association. Therefore, these language barriers can be overcome to the extent that the associations’ workers and volunteers have knowledge of different languages.

4.1.4. *Cultural differences*

Cultural differences refer to those concepts, beliefs or customs that may differ between people, whether they are workers, volunteers or participants in the associations. This is another of the most frequently mentioned barriers to communication among the people interviewed. This is why, as Peace comments, associations must take into account the cultural background of the people they work with:

It doesn’t work if you impose your perspective. We understand each person’s cultural background and we adapt to it. We adapt to people’s needs. We don’t just try to convey a message; we think about what context our message is in. (Peace)

When it comes to health-related issues, cultural differences require special sensitivity, so health-related activities and health communication in general should be responsive to cultural



values and beliefs (Ashing *et al.*, 2014; Costas *et al.*, 2020). Justice explains the following about the health workshops he gives as a physician and volunteer teacher in his association:

They had a lot of taboos, a lot of magic stories that they believed, that are not true. For example, in terms of sexually transmitted diseases, some people thought that AIDS could be cured with certain things, or that any kind of disease could be cured with traditional medicine, by pouring goat's blood over their head. That varies from country to country, each one has its own kind of natural medicine. Understanding the culture implies knowing what they can and cannot know, what you have to dwell on more or less, what is going to be difficult to explain and what is not. (Justice)

In this regard, as Justice explains, taking into account these cultural differences, such as taboo topics, beliefs and perceptions around conventional and traditional medicine, or their health literacy level (Jiménez-Castro *et al.*, 2022; Solomon *et al.*, 2005; Piñeiro *et al.*, 2018), allows professionals to approach interactions in a conscious way and adapt both workshops and materials to the target audience. Thus, Dignity also explains that detecting each group's background knowledge allows them to delimit the starting point in terms of information, attitudes, and beliefs:

Rather than giving good advice or examples of good practice, it is a matter of explaining the most basic diseases and building on previous knowledge, i.e., measuring the level of knowledge. We do not know the cultural distance that may exist, and a Yemeni is not the same as a Cameroonian or a Guinean. So, the best thing to do is to start by asking "what do you think about...?". We always start with "what do you know about...?" and from there, we try to see what topics can be approached. (Dignity)

Clearly, cultural awareness is one of the key competences in working with migrants, as despite speaking the same language, cultural differences can be a barrier to communication between groups. Again, as with language barriers, the presence of people possessing this intercultural competence depends on the profile of the associations' staff.

4.1.5. Level of education

One of the barriers to communication in these contexts is the level of education, i.e., whether people have had the opportunity to complete different levels of studies. This factor is highly variable between different countries of origin and even within the same country, between different regions. In addition, the long migratory routes that many migrants have to face take up years of their lives in which they have no possibility of accessing any type of education, as Solidarity comments:

For example, people from Yemen are totally different from people from Sudan. I also think it has a lot to do with the studies they have completed, the life they have had. The Yemenis are more educated, whereas the Sudanese at the age of 9 had already left their country, their city, they had already had to migrate from their own country, so they were not literate at all. Therefore, their beliefs might be much more deeply rooted. (Solidarity)

Solidarity adds that this situation is particularly common for women, the opportunities for women to access education in some countries are scarce:

People from Guinea, Cameroon, or Sudan, for example, spend years on the migration route and when they arrive, they have nothing. Some of them don't know how to write because they have worked tending cattle and haven't had a chance to go to school. With women, the difference is huge. A lot of women have gone to school, but when they were very young. And at the age of 10, 11, or 12, they have been taken out of school to get married. Few of them have university studies. (Solidarity)

For this reason, associations must adapt the language they use to ensure that their activities do not exclude any of the participants, as detailed by Empathy:

Their level of understanding must also be taken into account. We should not speak using complex terms, since language is a difficulty. We must always keep in mind that it is better to use a language that can easily reach everyone, that is easy for everyone to understand. Also, when translating what we communicate, we must make sure that we make it possible for everyone to know what we are talking about. (Empathy)

The way in which information is conveyed needs to be adapted to the literacy levels of the target audience, allowing it to be easily understood by audiences with varying levels of education.

4.2. Workshops

Given the great diversity of languages, cultures and levels of education, it is essential to approach activities and workshops from a perspective that is sensitive to these realities and that adapts to them. Three subcategories were created for the analysis of the content of the interviews concerning the workshops that associations carry out: topics covered, materials used, and translation and adaptation strategies.

4.2.1. Topics covered

The topics covered in the workshops are very varied and are adapted to the needs and realities of the people who come to each association at different times. However, there are some recurring topics in these workshops: administration, health, awareness-raising and trafficking and violence.

The subcategory “administration” refers to those trainings aimed at helping migrants learn the bureaucratic procedures necessary to integrate into Spanish society once they have a regular administrative situation. As mentioned in section 4.1.2. Administrative barriers, these trainings are addressed by those entities that work with people with NIE. Peace describes them as follows:

Information for integration into society: how to rent a house, how to apply for government benefits, how to pay the rent, where to apply for a scholarship, where to look for training courses, how to look for a job... Even topics like how to make an appointment at the “Imsero” (Spanish Institute for the Elderly and Social Services). (Peace)

As for “health”, it includes a wide range of trainings related to wellness, healthy living habits, as well as different diseases and risk situations that may be relevant to the contexts of migrants. These may vary depending on the association providing the workshops as well as the people participating. Empathy, for example, highlights the following:



We have had activities focused on health issues, especially workshops on first aid, which is very important to know how to get out of difficult, risky situations. We have also had workshops on sexually transmitted diseases, degenerative diseases and infectious diseases. (Empathy)

Within the “health” theme, six of the people interviewed (Empathy, Justice, Dignity, Respect, Solidarity and Freedom) highlighted the importance of sexual health workshops because it is a topic on which they sometimes find some misinformation among participants. These are topics around which people have taboos and false beliefs that place them in a situation of greater exposure to certain diseases and vulnerability (Rade *et al.*, 2018; Metusela *et al.*, 2017). Justice explains that in her experience in delivering these types of workshops, he finds a large gap in the information that participants know:

What do they have the most questions about? Clearly about sexual health. Questions related to women’s period, for example. Anything related to the opposite sex and especially anything related to sex in general, which is clearly taboo. If in Spain there was no sex education in the 90s, nor in the year 2000, and now there is beginning to be a little freer sex education... then I think that their knowledge can be similar to the sex education that our parents had in the 50s and 60s. (Justice)

Within the “awareness-raising” theme, there are activities aimed at bringing cultures closer together, with special emphasis on the promotion of equal relations. Topics such as gender equality or hate crimes are addressed with the aim of learning about different perspectives on these issues and promoting respect and social integration with different groups. Dignity comments on the approach of the workshops they provide:

People discriminate for different reasons. One reason may be gender, another may be race, or ethnicity, call it what you will. So, I try to say that discrimination is never good. But if we don’t discriminate, let’s not discriminate for any reason. So, we work on the issue of discrimination on that basis. (Dignity)

Finally, when there has been a greater presence of women in some associations, trainings and workshops on the topic of “trafficking and violence” have been organized frequently. Associations agree that migrant women have lived and continue to live in a situation of violence and discrimination that makes it necessary to develop specific work that is able to address their contexts. Solidarity, who runs a project with women in her association, makes the following assessment:

The work with women is much more specific. We specialize in working with women and we look for signs of trafficking. We have to take into account where they come from, their origin, the migratory route they have taken, their destination... With all these factors, they are very likely to be trafficked. (Solidarity)

This is corroborated by the latest reports of the “Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía” (2022), a Spanish association that elaborates annual reports on the state of migration on Spain’s southern border. Its latest reports show that migrant women not only often start out from contexts of physical, psychological, sexual or structural aggression, but that on their arrival in Spain they continue to suffer multiple forms of discrimination (racial, gender) that perpetuate

other forms of violence. Associations' workshops make it possible to address the specific needs of each person, as well as to detect the possible situations of vulnerability in which they find themselves (Jiménez-Castro & Gutiérrez-Artacho, 2023). Again, Solidarity states:

As they get to know us, they participate in the workshops. This is completely voluntary. Little by little they tell us what they need, what they are missing, and through the workshops we detect vulnerabilities and also try to help. [...] In the end, our objectives are the same, but depending on the vulnerabilities that each one has, we focus on one aspect or another. (Solidarity)

In general, topics are chosen according to the information needs of people who come to the association. Thus, although there are recurring topics that tend to be of interest, topics covered should always be flexible and adapted to different profiles.

4.2.2. *Materials*

To carry out these workshops, seven of the people interviewed (all except Freedom) commented that they use different materials and resources. The most commonly used tool is the PowerPoint presentation in which graphic and visual elements abound, with some words that serve as orientation or to reinforce the knowledge being taught, as Dignity says:

When I create materials, because we create most of them, I try to rely a lot on visuals, because it's obvious that it helps you to connect with people a lot. It's much simpler and relying on visuals to reinforce their language skills is always a very useful tool that works very well. (Dignity)

Solidarity agrees that the use of resources with visual elements facilitates the development of activities:

There are many tools available. It is true that when working with them it is much easier to offer them visual resources than not offering them anything at all. Visual resources always attract more attention, people are more focused, so we tend to have some support material in all the activities we have. (Solidarity)

These materials, as Justice explains, are used as a means to promote interaction, to raise questions and open up topics of conversation in order to assess the knowledge of participants:

The PowerPoint I use is made up of photos that I have taken myself or photos that I have taken from the Internet. Just pictures, there were no words at all, and I make each presentation completely interactive throughout. I normally ask questions such as, "What do you think, what would you do, what would you do, what's the point of this, do you think it's possible, are you right, are you right?" to make it more interactive. For each workshop there are usually 20 or 25 photos and it we spend two hours talking about those pictures. And I try not to talk all the time. Rather, I make up situations like: "There's a man lying down... There's a woman like this... Imagine you have a wound...". This way I can make participants think and react. (Justice)

Some of the interviewees, such as Kindness, use other types of resources such as manual activities or gamification, with the aim of adapting the way in which the content is taught to the people it is aimed at:



Within a vulnerable group, there are differences if they are older or younger. With minors, logically, we do not use PowerPoint presentations. We talk and explain the subject a little bit and then we do manual activities, very dynamic exercises, games, workshops... (Kindness)

In general, interviewees agree that the use of different materials facilitates the work of the associations in the development of their training workshops, especially those in which visual elements predominate and promote interaction among participants. These materials should always be adapted to the specific characteristics of each group.

4.2.3. Translation and adaptation

Translation and translational activities, in general, have the capacity to build bridges between cultures, fostering understanding between the people involved and their values (Valero and Salvador, 2007), thus reducing inequalities. All the interviewees recognized the importance of translation and transnational activities in carrying out their activities. This is the case of Empathy:

Translating is very important, because otherwise we can't really have a welcoming relationship, we can't get to know each other and share our thoughts. So, all the materials we use are translated into the different languages, except for the Spanish classes' materials, which are normally in Spanish, even if we sometimes speak in their mother tongue. [...] We really make a big effort on both sides, but we think it is important so that everyone can be well informed. (Empathy)

However, merely translating materials from one language to another without adapting them may be insufficient to adequately convey the message (Gonçalves et al., 2019). When appropriate translation strategies are applied, the translated material resonates with the target community and is sensitive to their cultural and contextual characteristics (Napoli & Stewart, 2018). As Solidarity comments, these adaptations should be carried out taking into account factors such as gender, sexual orientation or nationality:

For example, the activities carried out with young people are different from those carried out with women or with the LGBTBI community. They are totally different, even within the same group. For example, with young people, who are the most numerous profiles at the moment, we work in one way with a Guinean and in another way with a Sudanese or a Yemeni. (Solidarity)

Another interviewee, Freedom, stresses the fact that this “adaptive translation” is also essential to mitigate the asymmetrical relationships that can occur between participants and association staff:

You have to do an “adaptive translation”. [...] You have to make a lot of detours to be able to make yourself understood so that they can understand what you are trying to convey. But you learn that with experience, obviously combined with a certain sensitivity. In the end, there is a power relationship, and if you want to perpetuate it, the message will not get through. On the other hand, if you decide not to use that power situation, then that message will get through. (Freedom)

Finally, it should be noted that translating materials into a majority language instead of taking into account other languages can sometimes be ineffective, as many migrants do not speak the official language of their country of origin (e.g., Standard Arabic in Morocco, French in many

East African countries), but another language such as Wolof or Peul (Jiménez-Castro & Gutiérrez-Artacho, 2023). Some interviewees such as Justice comment that in the case of these limitations, they have relied on the help of participants who can serve as interpreters in the absence of staff members who speak these languages:

I would always explain it in French first, and then I would switch to Spanish and back to French so that those people who have a high intermediate level would be able to continue learning Spanish. But I translated everything into French. There were some people who spoke a language other than French. Then I would make a pause and two or three colleagues, one who spoke Wolof and another who spoke Pulaar, would translate what I had just said. (Justice)

The lack of both human and material resources means that in many cases the availability of translated materials depends on the will and capacity of each association (as Dignity points out). Moreover, the kind of adaptations that are implemented depend on the experience of the workshop facilitator, rather than on some kind of structured guide (as Justice says).

Dignity's words on this issue:

Could materials be worked on more? Yes. Should materials be more adapted and better prepared? Yes, but sometimes we don't have the capacity to do it, because preparing specific materials is not easy. Sometimes I have to prepare a workshop for the following week and give other workshops during the rest of the week. So, it is not easy at all. (Dignity)

Sometimes, as Justice comments, he makes these adaptations based on his own personal work experience, but they are not integrated following any kind of guidelines or informed criteria:

The truth is that I am not aware of making adaptations. I make them for sure, because I have been going to Africa for 12 or 13 years to work as a doctor. From my experience, I already know how they are, even though they are all different, but they have many similar aspects: the way they understand diseases, the way they understand many specific things, the way they understand sex education... So, I am aware of these differences, of course, but I don't have a structured scheme in my head when it comes to interacting with them or when it comes to teaching them something. (Justice)

Clearly, linguistic, and cultural differences, among others, are an intrinsic part of work with migrants. Despite the absence of professional translators and interpreters in the associations, translation-related activities are an essential part of their daily work.

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper was to analyze the situation of migrants arriving in Ceuta in relation to their information needs and the barriers they face in accessing it. Thus, interviews with workers of different associations have been analyzed to determine how the associations' workers manage multilingual and intercultural communication and to study whether information materials provided by the associations are translated into different languages and adapted. The content of the interviews with the associations, which act as active social agents, illustrates those situations of informational vulnerability presented by migrants arriving in Ceuta. There are numerous



barriers that migrants face in the city of Ceuta, and grassroots associations must detect them, seek solutions, and offer alternatives. This situation reflects the critical need to understand how multilingual and intercultural communication is handled by the associations, as well as the importance of effectively translating and adapting information to overcome these challenges.

As pointed out by some of the interviewees, the digital gap, understood as inequality in access to technologies and training (Ortega, 2009), affects this group in particular. This is due both to their socioeconomic status and to the lack of access to devices and stable connections that facilitate the use of ICTs (Blanco et al., 2022). For this reason, in order to carry out workshops and activities in these contexts, facilitating the necessary digital media and even considering a prior technological literacy process should be discussed beforehand. The associations' staff and volunteers attempt to mitigate these barriers through informal solutions, yet the absence of structured resources and professional support hinders their ability to fully bridge the gap. This highlights the need for better planning and allocation of resources to ensure migrants have access to essential digital skills and tools, contributing to better multilingual and intercultural communication.

Regarding administrative barriers, the interviews show that these obstacles are particularly severe for migrants without regularized administrative status. This issue, which affects access to services and resources provided by the associations, further exacerbates the vulnerability of undocumented migrants. Despite the associations' awareness of the issue, their ability to address it is limited by the legal and administrative frameworks under which they operate, thus creating a significant barrier to ensuring equitable access to services. The associations attempt to assist through translation and guidance, but the systemic nature of these barriers calls for more professional support to enable effective intercultural communication and assistance.

However, the most significant barriers to communication and access to information are those related to language, cultural differences, and educational level. The constant changes in terms of migratory flows in Ceuta mean that association staff must adapt to diverse linguistic and cultural profiles, as well as different levels of literacy and education. As highlighted in the interviews, despite the enormous importance of these contexts, the role of professional translation and cultural mediation services is scarce. None of the associations interviewed can provide these services on a professional and regular basis, as frequently occurs in associations in other regions of Spain (de Manuel et al., 2004; Valero-Garcés & Cata, 2006). This is mainly due to the lack of material and human resources allocated for this purpose. Again, despite the great importance of translational activities in these contexts, there is a tendency towards the voluntarization of these services, which reduces their effectiveness and consistency. This reflects a crucial gap in the associations' ability to provide comprehensive multilingual and intercultural support, which directly impacts their service delivery.

These interviews also provide valuable information on the resources and tools that the associations use to alleviate the inequality that these barriers generate for migrants. By means of workshops and training, informative resources are provided in areas where information needs are detected — in the case of Ceuta, mainly focusing on administration, health, awareness-raising, trafficking, and violence. Materials are frequently used as support tools to illustrate, exemplify, and reinforce the knowledge being taught during activities. The associations demonstrate a strong

awareness of the importance of translating and adapting these materials to reach their target audience effectively. However, despite the linguistic and cultural diversity of the participants, the management of these materials and workshops in multiple languages and cultures is rarely carried out by qualified professionals in translation, interpretation, and cultural mediation. The associations' ability to translate and adapt resources is limited not by their awareness of the need but by their lack of resources, both human and material, to provide these services professionally.

In conclusion, while the associations in Ceuta work diligently to provide migrants with the information they need, the study reveals the substantial challenges they face due to a lack of professional translation and cultural mediation services. This limits their ability to address migrants' information needs effectively, especially when it comes to overcoming language and cultural barriers. The findings underline the importance of investing in translation and intercultural mediation resources to reduce the informational vulnerability of migrants and ensure their successful integration into society.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained through the interviews reflect the complexities of working with communities that possess such linguistic, cultural, educational, and experiential diversity. The interconnectedness of these factors creates significant barriers to accessing information, particularly when it comes to understanding administrative processes, health services, and social resources. Migrants' diverse linguistic backgrounds, varying levels of education, and differing cultural norms all contribute to the challenges associations face in providing effective communication. These barriers are often compounded by limited digital literacy, which further restricts access to essential information.

The findings highlight the critical role of translation, interpretation, and cultural mediation in overcoming these barriers. Without these services, communication difficulties are exacerbated, leading to further marginalization of already vulnerable groups. The lack of professional resources dedicated to these activities forces many associations to rely on volunteers, making the quality and consistency of their services highly variable. This reliance on voluntarization underlines the urgent need for systematic investment in multilingual and intercultural communication strategies to better serve migrant populations.

Future research should focus on compiling and analyzing the materials used by these associations, both in their original and translated forms. This will allow for a comprehensive understanding of how these materials function as tools for linguistic and cultural mediation. Such an analysis would provide deeper insights into the strengths and limitations of current practices and help inform strategies to improve the quality of communication and support provided to migrants.

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