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THE RISE UP PROJECT WITH A FOCUS ON CROSS-BORDER ASPECTS OF THE USE AND POSITION OF AROMANIAN

Abstract: This contribution presents a current sociolinguistic cross-border comparison of Aromanian in Greece, North Macedonia and Romania. It is motivated by a) most studies of Aromanian focusing on the language variety as used in one country (e.g. Schwandner-Sievers 1999, Friedman 2001, Kahl 2003, Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković 2020; notable exceptions are Kahl 2008 and Gica 2009), b) many overview studies being quite dated (see previous references), and c) the lack of comparable data on Aromanian in the countries where it is spoken. The study is based on 285 responses to the Aromanian version of the RISE UP (www.riseupproject.eu) questionnaire which were collected in Aromanian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Serbian and Romanian between December 2023 and June 2024. It provides a description of the sociolinguistic context Aromanian exists in; its linguistic vitality; selected language ideological and attitudinal questions, as well as motivations for the use and/or learning of Aromanian. To identify effective ways and methods to support the use and revitalisation of Aromanian, the chapter furthermore identifies the use of existing Aromanian resources, facilities and services by community members; perceived opportunities to learn/improve the language and communicate/practice with other speakers of Aromanian; as well as areas in and age group(s) for which Aromanian resources are lacking most. The most important result of the study is that there is a strong group of users who are confident about

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their proficiency in all four skills. This group mainly lives in Romania and North Macedonia and is between 30 and 69 years of age. The results of the RISE UP survey thus suggest that the basis for the survival of Aromanian as an active medium of communication across the Balkans is thin and rests on a dedicated group of users/activists.

Keywords: RISE UP, minoritised language(s), Aromanian, Vlach, Cincari, cross-border, linguistic vitality, language maintenance, language revitalisation

1. Introduction

The aim of this contribution is to present an up-to-date comparison of the sociolinguistic situation of Aromanian¹ in three of the countries where it is spoken: Greece, North Macedonia and Romania. This synchronic cross-border comparison of Aromanian is descriptive and motivated by a) most studies of Aromanian focusing on the language as used in one country (e.g. Schwandner-Sievers 1999, Friedman 2001, Kahl 2003, Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković 2020; notable exceptions are Kahl 2008 and Gica 2009), b) many overview studies being quite dated (see previous references), and c) the lack of comparable data on Aromanian in the countries where it is spoken.

To understand language maintenance/shift scenarios in some of their complexity, we first need to place Aromanian in its present sociolinguistic context and establish the preconditions for language maintenance/shift in order to counteract its vulnerability. Language shift is only possible in multilingual speech communities. We therefore start with Aromanian in relation to other languages in its ecosystem or individual and community multilingualism. We then provide an update on the following vitality aspects of Aromanian: proficiency self-ratings in the four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing); estimates of proficient speakers by age groups; intergenerational transmission and other sources of language learning; frequency of use by domain and interlocutors. A section is dedicated to language ideological and attitudinal questions relevant to language maintenance and revitalisation and motivations for the use/learning of Aromanian. The chapter concludes with a survey of community attitudes

¹ We use the exonym Aromanian throughout this chapter – rather than the various endonyms the language variety is known under in the countries where it is spoken – for accessibility reasons.

towards the adequacy of individual, community and institutional support for the language; use of existing Aromanian resources, facilities and services by community members; perceived opportunities to learn/improve the language and communicate/practice with other speakers of Aromanian, as well as an identification of areas in and age group(s) for which Aromanian resources are lacking most. The latter information is used by RISE UP (www.riseupproject.eu) to identify effective ways and methods to support the use and revitalisation of Aromanian.

The contribution is structured as follows. In Section 2 we introduce the RISE UP project, in Section 3 the subject of study, Aromanian, and in Section 4 the most important concepts and literature we work with. Section 5 introduces the methodology. Section 6 presents the results, which are then discussed in Section 7. The last section is dedicated to a summary and conclusions.

2. The RISE UP project

RISE UP aims to counteract the vulnerability of endangered languages and to safeguard cultural diversity. More specifically, the project seeks to empower minoritised language communities by building connections between relevant actors, identifying good practices already in place and developing methods for the protection, maintenance and revitalisation of minoritised languages and cultures through a multi-disciplinary approach. RISE UP specifically focuses on five such communities: Aranese (Spain, France), Aromanian/Vlach/Cincari (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia (FYROM), Romania, Serbia), Burgenland Croatian (Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic), Cornish (UK) and Seto (Estonia, Russia).

The project objectives are:

- ANALYSING past and present language policies, language ideologies and sociolinguistic, legal, and economic reasons for language endangerment.
- DEFINING a European Language Promotion Ecosystem which aims at ensuring linguistic diversity by giving voice and support to smaller linguistic communities in order to empower them.

- CREATING guidelines and methodologies to revitalise endangered languages.
- FACILITATING and ENHANCING exchange of resources and tools among endangered language communities.
- DEVELOPING a RISE UP digital toolset to support the revitalisation of endangered languages.
- And LINKING educational/cultural/creative sectors with regional development.

The RISE UP consortium consists of MINDS & SPARKS GmbH (Vienna, Austria), the School of Oriental and African Studies (London, UK), the University of Roehampton (London, UK), the University of Tartu (Estonia), the University of Vienna (Austria), Espronceda (Barcelona, Catalunya, Spain), NUROGAMES GmbH (Cologne, Germany) and YEN, the Youth of European Nationalities (Leeuwarden, NL).

This contribution focuses on cross-border aspects of Aromanian in Greece, North Macedonia and Romania.

3. Aromanian

Aromanian is a neo-Latin language that belongs to the Romance family, more specifically to the Eastern or Balkan Romance group. Other Eastern Romance varieties include Daco-Romanian, better known as Romanian, Istro-Romanian and Megleno-Romanian.

Aromanian is an exonym based on how speakers of southern varieties call their language, *armāneashti*. Speakers of northern varieties call their language *rrāmāneshti* (Kahl & Pascaru 2018). The Aromanian grammar and lexicon (inherited from Latin) are similar to (Daco-)Romanian, but the vocabulary has been especially influenced by Greek, Albanian, Macedonian, Bulgarian and Turkish, which it has been in close contact with throughout its history (Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković 2020). Kahl and Pascaru even argue that a classification of Aromanian varieties could be based on these external influences (rather than north vs. south). They motivate this suggestion as follows:

“Die inselhafte Verbreitung der Aromunen über weite Flächen Südosteuropas hat den Kontaktverlust zwischen einzelnen Bevölkerungsgruppen verursacht und vielerorts die Beziehungen zu größeren Nachbarvölkern in den Vordergrund gestellt.“ (Kahl & Pascaru 2018: 58).

[The distribution of Aromanians in small pockets (“islands”) across vast areas of southeastern Europe has resulted in individual Aromanian communities losing contact with each other and – in many places or cases – foregrounding their relationships with “bigger” neighbouring peoples/communities.] [The translation is provided by the authors.]

The geo-linguistic distribution of Aromanian in four of the countries where it is spoken, namely Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and North Macedonia, is illustrated in the following map (Figure 1).

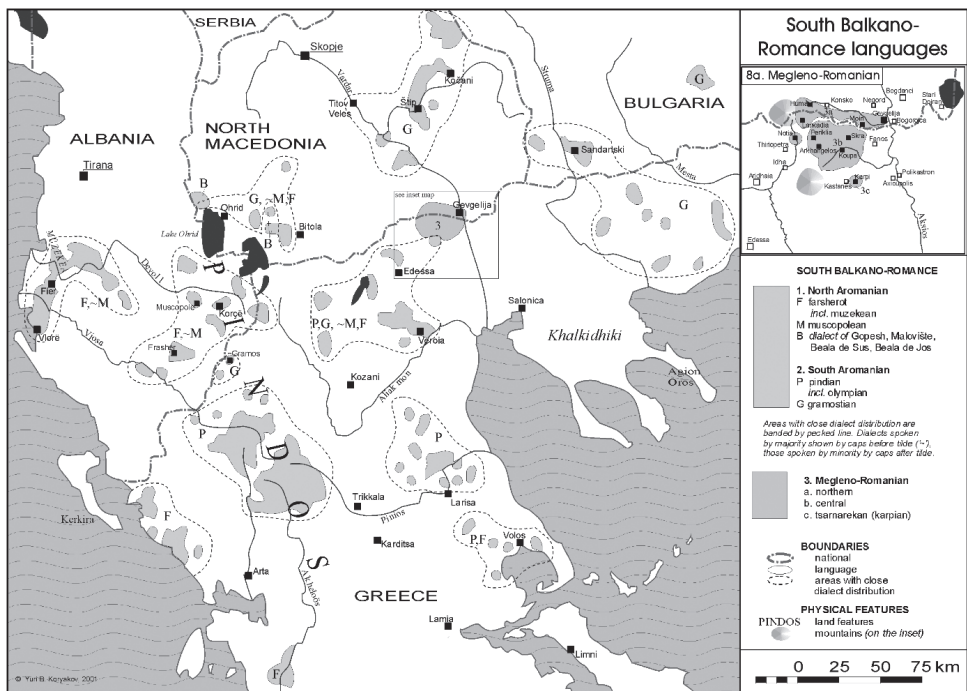


Figure 1: South Balkan-Romance languages map.

In Serbia, Aromanian communities can be found in Belgrade and Niš, and smaller ones in Knjaževac, Pančevo, Smederevo (Plasković 2003). In Romania, Aromanians live in the two Dobruja districts (Constanța and Tulcea), but also Bucharest, Ialomița district and the cities of Călărași, Slobozia, Brăila, as well as a small community in western Romania (the region of Banat near Timișoara).

The Aromanian spoken in urban centres and countries with recent waves of Aromanian immigrants, such as Romania and North Macedonia, is marked by dialect mixing (Trudgill 1986) and dialect levelling (Kerswill 2003).

The political situation of Aromanians and the Aromanian language is different in all countries where it is spoken. In Albania, Aromanians are a recognised national minority. In Bulgaria, minorities are not recognised. In the Serbian census of 2022, Aromanians surpassed the 300-person threshold required by Serbian law for a minority to apply for political status. The application was, however, turned down. Greek authorities do not recognise Aromanians as a different ethnic group, and Greek law does not allow for the Aromanian language to be used as a medium of instruction in school. In North Macedonia, Aromanian has a degree of official recognition and, since 2006, the status of a second official municipal language in the city of Kruševo. On a supra-national level, Albania, Bulgaria, and Greece have not signed, and North Macedonia has signed, but not ratified the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

Aromanian is considered “definitely endangered” by the UNESCO *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger* (Moseley 2010), “threatened” by the Endangered Languages Project (ELP), and “vigorous” by Ethnologue. Speaker numbers are controversial, but have been estimated to be around 200,000, with approximately a quarter each living in Albania, Greece and Romania and the remaining quarter in North Macedonia, Bulgaria and Serbia (Kahl 2002, Gica 2009, 2011, Sorescu-Marinković, Mirić & Ćirković 2020). According to the EU’s Regional Minority Language (RML) classification, Aromanian is thus an autochthonous cross-border Regional Minority Language (European Parliament 2020).

4. Literature review/concepts used

Due to the ratio between the number of languages (approximately 7,000) and the number of countries (approximately 200) that are currently “registered” on Earth, more than one language tends to be spoken in one country, and many languages are in use across different countries; not all languages have official status or are recognised. This leads to differentials in the formal and informal support for the use and development of some languages in public and private domains, e.g. mass media, education, government services, industry, religion, and culture. It also leads to power differentials between languages and their speakers, with different language communities having different social and economic status and different languages having different socio-historical prestige and different status among in-groups and towards out-groups. Last but not least, languages have different numbers of speakers who have different birth and mortality rates, different age pyramids, different patterns of immigration/emigration, and endogamy/exogamy. All these “objective” factors, as well as the distribution of a language in the territory where it is spoken, and the proportion of speakers in the total population, have been recognised as influencing the ethnolinguistic vitality of languages half a century ago (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977). The framework was extended in the 1980s to include “subjective ethnolinguistic vitality” or individuals’ views on the outlook for languages.

Most of these factors have been kept in later models of language vitality. UNESCO’s (Brenzinger et al. 2003) framework includes: the absolute number of speakers, proportion of speakers within the total population, trends in existing language domains and response to new domains and media, as well as governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use, and community members’ attitudes toward their own language. The UNESCO framework adds: materials for language education and literacy, amount and quality of documentation and intergenerational language transmission. As such, UNESCO’s framework picks up Fishman’s (1991) Graded Intergenerational Interruption Scale (GIDS), which emphasises the importance of intergenerational transmission for language vitality and which was later expanded into the EGIDS by Lewis and Simons (2010). Ehala (2010, 2011), on the other hand, focuses on in- and out-group relations and proposes that an ethnolinguistic group remains sustainable if “its strength and vitality combined are enough to cope with the challenges

that are posed to it by its environment” (Ehala 2010: 368). For a summary of ethnolinguistic vitality frameworks, see Smith, Ehala & Giles (2017).

Several issues with all vitality scales have been identified. One is the reliability of data these predominantly quantitative frameworks are based on. Self-report data can also be prone to bias (Karpen 2018, Tomoschuk, Ferreira & Gollan 2019). Another issue concerns the notion of “speaker”. Who counts as “a speaker”? The RISE UP project proposal suggests we work with the concepts of speakers, new speakers, learners, people who have not yet had the chance to learn their heritage language and supporters. As a yardstick for a proficient speaker, the project has adopted the following definition: a proficient speaker is one who is able to hold a sustained, impromptu conversation on a range of topics.

When intergenerational transmission gets weak or breaks down, minoritised languages rely on revitalisation through education for their vitality. Language learning is particularly relevant in the context of the reclamation of minoritised heritage languages through so-called new speakers, i.e. language users who have acquired their proficiency, at least partially, as a result of schooling (e.g. Austin & Sallabank 2014). Motivation (e.g. Gardner and Lambert 1972, Dörnyei, MacIntyre & Henry 2015) has traditionally been the domain of language learning, but has more recently also been recognised as an important factor in language maintenance and revitalisation (e.g. Wiltshire, Bird & Hardwick 2022).

Motivation generally refers to the act that initiates human behaviour. In language learning, motivation helps learners to achieve their goals in learning a language. Gardner and Lambert (1972) identified two central motivational orientations to language learning: 1) instrumentality, which refers to the functional/utilitarian advantages of language, where learning is pursued for “more practical concerns”, such as getting better jobs, and 2) integrativeness, which focuses on the relationship between the social context, individuals’ attitudes and motivation. One main issue with the socio-psychological model is similar to criticism levelled against ethnolinguistic vitality scales: the two orientations cannot be dealt with as two opposite ends of a continuum (Dörnyei 1994, Lamb 2004).

While instrumentality has been found to be an important motivating factor in acquiring a new language in some minority contexts (e.g. Walsh, O’Rourke & Rowland 2015), the motivations of old and new speakers can vary, and learning a heritage language, Lanvers (2017: 520) proposes, may be associated with motivation relating to personal enrichment rather than

instrumental motivation. Sallabank and Marquis (2018) claim that, in the context of minoritised heritage languages, symbolic motivations abound as individuals recognise the integrative and identificational potential of language. Symbolic motivations have been proposed to facilitate generating conscious changes to linguistic practices in favour of minoritised languages in individuals (Walsh & O'Rourke 2014: 68), and thus new speakers.

5. Methodology

The study is based on the RISE UP questionnaire. In order to build the project's actions on up-to-date and comparable information, RISE UP conducted a parallel online questionnaire among its five case study communities (Aranese, Aromanian, Burgenland Croatian, Cornish, Seto). The current chapter focuses on the Aromanian version of the questionnaire, which was available for completion in the following languages: Aromanian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Romanian and Serbian. It comprises 68 predominantly close-ended questions belonging to the following three groups: sociolinguistic questions on language maintenance and use, questions on facilities and resources, and demographic questions. The questionnaire opened in December 2023. The results presented in the next section are based on responses gathered until June 2024. The questionnaire will re-open in December 2024 to gather more responses a) from countries we currently have insufficient data from (Albania, Bulgaria, and Serbia), b) to facilitate statistical analysis despite non-representative sampling, c) to get closer to response numbers that are proportional to estimated Aromanian speaker numbers per country.

The Aromanian version of the RISE UP questionnaire was completed by 285 self-selected participants. 128 (44.9%) participants live in Romania, 79 (27.7%) in North Macedonia, 38 (13.3%) in Greece, 3 in Albania, 2 in Serbia, one in Bulgaria and 29 (10%) in other countries/the diaspora (mainly the US, Australia, Germany, Luxembourg, Scandinavia and Brazil). The RISE UP survey thus yielded sufficient responses from Greece, North Macedonia and Romania to conduct a descriptive statistical analysis. The following cross-national comparison is consequently based on responses from these three countries. For the other countries where Aromanian is spoken (Albania, Bulgaria and Serbia) we currently have insufficient data to report on them, and the countries are thus not included in the current study.

Sixty-eight out of 285 (24%) of all participants used the Aromanian language version; 38.3% of the respondents who completed the survey in Aromanian live in Romania, 11.4% in North Macedonia and 5% in Greece. Four out of all 285 respondents (1.4%) are between 10–17 years of age and completed the questionnaire with parental consent, 39 (13.7%) between 18–29, 126 (44.2%) between 30–49, 94 (33%) between 50–69, and 22 (8.7%) are 70 or older. 46% of the participants are female, 52% male, and 2% are non-binary or prefer not to say. Like in most surveys, there is a strong tendency for respondents to be well-educated (Demarest et al. 2013); over 80% completed higher education.

6. Results

In order to situate the Aromanian language in relation to other languages in its linguistic context, the RISE UP survey asked what other languages are employed by its users and in the communities they live in. In response to the question on individual multilingualism, most participants (48%) report to be bilingual in Aromanian/Vlach and the national language of the country they live in. Trilingual participants tend to know Aromanian, the national language of the country they live in and another language spoken in the Balkans (regardless of how closely related they are, e.g. Aromanian, Macedonian or Serbian, and Albanian or Greek), or another Romance language (Italian, French, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese). Young Aromanians and Aromanians living in the diaspora are multilingual (English, German, Finnish etc.). Community multilingualism mirrors individual multilingualism. These findings of widespread multilingualism and predominant language combinations of tri-, quadri- and quintilingual Aromanians living in Greece, North Macedonia and Romania are strikingly similar to those obtained by the Vulnerable Languages and Linguistic Varieties in Serbia (VLingS) survey from Aromanians living in Serbia (Ćorković 2024).

In the remainder of this section, we focus on three sets of results; the main section concentrates on linguistic vitality factors (Section 6.1), section 6.2. looks into language ideological and attitudinal questions; the last section (6.3) presents findings on existing and lacking resources for language maintenance and revitalisation.

6.1. Linguistic vitality of Aromanian in Greece, North Macedonia and Romania

The potentially most important result of this study for language maintenance and revitalisation is that there seems to exist a strong group of users who are confident about their proficiency in all four skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing. This is indicated in the following graph, which presents the proficiency self-ratings in Aromanian in all four skills by all (N=285) respondents to the RISE UP survey.

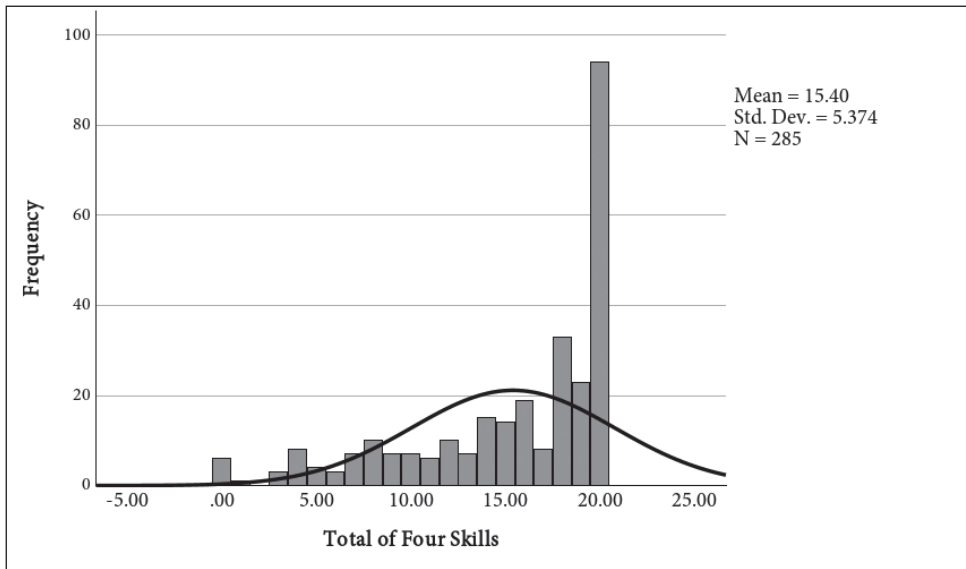


Figure 2: Proficiency/fluency self-ratings in Aromanian in the four skills.

Figure 2 shows that 32% of the participants rated their proficiency 5/5 in all four skills, and more than half (55%) rated their proficiency 5/5 in two skills and 4/5 in two skills, to achieve an overall proficiency self-rating of or above 18. These results indicate the existence of a strong group of highly proficient/fluent users of Aromanian who keep the language alive. The results, however, also show that there is a marked drop in competence self-ratings across the four skills between the proficient users of Aromanian and the remaining survey respondents. This means that language proficiency outside this core group of proficient Aromanian language users is lower and more varied.

91% of the group with proficiency self-ratings of or above 18 are over 30 years of age (34% between 30 and 49, 39% between 50 and 69 and 10% over 70). The mean self-ratings for speaking, listening, reading and writing are as follows:

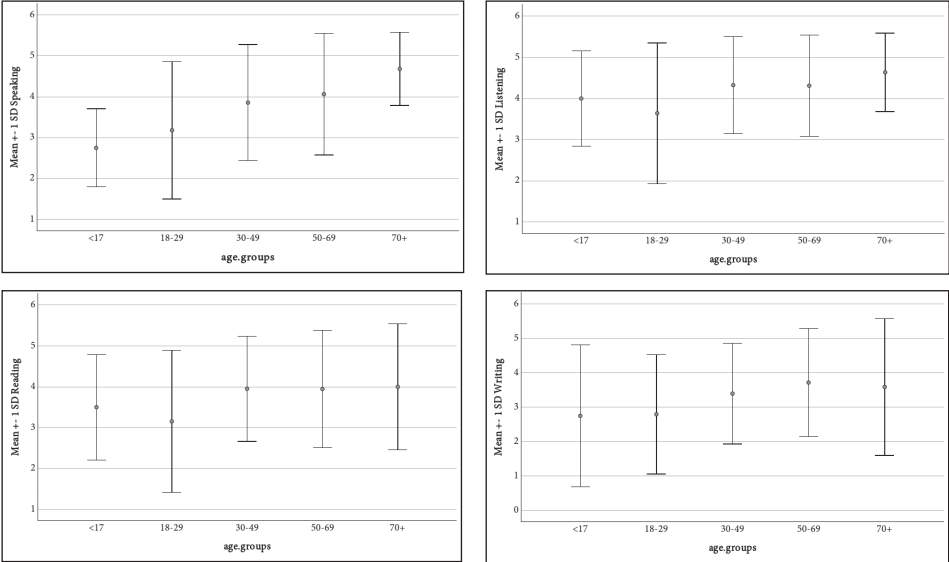


Figure 3: Proficiency self-rating means for speaking (top left), listening (top right), reading (bottom left) and writing (bottom right) by age group.

The mean speaking self-ratings of under-30-year-olds hover around “somewhat fluent” (3) on a five-point Likert scale ranking (0 = no knowledge, 1 = not fluent to 5 = fluent), those of 30-to-69-year-olds around “quite fluent” (4) and over-70-year-olds just under “fluent” (5). The mean listening self-ratings are more similar and range from just under “quite fluent” (4) to just under “fluent” (5) for all age groups; the mean reading self-rating of under-30-year-olds is below “quite fluent” (4), those of 30-or-older “quite fluent” (4); and the mean writing self-ratings of under-30-year-olds are below “somewhat proficient” (3), those of 30-or-older above “quite fluent” (4). Spearman’s rank correlation was computed to assess the relationship between age and proficiency self-ratings in all four skills. There was a positive correlation between age and speaking, $r(284) = .27, p = <.001$, age and listening $r(284) = .17, p = .005$, age and reading $r(284) = .15, p = .01$, and age and writing $r(284) = .2, p = <.001$. This means that there is a significant correlation between age and all four skills.

If we break the proficiency self-rating down by country of residence (see Figure 4), we notice that the overall results (bottom right-hand corner) are mainly due to Aromanian respondents residing in Romania and North Macedonia.

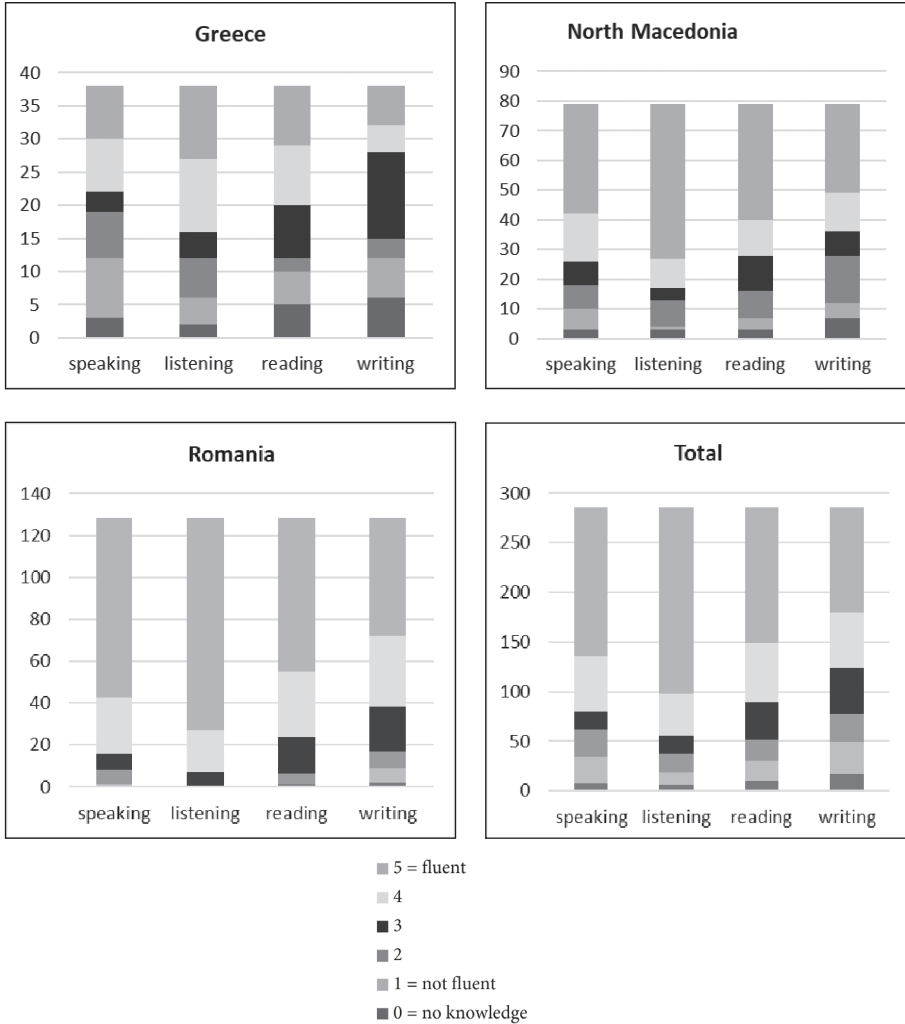


Figure 4: Proficiency/fluency self-ratings in the four skills by country.

Proficiency self-assessments of survey respondents residing in Greece (top left-hand corner) are more evenly spread out between no knowledge, not fluent and fluent across all four skills. This is the first indicator that

proficiency in Aromanian is highest in Romania and North Macedonia and that the survival of the language is at risk in Greece.

The proficiency/fluency self-rating in the four skills also enables us to determine if respondents think they are more proficient in spoken or written Aromanian. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicates that speaking and listening skills are significantly higher among our respondents than reading and writing skills ($z = 7.8, p < .001$). Expressed in terms of ranks, 118 respondents rank their speaking and listening skills higher than their reading and writing skills, whereas only 26 respondents rank their reading and writing skills higher than their speaking and listening skills. The remaining 141 respondents self-rate their literacy skills the same as their oracy skills. These results indicate that Aromanian is predominantly used as an oral language.

The proficiency self-ratings by age group already pointed towards the proficient users of Aromanian being adults or older. In the RISE UP survey, we approached the same issue with a second question, namely “Which age group(s) is/are able to hold a sustained, unrehearsed conversation on a range of topics in Aromanian/Vlach in your community?” where being able to hold a sustained, unrehearsed conversation on a range of topics is our definition of a fluent speaker.

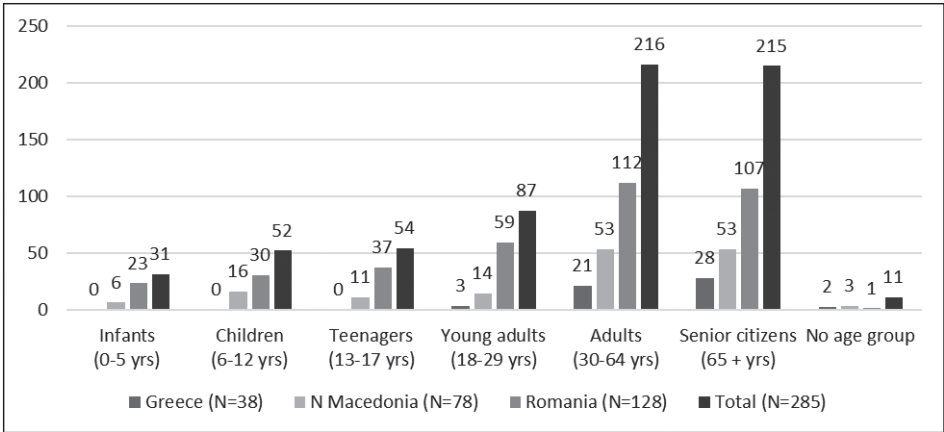


Figure 5: Fluent speaker estimates by age groups and country.²

² In charts presenting results by country, such as Figure 5, numbers from Greece, North Macedonia and Romania do not add up to the total because results from Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia and other countries are included in the total.

These results mirror those of the proficiency self-ratings and strengthen the picture that the majority of fluent Aromanian users live in Romania and North Macedonia and are 30 years of age or older.

It is important to note that Figure 5 does not claim that there are no infant, children and teenage speakers of Vlach in Greece. It simply shows that respondents to the RISE UP questionnaire from Greece live in Aromanian communities in which there are no infants, children or teenagers who are fluent speakers of Aromanian. The speaker estimates for Greece may be a consequence of the non-representative sampling used for the RISE UP survey (as many of our respondents are from one village/area, i.e. Avdella. We are aware that there are young speakers in some Greek Aromanian settlements, e.g. Verria, Edessa, Naoussa, Metsovo etc.). The fluent speaker estimates for North Macedonia strike some community members and experts as rather high. The Aromanian movement in North Macedonia is currently quite active (both bottom-up and top-down), which may have led to higher proficiency self-ratings and higher fluent speaker estimates among respondents from this country.

Fishman’s “Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale” (Fishman 1991), along with most vitality scales (e.g. Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977, Brenzinger et al. 2003, Lewis & Simons 2010, Ehala 2010, 2011) sees intergenerational transmission in the family as the most important factor in language survival. The RISE UP survey thus asked our participants from whom/where they learnt/are learning Aromanian/Vlach (Question 9).

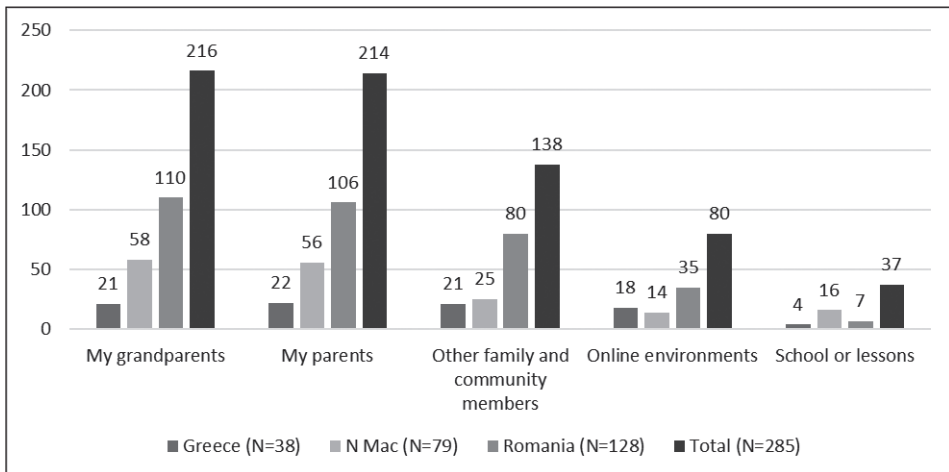


Figure 6: Intergenerational transmission and other sources of language learning.

Figure 6 illustrates that intergenerational transmission is clearly the main source of language learning in all countries where Aromanian is spoken and where we have sufficient data to conduct a descriptive statistical analysis. What is notable is that in Romania and Greece, Aromanian seems to have a broader familial base than in North Macedonia. 63% of Romanian, 55% of Greek and 32% of Macedonian respondents selected “other family and community members” in addition to “my grandparents” and “my parents”, i.e. intergenerational transmission within the nuclear family.

The “online environment”, by contrast, was selected by 47% of Greek, 27% of Romanian and 18% of Macedonian respondents. The online environment thus plays a bigger role as a source of language learning in the country where intergenerational transmission is weaker, i.e. Greece, and where the biggest stakeholder organisation argues against writing Aromanian for purposes other than passing on culture.

In North Macedonia, school or lessons play a bigger role in learning Aromanian (20%) than in the other two countries we have data for (Greece, 10.5% and Romania, 5.5%). This probably reflects the fact that some Aromanian language programs are introduced into public elementary schools in North Macedonia and that some community organisations run language courses, like in Greece.

The open-ended answer option for this question supports the close-ended results by respondents mentioning the Anveatsa Armanashti Project (e.g. ID No #13) and noting that they are learning “By myself, through any method available on the internet” (ID No #6). Respondents also name community organisations such as CTArm (Aromanian Youth Council) (e.g. ID No #1, #12, #16) and the Aromanian Cultural Association (Sutsata Culturala Armânească, e.g. ID No #263), as well as the Service of Secția Aromână Radio România Internațional (Serviciu Secția Aromână RRI, e.g. ID No #11, #263). The following two statements are characteristic of the situation of Aromanian in the respective countries: “Δε μαθαίνω” [I’m not learning] (ID No #4), and “Во Крушево кога растев сите зборуваа на влашки. Секаде зборував влашки. Научив дома. А немавме настава на влашки, туку на македонски јазик.” [In Kruševo, when I was growing up, everyone spoke Vlach. I spoke Vlach everywhere. I learnt at home. And we didn’t have classes in Vlach, but in Macedonian.]” (ID No #171).

Reduced ethnolinguistic vitality of a language is also widely associated with a shift/reduction in domains of use (Giles et al. 1977, Fishman 1991,

Brenzinger et al. 2003, Lewis & Simons, 2010, Ehala 2010, 2011). The results of the RISE UP survey on domains and frequency of use (Question 11. In which situations/contexts do you mostly use Aromanian/Vlach?) naturally fall into three groups: the first two on the left of Figure 7 (home/family and friends/neighbours/community), the four in the middle (religion/worship, employment, education & government) and four on the right (leisure, arts and culture & online).

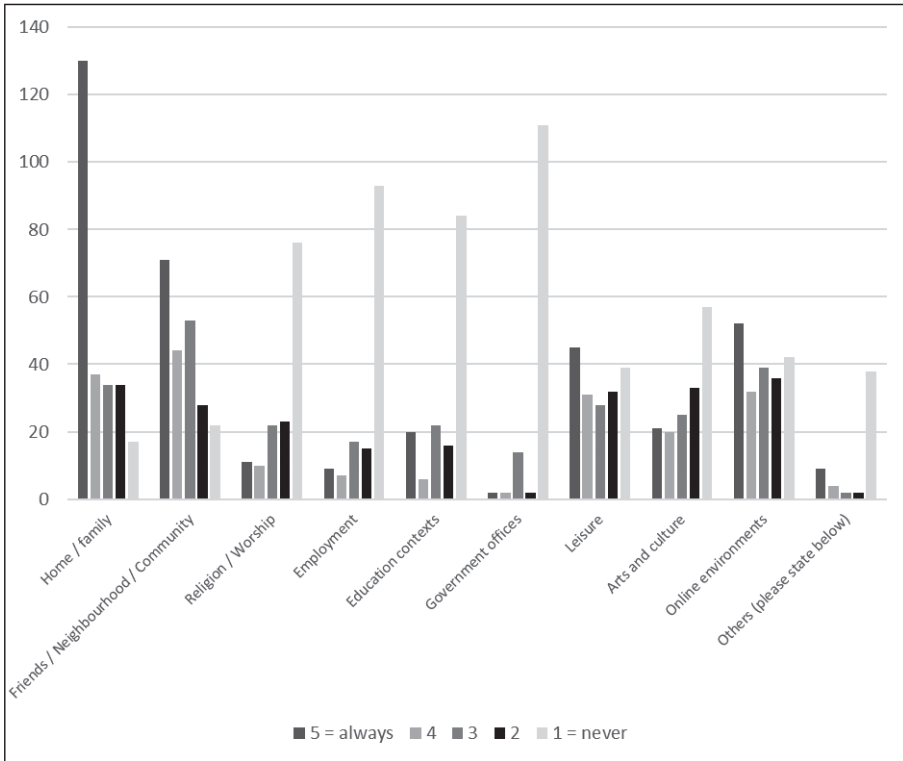


Figure 7: Domains and frequency of use.

The frequency of use in the home domain and with friends/neighbours/community underlines the general finding that there is a strong group of participants who always use Aromanian in these situations or contexts. The extremely limited use of Aromanian in religion/worship, employment, the educational context and government is unsurprising, given the national language policies briefly outlined in the introduction, and shows that Recommendation 1333 for the protection of Aromanian culture and

language (Council of Europe 1997) has had limited to no effect. The use of Aromanian in the leisure domain and online environments is encouraging and indicates two promising domains for language revitalisation. In arts and culture, the use of Aromanian is lower than expected given that the use of Aromanian is generally supported/encouraged/promoted by stakeholder organisations in this domain.

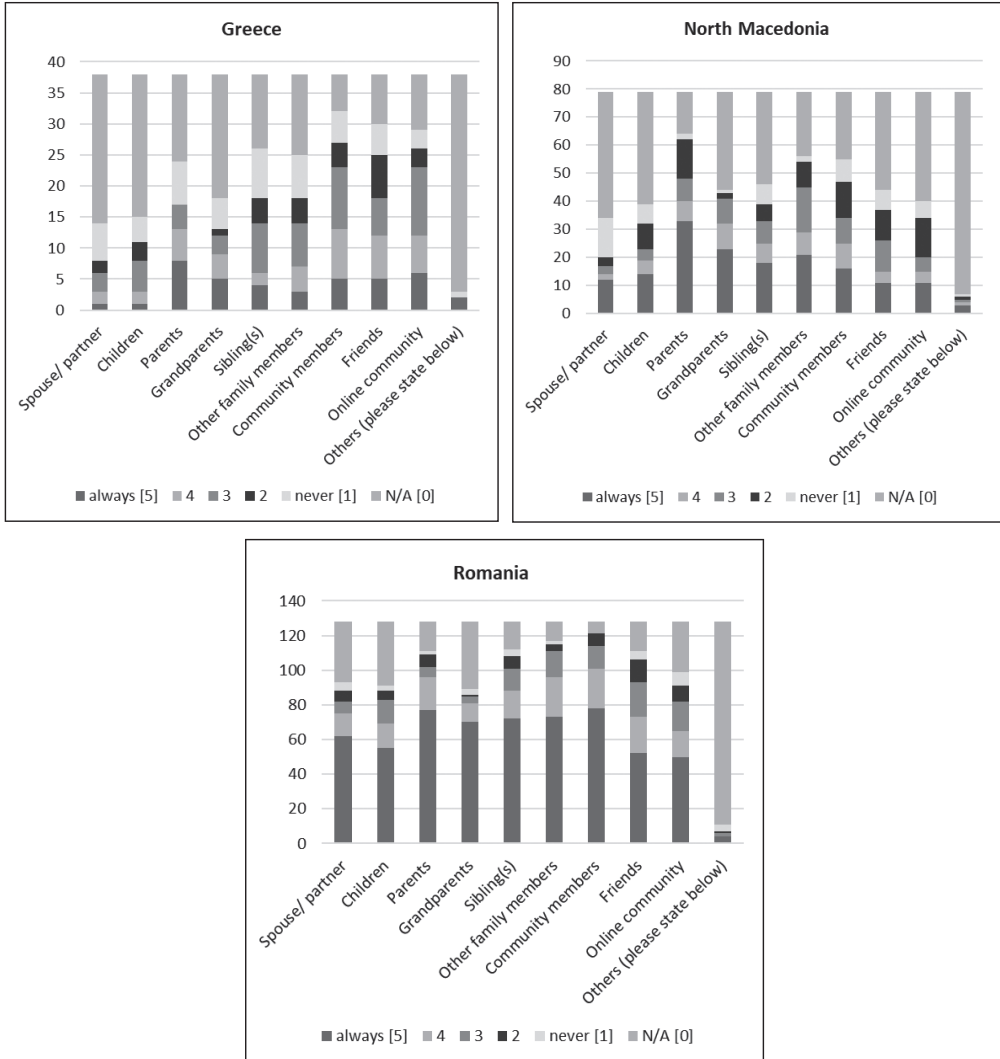
The main difference in domains and frequency of use of Aromanian in Greece, North Macedonia and Romania is that, in North Macedonia and Romania, a strong group of participants say they always use Aromanian in the home domain and with friends/neighbours/community. In Greece, on the other hand, respondents predominantly selected the “sometimes” or “rarely” response option, indicating that they use Aromanian less frequently in these important domains than Macedonian and Romanian Aromanians.

The open-ended answers to Question 12 illustrate how narrow the domains of use are for some participants and how wide they are for others. They include anything from “Evenimente în cadrul familiei/comunității” [Family and community events] (ID No #21), to “Στο σύλλογο Βλάχων που δραστηριοποιούμαι” [In the association of Vlachs where I am active] (ID No #94), “На онлајн часови по влашки” [In Online Classes] (ID No #60), “На социјалните мрежи” [On social media] (ID No #187), to music, to reading, writing and translating poems, books, commentaries and articles in(to) Aromanian to “Σε καμία κατάσταση” [In no situation] (ID No #4).

Domains are associated with groups of interlocutors. The responses to the question “If you speak Aromanian/Vlach, who do you speak it with, and how often?” (Question 7) should reflect this association. Figure 8 below shows that they do.

The bar charts for Romania show that most respondents to the RISE UP survey who live in Romania say they always speak Aromanian with their parents, grandparents, siblings and other family members, i.e. in the home domain. Endogamic marriages are quite frequent, and Romanian nationals who are married to another Aromanian always tend to use the language with their partners and children. The frequency of use of Aromanian with children mirrors the frequency of use with partners, which indicates that speakers of Aromanian pass their language onto their children when married to another Aromanian speaker, but don't transmit it intergenerationally when not (see bar for N/A). Many respondents from Romania also state they always speak Aromanian with friends, other community members, and the

online community they are part of, but responses shift more from “always” to “often” and “sometimes” in these less intimate domains than in the home domain.



Figures 8: Main interlocutors and frequency of use by country.

The responses from North Macedonia follow a similar pattern. The most noticeable difference to the Romanian bar charts is that the “not applicable (N/A) bars are considerably more pronounced, i.e. in North

Macedonia, more respondents live away from other Aromanian-speaking family and community members and entered exogamic marriages in which they do not pass the language on to their children.

In Greece, the N/A bars indicating that the respondents to the RISE UP survey cannot speak Aromanian with family members are the highest throughout. Greek Aromanians speak more Aromanian with friends, community members, and the online community than with their immediate family members. Intergenerational transmission from the current parent generation to their children is even lower than in North Macedonia.

Another interesting trend in the intergenerational transmission patterns between respondents from Romania, North Macedonia and Greece is that almost as many Romanian respondents report to always speak Aromanian with their parents as with their grandparents (77 and 70 respectively). In North Macedonia and Greece, on the other hand, fewer respondents report to always speak Aromanian with their grandparents than with their parents (33 and 23; 8 and 5 respectively). Life expectancies are not that different in Romania, North Macedonia and Greece to account for this difference; the dent in intergenerational transmission in the 1950s and 1960s is also apparent in the responses to Question 9 on who respondents learnt their Aromanian from, and is thus more likely due to diverse past (and present) language and minority policies in these countries.

Responses to the open-ended question on main interlocutors and frequency of use highlight the importance of Aromanian as a lingua franca in the Balkan and with diaspora Aromanians. Respondents, for example, speak Aromanian with fellow Aromanians in “Ομορες χώρες” [neighbouring countries] (ID No #123), with “abroad relatives” (ID No #141), “old people from balcan [the Balkans]” (ID No #198), “Φιλοι Ρουμάνοι (κατοικος εξωτερικου)” [Romanian friends (resident abroad)] (ID No #92), and sometimes the domains unexpectedly merge online, as for respondent No #40 who is “enrolled in an Aromanian course online and ha[s] some people who are distant family members and total strangers to me in the course”.

This brings us to the end of the section on multilingualism, linguistic vitality, intergenerational transmission and other sources of language learning, domains and main interlocutors and frequency of use and to a selection of language ideological and attitudinal questions relevant for language maintenance, revitalisation and motivations for the use/learning of Aromanian.

6.2. Language ideological & attitudinal questions

For this chapter, we selected six language attitudinal, ideological and motivational questions from the RISE UP questionnaire that seem particularly relevant to language maintenance and revitalisation and thus the coordination and support actions this Horizon Europe project is/will be proposing:

1. In the country I live in, public/official communication should occur only in the national language;
2. The official language(s) of the country I live in represent national identity;
3. The use of more than one language creates social problems/makes social unity difficult;
4. Aromanian/Vlach has more prestige than the national language(s);
5. Using/learning Aromanian/Vlach is a strong part of my identity;
6. Being able to use/learn Aromanian/Vlach makes me feel connected with who and where I come from.

The results from all countries are summarised in Figure 9; the national differences are summarised in writing below.

The first set of three questions taps into respondents' language ideologies. Language ideologies are morally and politically loaded representations of the structure and use of languages in a social world. They link language to identities, institutions and values in all societies (Woolard 2020).

The first language ideological question asked if, in the country respondents live in, public/official communication should occur only in the national language. Opinions are divided in Romania and Greece; in North Macedonia, there is a slight tendency towards strongly agree. The official language(s) of the country they live in tends to represent national identity for Romanian and Macedonian respondents. Greek respondents' opinions are more divided, they either tend to strongly agree or disagree or "sit on the fence", i.e. selected the "neutral" option. The general trend is that Greek respondents sit more on the fence on the national language ideological questions than respondents from North Macedonia and Romania. There is widespread disagreement with the view that the use of more than one language creates social problems or makes social unity difficult, more strongly so in Romania and Greece than in North Macedonia.

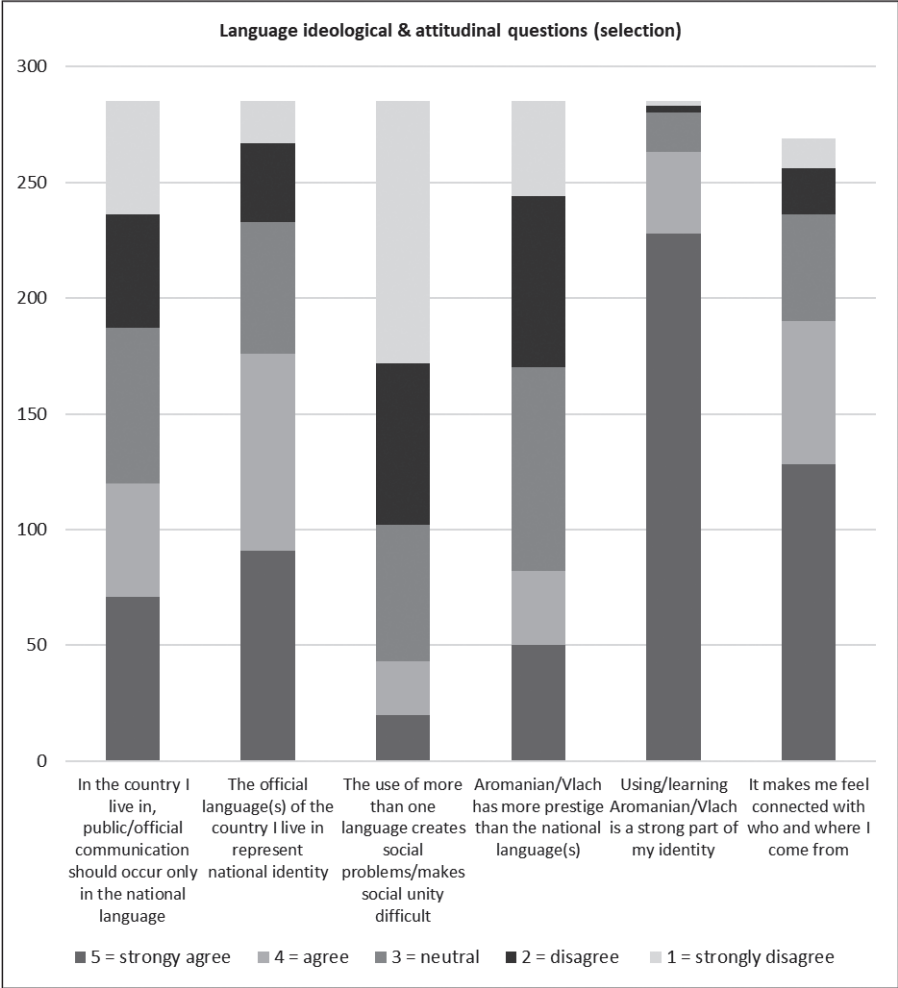


Figure 9: Language ideological and attitudinal questions (selection).

The prestige of the minority language (in relation to the other languages in its ecosystem) is considered an important factor in most linguistics vitality frameworks (e.g. Giles, Bourhis & Taylor 1977, Brenzinger et al. 2003, Lewis & Simons 2010, Ehala 2010, 2011). In response to the question if Aromanian has more prestige than the national language(s), it is Romanian respondents who “sit on the fence”, i.e. 48/128 or 37.5% selected the “neutral” Likert scale option. Apart from a group of 17 respondents who strongly agree, most Macedonian respondents lean towards “disagree” or “strongly disagree”. So do Greek respondents, but in their case, “disagree” is clearly the preferred response (16/38).

Symbolic motivations to maintain and learn Aromanian are strong among respondents to the RISE UP questionnaire in all countries. 95% of our respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that using/learning Aromanian is a strong part of their identity; 70% agree or strongly agree that being able to use/learn Aromanian makes them feel connected with whom and where they come from.

The open-ended answer option to the motivational question “I want to be able to use/learn Aromanian because ...” (Question 15) highlights the importance of the language for maintaining family and community ties, with answers such as “ca s-pot amu nic auna ligatura cu papanjiji a mei” [in order to have one more tie with my grandparents] (ID No #235); “That is my parents’ language”; “Pentru a putea transmite mai departe copiilor” [To be able to pass on to the children] (ID No #269); and “S-potu si zburăscu cu sots armânj dit alti vâsili³” [To be able to communicate with my fellow Aromanians from other countries] (ID No #242). The symbolic function mentioned above also features in the open-ended answers, “It’s part of my identity. They are the roots and the connection with the memory of the ancestors. It is the desire to carry forward the language and culture inherited from them” (ID No #48), as does the concern about the language and the community “To keep the language alive. It’s just that the generation that does or did use it is fast dwindling.” (ID No #56) and “Simply because this community [sic] must survive.” (ID No #6)

Linking language ideological and attitudinal questions with the use and perceived need of resources to keep Aromanian alive, we asked our respondents if enough is being done to keep Aromanian going by 1. members of the Aromanian community, 2. community organisations/representatives, 3. the national/state government, and 4. the local/regional government. The means from the countries we have sufficient data from (Greece, North Macedonia and Romania) are visualised alongside the totals in Figure 10.

Greek and Romanian respondents agree that not enough is being done by regional and national governments to keep Aromanian alive. Although Macedonian respondents still think that not enough is being done by the national and regional governments to keep Aromanian going, the North Macedonian regional and national governments score better than the Romanian and especially the Greek governments.

³ Aromanian open-ended answers were translated with <https://www.arotranslate.com>.

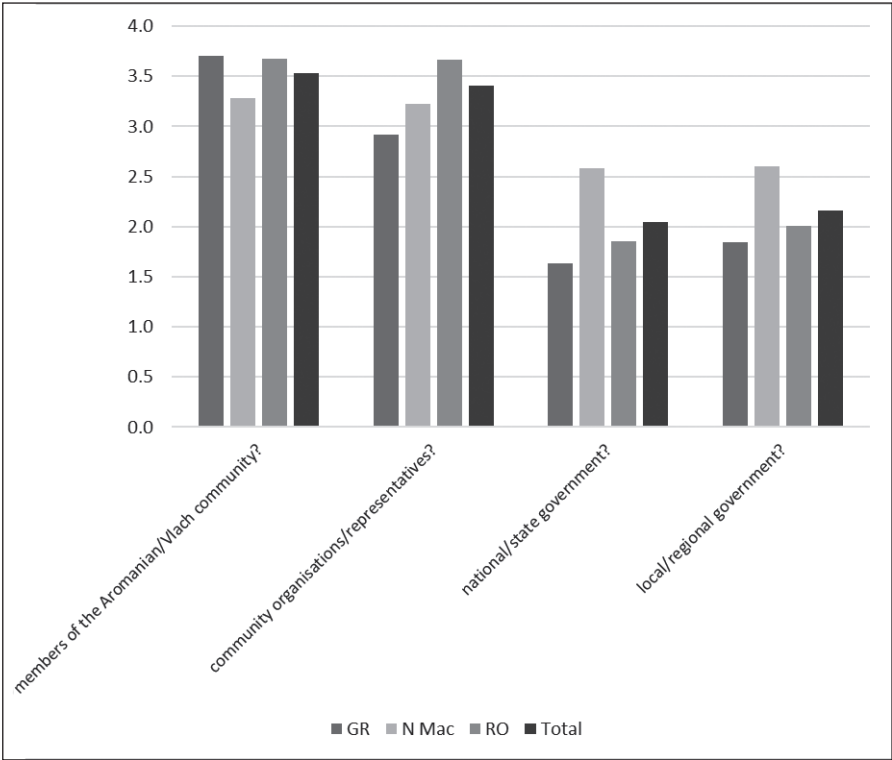


Figure 10: Evaluation of language maintenance and revitalisation efforts by stakeholders.

The responses on whether community organisations/representatives do enough to keep Aromanian going are quite evenly distributed, but most respondents think that more could be done by community organisations/representatives to keep Aromanian alive. The same holds true for community members.

This brings us to the last section on the use and perceived need of resources to keep Aromanian alive. The aim of this section is to enable RISE UP and other stakeholders to base their language maintenance and revitalisation efforts on these findings.

6.3. Resources for Aromanian language maintenance and revitalisation

Based on previous research on the existence of resources for Aromanian language maintenance and revitalisation, we asked our respondents which resources they use. They are presented in order of frequency of use in Figure 11.

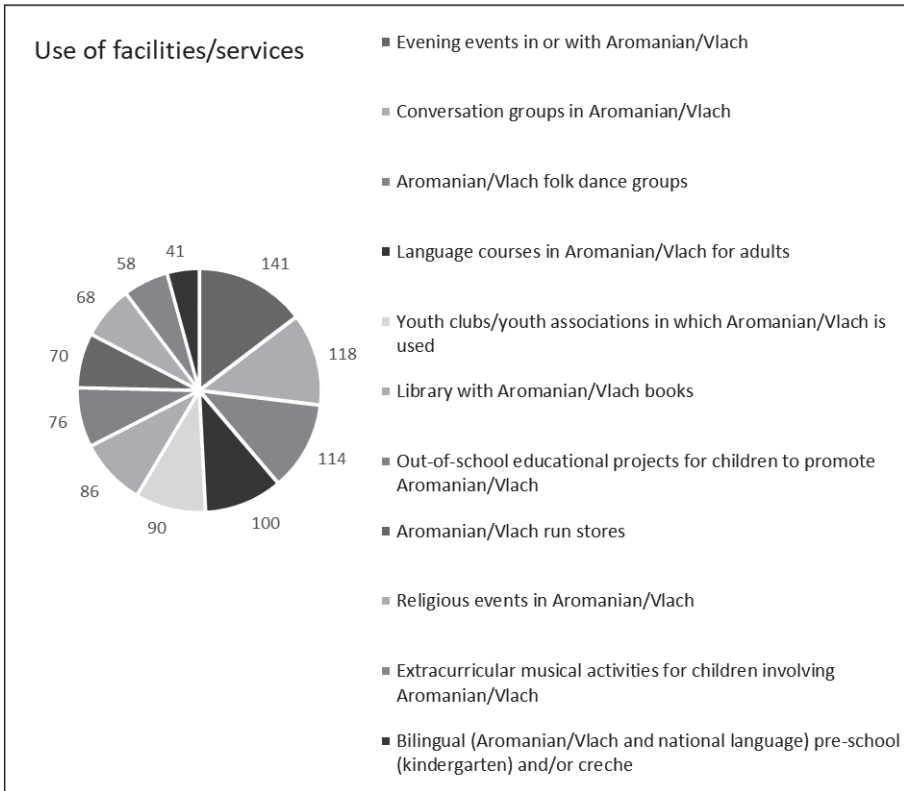


Figure 11: Use of Aromanian facilities and services.

Informal events in which the Aromanian language can be used are clearly the most popular among our respondents, as are conversation groups, language courses and youth clubs.

Next, we wanted to establish in which areas Aromanian resources are lacking most.

We saw in Figure 11 that Aromanian music, dance and other cultural events are popular and thus feature lower down in the list of areas/events in which resources are lacking most. High up on this list are digital media and services, as well as literature and non-fiction works.

Last but not least, especially given RISE UP’s focus on young members of minoritised communities, we asked our respondents for which age group(s) Aromanian resources are lacking most (see Figure 13).

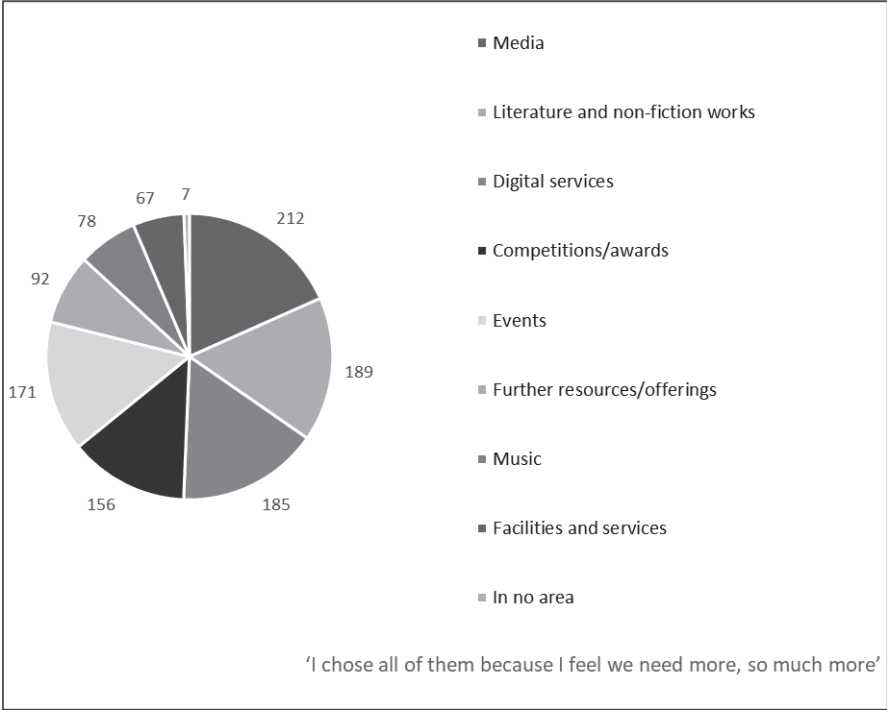


Figure 12: Areas in which Aromanian resources are lacking most.

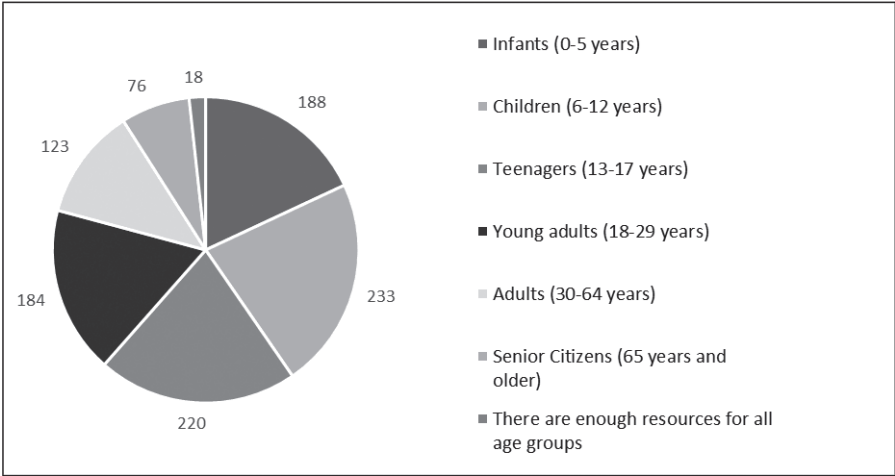


Figure 13: Age groups for which Aromanian resources are lacking most.

The results strongly support RISE UP's and other stakeholders' focus on young people up to the age of 30.

7. Discussion

One dangerous factor for languages that do not have official status is linguistic similarity with a national language. This is the case for Aromanian and (Daco-)Romanian. In this respect, the widespread multilingualism of languages spoken in the Balkans, regardless of which language family they belong to, among the respondents to the RISE UP questionnaire may positively impact the vitality of Aromanian, as one of the distinctions between (Daco-)Romanian and Aromanian is the latter's lexical enrichment from Albanian, Greek, Slavic languages and Turkish. Familiarity with non-Romance languages among our respondents may thus preserve the lexical richness of Aromanian.

The potentially most important result of this study for the maintenance of Aromanian is that there seems to exist a strong group of users, i.e. over half of our respondents, who are confident in their proficiency in all four skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). A strong group of proficient users who can keep the language alive and pass it on to younger generations and new speakers alike is, of course, an encouraging sign for the survival of Aromanian. Self-ratings of language proficiency are as liable to bias as other self-assessments, and community members have commented that self-ratings of participants from one country strike them as somewhat high. The fact that only approximately half of our respondents, who in turn represent just over one percent of estimated Aromanian speakers, say they are highly proficient, with competence self-ratings across the four skills dropping markedly between the proficient and the remaining survey respondents, is more alarming. This is even more so because an online questionnaire like the one conducted by RISE UP is more likely to reach stakeholders and other community representatives and activists, something that is supported by many respondents indicating that they are engaged in voluntary work in relation to Aromanian/Vlach (Question 66). These observations may suggest that Aromanian is potentially kept alive by a rather small group of activists who mostly live in Romania and North Macedonia and are over 30 years of age. The geo-linguistic distribution and age pyramid of proficient

users of Aromanian taken into account, the future of Aromanian looks less rosy, particularly in Greece.

That speaking and listening skills are significantly higher among our respondents than reading and writing skills is unsurprising. Like many endangered minority languages, Aromanian has always been a predominantly oral language. Being written in three different scripts (Latin with varying numbers of diacritics, Cyrillic and Greek) and none of the proposed orthographic standards being widely accepted have not helped the spread of Aromanian literacy; neither have the large print runs of some Aromanian books funded by Aromanian patrons. Literacy and especially standardisation are not prerequisites for language survival. It has long been argued that, contrary to the common view, “standardisation creates not uniformity but more (and hierarchical) heterogeneity” and an “opposition of values between standardisers and speakers” (Gal 2006: 171, Matras 2021). Furthermore, top-down standardisation processes may not be necessary because standards can also evolve bottom-up, as is currently the case with the use of Aromanian on the web. The internet has generally become “a sort of *spring* for Aromanians” (Integra Nau 2023), because it facilitates communication among Aromanians across borders and brings together like-minded community members in social media groups.

Fishman’s GIDS, along with most other vitality scales, regards intergenerational transmission in the family as the most important factor in language survival. Intergenerational transmission is clearly still the main source of learning Aromanian in all countries where it is spoken (see Figure 6) and is particularly strong in Romania, but also in North Macedonia. This places Aromanian at least on Stage 6 in Fishman’s GIDS, one of the stages intended to attain diglossia or stable bilingualism. With regard to the GIDS, questions have been raised about how beneficial diglossia may be for minoritised languages and how sustainable bilingualism can be. The results on fluent speaker estimates by age group and country (see Figure 5) clearly show that stable bilingualism is a distant aim for Greek Aromanians. That being said, the responses to the question on who participants learn Aromanian from (see Figure 6) indicate that Greek Vlachs are trying to “compensate” for the lack of intergenerational transmission by going online to learn Aromanian. This suggests that education (and literacy) should set in when intergenerational transition starts crumbling (Romaine 2006) and should not wait (Fishman 1991). Formal language learning seems to

contribute to some extent to the vitality of Aromanian in North Macedonia, where it is partly government-funded.

Figure 6 on sources of language learning also shows that Aromanian has a broader base in Romania and Greece than in North Macedonia because other family and community members are involved in passing the language onto younger generations. Bilingual acquisition studies have demonstrated how important input from various sources is for high proficiency levels in more than one language (Alahmadi 2019). We saw that the open-ended answer option for this question supports the close-ended results, and the quote by the Macedonian respondent from Kruševo furthermore echoes a concern that surfaces repeatedly in the community: more children attend a crèche and/or kindergarten at an increasingly earlier age, which impacts intergenerational transmission and necessitates the provision of Aromanian crèches and kindergartens to compensate for the lack of intergenerational transmission in the home.

Critics of ethnolinguistic vitality scales frequently comment that factors cannot easily be separated. Attempting to do so, we argue, would weaken studies working with vitality factors, as results on one factor can support results on another (or not), as we have already seen in the previous paragraphs. The same holds true for the question on domains and frequency of use (see Question 11, Figure 7), which supports our findings on why Aromanian seems to have higher vitality in Romania and North Macedonia than in Greece. In the former, a strong group of participants say they “always” use Aromanian in the home domain and with friends, neighbours and in the community, which is not the case in Greece. If, in addition, we take the results on main interlocutors and frequency of use (see Question 7, Figure 8) into account, evidence is accumulating on why the future looks more promising for Aromanian in Romania than in the other countries we have evidence for, and the picture on the intersectionality between domains of use (see Question 11, Figure 7) and sources of language learning and intergenerational transmission (see Question 9, Figure 6) is getting more nuanced. Respondents to the RISE UP survey who live in Romania not only say they “always” speak Aromanian with their immediate and extended family, i.e. in the home domain, but are also more frequently in a relationship with another Aromanian speaker and pass their language on to their children when they are. The finding that the frequency of use of Aromanian with children mirrors that with partners indicates that speakers

of Aromanian do not generally intergenerationally transmit the language when in an exogamous relationship. This may also pose a danger for Aromanian in Romania and can be addressed by informing parents about research on simultaneous bilingual language acquisition, which shows that there are cognitive advantages to growing up bilingual (e.g. Sorace 2011).

As already indicated in the results section, the extremely limited use of Aromanian in religion/worship, employment, the educational context and government shows that Recommendation 1333 for the protection of Aromanian culture and language, in which the Council of Europe (1997) recommends the use of Aromanian in exactly these domains to all countries where Aromanian is spoken, has had limited to no effect. The use of Aromanian in the leisure domain and online environments is encouraging and suggests two promising domains for counteracting language shift. The findings on the frequency of use of Aromanian in arts and culture are not necessarily in line with the picture painted by community activists and suggest that Aromanian is more frequently used on stage than off.

The results on language ideological and attitudinal questions which revealed that Greek respondents sit more on the fence on the national language ideological questions than the respondents from North Macedonia and Romania; and that Aromanian has less prestige in Greece than in North Macedonia and especially Romania, are probably a consequence of political events in the 20th century and national (language) policies. The Balkan Wars, World War II, the Romanian national movement and educational policies in the Balkans, the civil war and the military dictatorship have led to a tabooing of minority topics in Greece, which also influences the Aromanian community. Many Greek Aromanians and their stakeholders do not want to be seen as an ethnolinguistic minority. Beis and Dasoulas (2017: 52) even talk about a refusal to transmit the language to the younger generations, and the Ohrid Resolution⁴ (September 3, 2023) notes that the “transmission of the Armã language to the younger generations has almost completely stopped” in Greece. This is also what the RISE UP survey found (see Question 10, Figure 5). Since Greece joined the EU, these discourses are slowly changing, and there are some attempts at reinvigorating the

⁴ Resolution signed at the International Conference “25 Years after Recommendation 1333/1997 on the Armã Culture and Language of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe”, held in Ohrid, Republic of North Macedonia, from September 1–3, 2023.

Aromanian language by teaching it. Greece, however, did not participate in the preparation of Recommendation 1333 on Aromanian culture and language (Council of Europe 1997), nor has it signed the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

The political situation of Aromanians and the Aromanian language is considerably more favourable in North Macedonia, where Aromanians are an officially recognised minority and the Aromanian language has co-official status with Macedonian in the municipality of Kruševo (since 2001). The Macedonian government provides financial assistance to Aromanian-language media, and North Macedonia has one of the most active Aromanian communities (Gica 2011, RISE UP community consultants). All these ecological factors likely contributed to the high response rate to the RISE UP questionnaire in North Macedonia and the language ideological and attitudinal results. It is, however, noteworthy that the higher political profile of Aromanian in North Macedonia has also led to proportionally more North Macedonian respondents strongly agreeing with the statement that the use of more than one language creates social problems/makes social unity difficult than any other national response group.

The support for Aromanian provided by the Romanian government(s) has been described as insufficient to “preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their language, traditions, cultural heritage and religion” (Council of Europe 2023). The relatively high prestige and vitality of Aromanian in Romania thus probably go back to the national movement of the late 19th and early 20th century and an autonomous movement that has been gaining strength since the early 21st century.

This (language) political background of Aromanian in Greece, North Macedonia and Romania naturally also contributes to Greek and Romanian respondents agreeing that not enough is being done by regional and national governments to keep Aromanian alive.

8. Summary and conclusion

We saw in the introduction that the aim of RISE UP is to counteract the vulnerability of endangered languages and safeguard cultural diversity. The project seeks to empower minoritised language communities by identifying good practices already in place and developing methods for the protection,

maintenance and revitalisation of minoritised languages through a multi-disciplinary approach.

In order to identify effective ways and methods to support the revitalisation of endangered languages and promote sustainable linguistic ecologies that support peaceful co-existence and multilingual expertise, the project needed to have an up-to-date basis. To achieve this, we conducted an online survey among all of RISE UP's case study communities. The results of the Aromanian questionnaire from the three countries from which we have sufficient responses were presented in this contribution. They are summarised in the following paragraphs.

The results on proficiency/fluency self-ratings identified a strong group (55%) of respondents who self-rate as fluent or almost fluent in all 4 skills; most of them are from Romania, followed by North Macedonia and Greece (due to a lack of data from Albania, Bulgaria and Serbia, no conclusions can be drawn about Aromanian in these countries). The difference between speaking & listening and reading & writing self-ratings is highly significant ($p < .001$). Fluent speakers mainly belong to the over-30 age groups, especially in Greece.

Intergenerational transmission is the main source of language knowledge; the online environment and especially the educational context play a marginal role. In communities where intergenerational transmission is disrupted, the online environment and formal language learning contexts play a bigger role.

With regards to domains and frequency of use, the RISE UP survey established that Aromanian is mainly used in the home, neighbourhood and community domains; it is barely used in religion/worship, employment, education and official business. Leisure and arts & culture are promising domains for the use of Aromanian, though there are many art events where Aromanian is never or hardly ever used.

The main interlocutors that keep Aromanian alive are (grand-)parents, siblings and other family and community members. The use of Aromanian with children mirrors its use with spouses/partners. In Romania, the use of Aromanian with spouses/partners, children, friends and the online community spike at both ends of the Likert scale, either "always" or "not applicable" to create a "U" shape. For North Macedonia, the spike at the "never" and N/A end of the scales is higher than that at the "always" end to create a "J" shape. For Greece, it is a cline towards "never" and N/A within

the family, with occasional use in the community, with friends and the online community.

The results on language ideologies and attitudes reveal that opinions on whether public/official communication should occur only in the national language are divided; only in North Macedonia, there is a trend towards “agree”. More respondents agree with the statement that the official language(s) of the country they live in represents national identity than disagree; the reverse is true for multilingualism creating social problems/making social unity difficult. Most respondents selected “neutral” in response to the question if Aromanian has more prestige than the national language(s), with a slight trend towards “disagree”, especially in Greece. There is almost unanimous agreement that, for the survey participants, using/learning Aromanian is a strong part of their identity and that being able to use/learn Aromanian makes them feel connected with whom and where they come from.

Respondents feel that enough is being done to keep Aromanian going by members of the Aromanian community and community organisations/representatives, but not by regional and national governments.

Respondents report good use of existing resources, facilities and services, but resources are lacking most in media, literature and non-fiction, digital services, completions and awards, and events, least in music. Resources are furthermore felt to be lacking most for infants, children, teenagers and young adults, less so for adults and senior citizens.

RISE UP is hearing the message that Aromanian is the language variety that is closest to 83.5% of respondents’ hearts and is working with the communities to counteract the vulnerability of the language and culture through developing a toolkit for the protection, maintenance, and revitalisation of Aromanian and the other minoritised language communities it is working with through a multi-disciplinary approach.

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