Teamwork in Eastern Europe

Bible translation for the Ruska Roma

Imagine the following scenario. You've grown up in the church and been a member your entire life—indeed, it has been part of your people's history for a long time. However, you've never heard a church service or read the Bible in your native language. How might this hinder your ability to flourish spiritually?

The Ruska Roma of Ukraine and the surrounding regions were in this very situation. Though they belong

Region:	**Ukraine**
People group:	**Ruska Roma**
Language:	**Ruska Roma**
Native speakers:	**173,000**
Status:	**Superficially Reached***

*status from Joshua Project

TRANSLATION OVERVIEW

People involved: **42**
Time active: **2021 - present**
Current goal: **Full Bible**
Outside funding: **$44,000**

to various denominations, all the churches in the region use Russian in their services and read Russian Bibles. Most of the Ruska Roma can understand Russian, but reading the Word of God in a second language does not have the same impact as reading it in one's native language, the language one uses at home to talk to family and friends.

Many of the Ruska Roma expected that this was the way things would always be. "I have been in church ministry for 20 years," said a Ruska Roma pastor, "I never thought that we would have a church service in our language." They didn't realize how great the need
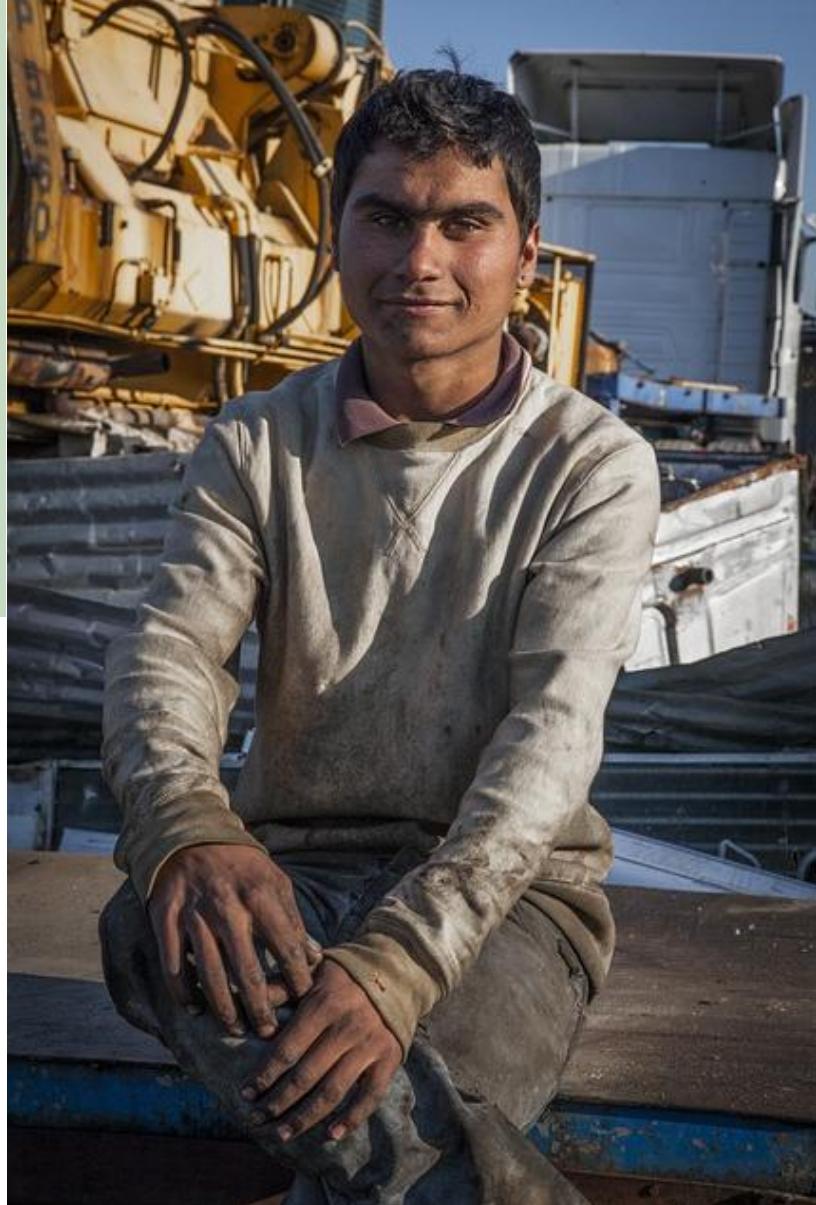
> ❝ **I never thought that we would have a church service in our language.**
>
> **Ruska Roma pastor**

was until they started learning about Church-Based Bible Translation and the Strategic Language Initiative.

Strategic languages

The Strategic Language Initiative is one of the keys to Church-Based Bible Translation. Rather than treating

each of the world's 7,000+ languages as a separate project, organizations promoting CBBT have identified ~200 strategic languages that connect to every other language in the world through patterns of multilingualism. When biblical resources are made available in the strategic languages, speakers of minority languages can translate them for their own people.

One of these strategic languages is Russian. Many minority language groups across Eurasia, including the Ruska Roma, have high levels of fluency in the language. That means that these language groups can acquire Scripture and discipleship resources by

translating them from Russian. Fortunately for the Ruska Roma, this vision has become a reality—thanks to some help.

A team of pastors, theologians, and biblical language experts, representing multiple Eastern European countries, is providing open-licensed resources for translation work in the region. They are making these resources available in Russian—the lingua franca. In 2021, they were looking to test the resources they had been developing by deploying them in a minority language translation project. They chose to work with the Ruska Roma.

Translation begins

Pastor Stephan*, a local church leader, played a key role in the project's early stages. He didn't initially speak Ruska Roma, but he knew many people who did, and so helped assemble a translation team.

The translation work began with 3 John. Why this book? The letter comes to only fifteen verses, meaning that a team can quickly progress through the entire process of CBBT, from drafting to checking to distribution—allowing them to gain experience before drafting longer books.

The Ruska Roma team remained enthusiastic throughout the process. The translation work revealed theological insights in the text that they had never seen before. While initially cautious about distracting from the translation work, the resource team eventually decided to allow more time for the Ruska Roma team to discuss these insights as they went through the text together. This is a great example of how CBBT enables theological formation alongside Bible translation.

Since electronic devices are uncommon among the Ruska Roma, the team decided to distribute the finished draft to the local churches as print copies. The churches received it eagerly and gave the team helpful feedback, enabling them to improve the translation and render it relevant to the community's needs.

"This is an event of historical importance," said Pastor Stephan. "This is the first book of Holy Scripture in the Ruska Roma language. The Word of God in Ruska Roma will be able to spread with greater speed."

> **" This is an event of historical importance.**
>
> ### Pastor Stephan

After completing 3 John, the Ruska Roma team turned to translating a collection of 50 key biblical stories

from the entirety of Scripture called Open Bible Stories. The resource team decided that this would equip them to translate longer, more complicated books of the Bible. In 2021, the Ruska Roma team finished drafting and checking Titus and Ruth. By 2024, the team had completed Open Bible Stories, Jonah, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Obadiah, and 2 John, with Esther currently in progress.

The resource team is also benefiting from the Ruska Roma project. They have helped the team at each step of the way, providing not only initial training but also continual guidance through the form of training videos, drafting procedures, project management, and even new software. Though they supplied the Ruska Roma team with extensive assistance, they did so with an eye toward developing a long-term capacity for Bible translation in that people group. Encouraged by the results, they have also started Bible translation in another minority language in Eastern Europe.

Thanks to Church-Based Bible Translation, these language groups will no longer need to use Russian in church. The word of God is arriving in their languages at long last.