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Section 4.11.3 Interpretation borders

NGOs have repeatedly reported inadequate efforts by national authorities at the EU's borders to overcome language and cultural barriers due to a lack of interpretation services and poor translations of information. This often prevents migrants from meaningfully understanding their rights.938

In addition, reports suggested that some individuals who were returned to the border of Bulgaria were requested to sign untranslated papers and were not provided with interpretation.939 Similarly, in Poland, individuals allegedly pushed back to Belarus by Border Guards were not provided with information in a language they understood.940 While assessing the need for an interpreter in a case of detention at the border, the Administrative Court of Bialystok confirmed that digital translation tools used by the Border Guard in Poland may suffice if correct information is conveyed. An Amnesty International report mentioned how, in the framework of an informal cross-border expulsion policy, Lithuanian authorities disregarded procedures and failed to provide adequate interpretation to asylum seekers.941

The importance of interpretation in the context of a border procedure was reiterated also by UNHCR in its recommendation to the French and Czech EU Presidencies.942

A lack of interpreters at the borders for some languages spoken by minorities was highlighted by NGOs in Spain. As a result, some interviews were conducted in a language other than the one spoken by the applicant or in certain cases over the phone.943 To address some of the gaps, UNHCR funded the setting up of an interpretation service specialised in African languages, to support stakeholders involved in sea arrivals and help with interpretation in reception centres, medical services and detention.

A new call for tender was launched by Frontex to provide reliable, flexible and high-quality interpretation and cultural mediation services in support of its operational activities at the EU's borders. The contract provides for 112 interpreters and cultural mediators to provide in-person and remote interpretation and a pool of 20 interpreters for rapid deployment who are on 24/7 standby and can work remotely.944

In the context of Frontex operations, a group of interpreters deployed in Greece, Italy and the Canary Islands launched a petition calling for better working conditions.945 Addressing the

issue, Frontex specified that the company which was contracted to provide interpretation services is responsible to ensure its employees a remuneration in compliance with applicable social and labour laws. In addition, the agency wrote a letter to the contractor expressing concern, reminded them of the contractual obligations and contacted the signatories of the petition to clarify the issue.946

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