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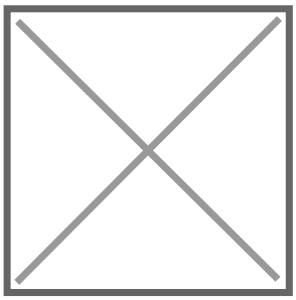
4.11.5 New working methods

Remote interviews and interpretation quickly became the preferred mode during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the European Commission recommended that Member States use remote simultaneous interpretation, and where videoconferencing was not technically feasible, to explore all means possible to ensure remote simultaneous interpretation.[921] Asylum authorities, such as BAMF and the Swedish Migration Agency, already had the mechanisms in place and resorted to remote interpretation services to a greater extent than before. Other countries needed to establish the system for the first time.

Countries such as Germany,[lii] Norway and Sweden conducted personal interviews with remote interpretation using different communication software since April 2020.[922] Similarly, in Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands and Switzerland, interpretation was provided through videoconferencing from a different room. Swedish NGOs cautioned, however, that important nuances might get lost during remote interviews and interpretation.[923] To tackle this challenge, the Irish Refugee council provided training to interpreters on how to work remotely.[924] Slovenia was not able to purchase the technical equipment to ensure distance interpretation and videoconferencing but is currently developing such a system for the future, during the epidemic and in the implementation of interpretation for some rare languages.

Authorities in Czechia used interpretation by teleconference at times since they reported a shortage of interpreters during the pandemic, which created delays in the asylum procedure. This was echoed by JRS Europe, noting that asylum interviews were delayed or postponed because interpreters would refuse to be physically present.[925] Issues were reported also in Hungary, where interpretation through videoconferencing was sometimes difficult due to a bad connection.[926]

Some countries followed a different approach. In Denmark, for example, plexiglass barriers were installed to separate the interviewer, the applicant and the interpreter. Likewise, the Danish Refugee Appeals Board also used plexiglass barriers separating board members and secretariat staff from the applicant, the interpreter, the first instance representative and the lawyer. Similarly, in France, Italy and Luxembourg, plexiglass panels were used to separate the interviewer from the applicant, the lawyer and the interpreter, while the use of a mask was mandatory.[927] In addition to the mask, Slovakia introduced an air purifier in the rooms and required a self-declaration to be signed by the interpreter. However, EASO operations personnel in Malta cautioned that face-to-face interviews with protective personal equipment required additional efforts by both interpreters and applicants for clear comprehension.[928]



[lii] In addition, branch offices at the operational level are instructed to book the nearest interpreters.

[921] European Commission. (2020, April 17). *COVID-19: Guidance on the implementation of relevant EU provisions in the area of asylum and return procedures and on resettlement*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020XC0417(07)&from=EN

[922] European Asylum Support Office. (2020, June 2). *COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems*. https://easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/covid19-emergency-measures-asylum-reception-systems.pdf

[923] European Council on Refugees and Exiles. (2020, December 7). *Information Sheet 7 December 2020: COVID-19 Measures and Updates Related to Asylum and Migration Across Europe*. https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ECRE-COVID-information-sheet-Dec-2020.pdf

[924] AIDA Ireland. (2021). *Country Report: Ireland - 2020 Update*. Edited by ECRE. Written by Irish Refugee Council. https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AIDA-IE_2020update.pdf

[925] European Council on Refugees and Exiles. (2020, April 23). *Information Sheet 23 April 2020: COVID-19 Measures and Updates Related to Asylum and Migration Across Europe*. https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-INFO-23-April.pdf

[926] AIDA Hungary. (2021). *Country Report: Hungary - 2020 Update*. Edited by ECRE. Written by Hungarian Helsinki Committee. https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AIDA-HU_2020update.pdf

[927] European Asylum Support Office. (2020, December 7). *COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems: Issue No 3*. https://easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/COVID-19%20emergency%20measures%20in%20asylum%20and%20reception%20systems-December-2020_new.pdf

[928] European Asylum Support Office. (2020). *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on EASO Malta operations*. https://www.easo.europa.eu/impact-covid-19-pandemic-easo-malta-operations

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