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4.11.3. Providing interpretation

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Boosting human resources to manage increased arrivals

icon for boosting human resources in interpretation
As the number of asylum applications steadily increased during the year, some countries deployed more interpreters to cope with the rising demand. This was highlighted by the Ombudsperson in Cyprus, who noticed improved communication for residents in reception centres when using more interpreters.975
To handle the increased number of applications from West and Central African countries in Slovenia, the authorities issued short-term contracts (rather than going through public tendering procedures) to quickly employ interpreters with knowledge of rare languages. In Malta, a tender was published to subcontract interpretation services in general.

Several Member States signed agreements with civil society organisations, international organisations and private companies to provide interpretation throughout the asylum procedure. This was the case in Italy, where a shortage of interpreters was observed during the lodging of an application.976 Under a framework of cooperation with the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior, an NGO established special teams, including interpreters, to assist unaccompanied minors from the moment of disembarkation until first accommodation.977

Likewise, METAdrasi has an agreement with the Greek authorities to provide interpretation in 36 different languages/dialects to assist applicants from 72 different countries.978 Moreover, UNICEF Greece worked with METAdrasi to provide interpretation to refugees and migrants who are survivors of gender-based violence. The number of languages and dialects available were diversified from 3 to 22, at 26 service delivery points, for this particular group.979

In 2021 Luxembourg increased the budget for the Directorate of Immigration for translation and interpretation by 2.8%, while in practice it spent 32% more for these purposes in 2021 compared to 2020. The costs allocated to the National Reception Office (ONA) for experts, studies and translations decreased by 38%.

In Lithuania, the Ministry of the Interior signed a memorandum of understanding with the Red Cross to organise translation services in various dialects, share their expertise with social workers working with migrants, and act as intermediaries between municipal communities and

government representatives to ensure effective communication with illegal migrants.980

Through its operational activities to support asylum and reception authorities, the EUAA provided interpretation services to certain countries in 2021. The Operational Management Centre in Latvia requested the assistance of the EUAA due to a shortage of interpreters in Kurdish/Arabic.981 The EUAA provided 20 interpreters to assist with asylum and reception procedures.982 In Lithuania, the EUAA deployed 72 interpreters in 2021 under the operating plan.983 In December 2021, Belgium and the EUAA signed an operational agreement to support the reception system with 100 additional resources, including interpreters. 984

Nonetheless, other countries were faced with inadequate resources to provide sufficient interpretation services. For example, FRA highlighted the limited availability of interpreters for return procedures across EU+ countries, with an overall shortage of qualified interpreters for specific languages, issues with reimbursement procedures and ceilings, and an absence of interpretation for preparatory consultations.985

In Spain, ECRE reported that appropriate interpretation services were not always guaranteed in the first stages of the asylum procedure.986 In Estonia, the Police and Border Guard Board reported that they had limited interpreters available if there was a mass influx of new arrivals. 987

In Bulgaria, increased arrivals and the limited availability of interpreters meant that case officers had to conduct interviews also over the weekend, which was the only time slot when interpreters were available. In addition, the ECtHR overruled the return of a Turkish journalist, in part due to a lack of interpretation services which would have been essential for Bulgarian authorities to assess the risk of persecution.

Practical challenges brought by COVID-19 still remained an issue during 2021 for some countries. For example, Belgian authorities reported a high number of cancellations of interviews due to absences or illnesses of interpreters.

Access to interpretation in detention was reported by the National Ombudsperson to be an issue in Bulgaria.988Likewise, UN CAT989 and the Ombudsperson990 reported a lack of interpreters for refugees and asylum seekers in detention in Lithuania *(see Section 4.8)*.

flag of Afghanistan

Box 4.4 Interpreters from Afghanistan

Interpreters are usually employed by national authorities to provide assistance during the asylum procedure, but sometimes interpreters themselves are granted international protection as a result of the services they provide. This was the case in 2021 for Afghan interpreters cooperating with western forces during the war. Following the Afghanistan crisis, interpreters were one of the profiles evacuated or entitled to humanitarian admission in the EU 991and other

countries 992 as they were in danger of being persecuted by the Taliban.

Quality assurance

icon for quality assurance in interpretation

To further finetune mechanisms of interpretation provision, EU+ countries focused on improving the quality of interpretation. One method was through specialised training to interpreters on the specific context of international protection. For example, interpreters in Portugal attended the EASO training module “Interpreting in the Asylum Context”.

In Italy, the IOM and NGOs organised periodic training for interpreters working in immigration offices. In addition, a platform is being developed for the exchange of information between the National Asylum Commission and territorial branches. It will contain a section for interpreters with training courses and other resources.

In Finland, new quality assurance modalities for interpretation services were put in place in 2021 after the launch of the project Tulppani in 2020. As of 2021, the International Protection Agency’s interpreters in Malta are bound by a code of conduct to increase professionalism and performance. The Swedish Migration Agency published a legal position on the requirements for interpreters and translators to work in the asylum context.993

In Slovenia, new copyright agreements were ongoing for translation and interpretation in international protection proceedings. And UNHCR updated the Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures in German.994

NGOs in Spain recommended that the authorities need to develop a training and certification mechanism to ensure quality. They called for resources to be invested in regular monitoring to address the gaps in specialised knowledge to interpret in the asylum and migration fields.995

Civil society organisations in Ireland reported deficiencies in training for interpreters in the asylum setting.996 UNHCR also pointed out the variations in the quality of interpretation in Ireland and stressed the need for a regulation on interpretation services.997 This was echoed by the Translators and Interpreters Association, which called for standardisation in the provision of interpreters in the asylum context.998 In addition, UNHCR stressed the need for a better selection and training of interpreters, for example those working with children999 and LGBTIQ applicants.1000

A study in Sweden revealed an urgent need to improve the quality of interpreters in asylum determination procedures, ensuring specific training modules and knowledge and sensitivity about the subject matter.1001

Interpreters in health care

icon for interpreters in healthcare

There was a shortage of interpreters in all sectors connected with asylum and immigration in Croatia, especially in social services, education and health care.[1002] Similarly, the Greek National Commission for Human Rights observed a wide gap in the provision of health and psychological services in Samos due in part to a lack of support from interpreters.[1003] For example, the psychologist in the pre-removal detention centre in Kos does not have access to interpreters and therefore cannot communicate with most applicants.[1004]

The OFII medical service launched a pilot project in three major French cities (Marseille, Strasbourg and Toulouse) in June 2021. Medical screening is done in the presence of an interpreter for all new asylum applicants. In addition, the government plan on vulnerabilities, which was presented in May 2021, foresees improving interpretation and mediation in health care.

In Austria, Arabic and Dari-Farsi interpreters were engaged to assist doctors in their consultations with patients receiving the COVID-19 vaccination.[1005] However. legal advisors noted that police doctors in detention facilities did not consult interpreters during a medical examination. [1006]

In Spain, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child reported that the interpreter was not involved in the medical examination of a child undergoing an age assessment. A similar issue was reported in Czechia, where the Constitutional Court indicated a violation when an age assessment was held without interpretation.

Challenges in second instance procedures

icon for challenges in interpretation in second instance procedures

There seemed to be particular challenges in providing interpretation for second instance asylum applications in 2021. In Portugal, for example, interpretation to prepare an appeal was difficult to secure, as the law does not specify if this expense is included in free legal aid.[1007] In Estonia, the law firm must initially bear the costs of interpretation, which can be reimbursed once the proceeding is concluded. [1008] Similarly, interpretation for an appeal in Bulgaria is subject to the availability of funds of lawyers, who must pay for these services at their own expenses.[1009]

The Finnish Supreme Court ordered the reimbursement of interpretation costs after the Administrative Court rejected the fee as unjustified on the basis of the applicant's allegedly good understanding of English. The Supreme Administrative Court in Finland also recognised procedural errors during an appeal by an Iraqi national whose hearing was held in Kurdish Soranese instead of Badini.

Hearings were disrupted in Ireland until May 2021, specifically for second instance procedures. In part this was due to general COVID-19 restrictions but also because providing interpretation for video hearings was not covered in the contract of interpreters.[1010]

Languages and dialect not covered

icon for languages that are not covered

The lack of interpretation in certain languages continued to be reported in several Member States. NGOs highlighted the shortage of specific languages in Croatia, resulting in overburdening existing resources and undermining the quality of services. There was also a lack of female interpreters.1011 Authorities mentioned similar issues in Belgium, where female interpreters for Somali were limited and interpreters were not available for some rare African languages. Norway, at the same time, pointed out that they did not have enough interpreters immediately fort Uyghurs, when the authority suddenly received an increased number of applications.

NGOs reported that there was a serious shortage of interpreters in Spain for applicants who do not speak English, French or Arabic.1012 In particular, this was seen on the Canary Island, where interpretation was not available for a number of languages and dialects spoken in several sub-Saharan African countries, in addition to insufficient interpreters for Wolof, Bambara and Moroccan dialects. The shortage led to situation where interpretation was given as a collective service or not provided at all.1013

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