

4.11.3. Providing interpretation

4.11.3. Providing interpretation

Boosting human resources to manage increased arrivals



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.⁹⁸⁸ Likewise, UN CAT⁹⁸⁹ and the Ombudsperson⁹⁹⁰ reported a lack of interpreters for refugees and asylum seekers in detention in Lithuania (see [Section 4.8](#)).



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



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 children[999](#) 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



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



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



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 for 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

975-1013

⁹⁷⁵ Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights | ?????????? ?????????? ??? ?????????? ?????????? ??????????. (2021, December 31). ?????? ??????? ?? ??? ?????????? ??????????? 20 ??????????? 2021 ??? ?????? ?????????? ??????????????? ??????????? ??? ?????????? (?????) [Report of the visit on 20 September 2021 at the detention centre of illegal migrants at Menogia (DCIM)]. [http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/FB1778C45E7E5870C22587D40044B825/\\$file/XC](http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/ombudsman/ombudsman.nsf/All/FB1778C45E7E5870C22587D40044B825/$file/XC)

⁹⁷⁶ Waldensian Diaconate | Diaconia Valdese. (2021, August 22). Monitoraggio prassi illegittime - Report sulle prassi riscontrate presso le Questure italiane [Monitoring of Illegal practices - Report on the practices at the Italian Immigration Police Offices]. https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/MONITORAGGIO_prassi-Questure.pdf

⁹⁷⁷ Ministry of the Interior | Ministero dell'Interno. (2021, June 8). Minori non accompagnati, accordo tra Viminale e Terre des Hommes per nuove misure di sostegno [Unaccompanied minors, agreement between Viminale and Terre des Hommes for new support measures] [Press release]. <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/notizie/minori-non-accompagnati-accordo-viminale-e-terre-des-hommes-nuove-misure-sostegno>

⁹⁷⁸ METAdrasi - Action for Migration and Development | ?????????? – ?????? ??? ?? ?????????????? ??? ??? ??????????. (2021, November 15). 2020 Annual Report: 1st of January 2020 – 31st of December 2020. (According to the law 4308/2014). https://metadrasi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Annual-report-2020_EN.pdf

⁹⁷⁹ United Nations Children's Emergency Fund. (2021, September 30). Greece – Refugee and migrant response: Overview: Gender-based violence programme. https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/18121/file/GBV_Greece_Fachsheet___September_2021.pdf

- [980](#) Ministry of Interior | Lietuvos Respublikos vidaus reikalų ministerija. (2021, August 3). Raudonasis Kryžius: mūsų ekspertai ir savanoriai padės užtikrinti efektyvią komunikaciją su migrantais [Red Cross: Our experts and volunteers will help ensure effective communication with migrants]. <https://vrm.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/raudonasis-kryzius-musu-ekspertai-ir-savanoriai-pades-uztikrinti-efektyvia-komunikacija-su-migrantais>
- [981](#) Ministry of the interior | Lekšlietu ministrija. (2021, August 18). Aktušie jautājumi uz Latvijas-Baltkrievijas robežas: tulku trūkums, termiņuzturēšana atpauzās pierobežā un individuāli izvērtējumi [Current issues on the Latvian-Belarusian border: lack of interpreters, temporary residence permits at the border and individual assessments] [Press release]. https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/aktualie-jautajumi-uz-latvijas-baltkrievijas-robezas-tulku-trukums-terminuzturesanas-atlaujas-pierobeza-un-individuali-izvertejumi-0?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu/word-edit.officeapps.live.com%2F
- [982](#) European Union Agency for Asylum. (2021, September 9). Operating plan agreed by EASO and the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia. https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Operating_Plan_EASO_Latvia_0.pdf
- [983](#) European Union Agency for Asylum. (2021, September 14). Operating plan agreed by EASO and the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania. https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Amendment_Operating%20Plan_EASO_Lithuania_14.09.2021.pdf
- [984](#) European Union Agency for Asylum. (2021, December 16). Belgium: EASO launches operation to support reception authorities. <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/belgium-easo-launches-operation-support-reception-authorities>
- [985](#) European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021, November 4). Legal aid for returnees deprived of liberty. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-legal-aid-in-return_en.pdf
- [986](#) European Council on Refugees and Exiles. (2021). Boosting asylum in Spain - Making the most out of AMIF funding: ECRE's recommendations for Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) spending in Spain. Policy Note 37. <https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Policy-Note-37.pdf>
- [987](#) Estonian National Broadcasting | Eesti Rahvusringhääling. (2021, July 8). PPA: Estonia could cope with mass immigration, but needs more translators. <https://news.err.ee/1608270594/ppa-estonia-could-cope-with-mass-immigration-but-needs-more-translators>
- [988](#) Ombudsman | ?????????? ?? ?????????? ??????????. (2021). Annual Report of the Ombudsman acting as National Preventive Mechanism 2020. https://www.ombudsman.bg/pictures/Annual%20Report%20NPM%202020%20-%20SUMMARY_EN_.pdf
- [989](#) United Nations, Committee against Torture. (2021, December 21). Concluding observations on the 4th periodic report of Lithuania. CAT/C/LTU/CO/4. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3954251?ln=en>
- [990](#) Office of the Seimas Ombudsmen | Lietuvos Seimo Kontrolieriai. (2021, October 11). Regarding the Lithuanian submission to the UN Committee Against Torture for the review of the 4th Periodic Report of the Republic of Lithuania (NHRI and NPM reporting). https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CAT/Shared%20Documents/LTU/INT_CAT_NHS_LTU_46978_E.pdf
- [991](#) European Council on Refugees and Exiles. (December 2021). Afghans seeking protection in Europe: ECRE's compilation of information on evacuations, pathways to protection and access to asylum in Europe for Afghans since August 2021. https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Evacuations-pathways-to-protection-and-access-to-asylum-for-Afghans-in-Europe_FINAL.pdf
- [992](#) Human Rights Watch. (2021, June 8). Afghanistan: Exiting Forces Should Protect Interpreters: NATO Members, Australia Should Expedite Relocation of Local Staff. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/08/afghanistan-exiting-forces-should-protect-interpreters>

- [993](#) Swedish Migration Agency | Migrationsverket. (2021, February 2). Rättsligt ställningstagande. Lämplighetsprövning av tolkar och översättare - RS/001/2021 [Legal position. Assessment of the suitability of interpreters and translators - RS/001/2021]. <https://lifos.migrationsverket.se/dokument?documentSummaryId=45242>
- [994](#) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021). Trainingshandbuch für DolmetscherInnen im Asylverfahren [Training handbook for interpreters in the asylum procedure] (2nd updated edition). <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=618a84434>
- [995](#) European Council on Refugees and Exiles. (2021). Boosting asylum in Spain - Making the most out of AMIF funding: ECRE's recommendations for Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) spending in Spain. Policy Note 37. <https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Policy-Note-37.pdf>
- [996](#) The Irish Times. (2021, August 14). Lost in translation: 'You can be shocked by the bad news you have to interpret': Lack of minimum standards for interpreters has knock-on effect for vulnerable people. <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/lost-in-translation-you-can-be-shocked-by-the-bad-news-you-have-to-interpret-1.4644674>
- [997](#) European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021, September 24). Migration: Key fundamental rights concerns: Bulletin 2 [Quarterly Bulletin]. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/migration-key-fundamental-rights-concerns-bulletin-2-2021>
- [998](#) TheJournal.ie. (2021, April 24). Poor interpreting having impact on patients, victims of crime and those seeking asylum. <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/interpreter-inadequate-service-5388479-Apr2021/>
- [999](#) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021, November 28). Technical Guidance: Child-friendly Procedures. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/61b7355a4.html>
- [1000](#) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (June 2021). LGBTIQ+ Persons in Forced Displacement and Statelessness: Protection and Solutions [Discussion Paper]. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/611e16944.html>
- [1001](#) Migration Studies Delegation | Delegationen för migrationsstudier (2021, May 5). Tolkfunktioner i asylprocessen [Interpretation in the asylum process]. <https://www.delmi.se/en/publications/knowledge-overview-2021-4-the-interpretation-functions-in-the-asylum-determination-process/>
- [1002](#) Swiss Refugee Council | Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe | Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés. (2021, December 20). Situation of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection with mental health problems in Croatia: Report and recommendations of the Swiss Refugee Council. https://www.osar.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/Dublinlaenderberichte/211220_Croatia_final.pdf
- [1003](#) Greek National Commission for Human Rights | ?????? ?????????? ??? ?? ?????????? ??? ??????????, & European Network of Human Rights Institutions. (2021, July 14). National Report on the situation of human rights of migrants at the borders: Executive Summary. https://www.nchr.gr/images/English_Site/PROSFYGES/Greek-Executive-Summary.pdf
- [1004](#) Equal Rights Beyond Borders. (2021, July 3). Consequences of the EU-Turkey Statement: The Situation of Syrian Asylum Seekers on the Greek Aegean Islands. https://equal-rights.org/site/assets/files/1300/210705-consequences_of_the_eu-turkey_statement_equalrights.pdf
- [1005](#) Austrian Integration Fund | Österreichische Integrationsfonds. (2021, September 24). COVID-19-Impfstraße im ÖIF-Integrationszentrum Wien [COVID-19 vaccination route in the ÖIF integration center in Vienna]. <https://www.integrationsfonds.at/positionen-des-direktors/beitrag/covid-19-impfstrasse-im-oeif-integrationszentrum-wien-11692/>
- [1006](#) European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021, November 4). Legal aid for returnees deprived of liberty. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-legal-aid-in-return_en.pdf

[1007](#) European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021, November 4). Legal aid for returnees deprived of liberty. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-legal-aid-in-return_en.pdf

[1008](#) European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021, November 4). Legal aid for returnees deprived of liberty. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-legal-aid-in-return_en.pdf

[1009](#) European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2021, November 4). Legal aid for returnees deprived of liberty. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-legal-aid-in-return_en.pdf

[1010](#) Dublin Inquirer. (2021, July 28). Pleading for Sanctuary Through a Language Barrier Was Tricky Enough - Doing That Online Is Even Harder, Some Asylum Seekers Say. <https://www.dublininquirer.com/2021/07/28/pleading-for-sanctuary-through-a-language-barrier-was-tricky-enough-doing-that-online-is-even-harder-some-asylum-seekers-say>

[1011](#) Swiss Refugee Council | Schweizerische Flüchtlingshilfe | Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés. (2021, December 20). Situation of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection with mental health problems in Croatia: Report and recommendations of the Swiss Refugee Council. https://www.osar.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/Dublinlaenderberichte/211220_Croatia_final.pdf

[1012](#) European Council on Refugees and Exiles. (2021). Boosting asylum in Spain - Making the most out of AMIF funding: ECRE's recommendations for Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) spending in Spain. Policy Note 37. <https://ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Policy-Note-37.pdf>

[1013](#) Spanish Ombudsman | Defensor Del Pueblo. (2021). Migration on the Canary Islands. https://www.defensordelpueblo.es/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/04/INFORME_Canarias-EN.pdf