

Please cite as: EUAA, 'Section 4.11. Interpretation services' in *Asylum Report 2023*, May 2023.

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Interpreters play a key role throughout the asylum procedure to ensure that the exchange of information between an applicant and the asylum authority is accurate and understood by both parties. They are pivotal in enabling applicants to tell their story in their own words. Thus, skilled interpreters can reflect the nuances of a dialect and address the specific needs of applicants with vulnerabilities. Interpretation helps to reduce misunderstandings and cultural biases, and promotes mutual understanding and respect.

The support of interpreters is important not only during the personal interview but also in providing information at the first stage of an asylum application and during daily life in reception. While the recast APD sets out the legislative provisions for interpretation, the recast RCD calls for information on reception conditions to be given in a language that the applicant understands or is reasonably supposed to understand. It does not, however, mention interpretation for other purposes.

Some Member States have well-developed interpretation services with qualified and experienced interpreters, while others may have limited resources or capacity to provide these services. This can lead to disparities in the quality of interpretation services, which can have a significant impact on the fairness of the asylum process and the result of the final decision. Furthermore, there may be issues related to the integrity and impartiality of interpreters, which can impact the accuracy of interpretation.

In 2022, legislative changes affecting interpretation in the asylum procedure were introduced by some EU+ countries. Several initiatives to improve interpretation services were put forward, especially in the context of health care services and preventing the trafficking of human beings. Civil society organisations continued to raise concerns about interpretation at the border.

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