

Do you need professional interpreters?

Your job may involve assisting migrant communities from different backgrounds who speak a range of languages, and to overcome the linguistic barrier you possibly received help from colleagues or volunteers from your organisation who speak other languages, called upon user's family members or friends, or perhaps even communicated using a shared third language or translation App. But is that the right approach? And would it apply to every circumstance?

There are many situations in which service users can benefit from the right of access to professional interpreters. Professional interpreters should be used in interviews and meetings whenever their outcome involves the granting of rights, access to public resources or inclusion in programs that facilitate or improve social integration, employment and financial situations. The same should apply for matters related to physical or emotional well-being.

The use of professional interpreters improves the quality of communications and furthermore guarantees that service providers and users are able to express themselves effectively in their own language.

How and where to find professional interpreters

You can contact specialised commercial agencies, language service providers and freelancers, but other options to find the best suited professional for the service you need are also available:

- you can contact local, regional, national or international associations of qualified interpreters and translators, as they may offer online directories of their members, call centres or other booking services;
- you can browse official or institutional registers, kept by credentialing or certification authorities;
- you can also seek information from higher education institutions providing interpreter training.



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Frequently asked questions

The organisation/project I work for has no budget for language services. What should I do?

When requesting external funding for projects that cover migrant communities, you should allocate budget for translation and interpreting to ensure a quality service. If this is not the case, a procedure could be established to engage only professional linguists to collaborate with the organisation whenever the need arises.

Would engaging the user's family members or friends as interpreters become an issue?

The use of ad-hoc interpreters could jeopardise the communicative success of the interview or assignment. The user may feel uncomfortable describing some events in the presence of close members from their community, who in turn may filter the information according to their own beliefs, values, and traditions. Using minors as interpreters should be avoided at all costs since they lack the required maturity and training to interpret.

When working with interpreters, I always wonder if everything said to me was interpreted and whether the user actually understood what I said.

Professional interpreters have the required skills and expertise to fully and accurately translate everything spoken. Some identifying aspects of non-professional interpreters are: their utterances are shorter than the original message, they don't carry a pen or notepad to take notes; they take control of the conversation, intervene of their own accord and have separate conversations with one of the

parties; their interventions are not smooth, with constant corrections and false starts; their body language indicates they are uncomfortable, nervous or unsure of what they are translating; they use a very different linguistic register than that expected from the user, etc.

During interviews we handle very sensitive information and documents, which is why we avoid hiring interpreters from outside the organisation.

Professional interpreters abide by ethical principles that include keeping everything interpreted or learned at work confidential. Do remind interpreters about confidentiality and ask them to sign a non-disclosure agreement, when the situation calls for it. If you work with ad-hoc interpreters, quickly brief them on the main ethical principles and ensure that they are fully aware of the limits of their engagement.

Why do I need an interpreter? Wouldn't an intercultural mediator be better?

Although interpreters and mediators have common goals like guaranteeing communication, there are differences in the way they achieve this. Interpreters are trained to be impartial and to boost the full communicative independence of the parties. Mediators not only perform other tasks unconnected with the communicative exchange (cultural awareness workshops, conflict mediation), but also intervene by asking their own questions whenever they think these might facilitate communication. Interpreters, on the other hand, only intervene when strictly necessary and do so informing both parties of that decision.

Tips for identifying user language/s

Literate users could be shown a language chart or short phrase list of languages you think they speak, such as:



Otherwise, show them a map to identify their country of origin or a list of national flags, such as:

-  Chinese
-  Spanish
-  Tamil
-  Polish

Remember that:

- Sometimes, there may not be an exact match between a country and a language. For example, Hindi is not spoken by the entire population of India.
- Users may speak a *lingua franca* like French or English, but not at the level required for effective communication.

Effective communication through interpreters in the third sector



MELINCO. Mediación lingüística para a cooperación ao desenvolvemento

Universidade de Vigo



XUNTA DE GALICIA



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What is the role of an interpreter?

To accurately transmit an oral or signed message from one language to another in any type of communicative event.

Who is a professional interpreter?

It is someone with the necessary skills and training to deliver quality interpretation and moreover, abide by ethical principles and good professional practice.



A professional interpreter ...

- will guarantee full confidentiality of everything dealt with;
- will faithfully and fully interpret everything covered during the event;
- will act transparently and neutrally, without favouring any of the parties;
- will promote direct communication between the participants;
- will refrain from making value judgments;
- will facilitate intercultural communication;
- will respect professional boundaries and not accept assignments that he or she is not adequately prepared for; and
- will communicate any possible conflict of interest that may affect the assignment.

And thus ensure full communicative autonomy of the parties and the success of the event.

Interpreting Formats

Interpreting can be classified into the following two main formats, based on whether or not the parties involved are present at the meeting venue.

Face-to-face interpreting:

All parties are in the same venue.



Remote interpreting:



The interpreter or another participant is in a remote location. There are two possibilities:

- **Telephone interpreting:** where only audio is transmitted.
- **Video-conference interpreting:** where both audio and video are transmitted.

Recommendations for working with interpreters

Before the communicative event

Interviews and meetings with speakers of other languages should be planned well in advance. Verify whether they need an interpreter and, if so, find out the language and specific dialect they speak. Pay attention to aspects like their nationality or gender. Keep these factors in mind when selecting a suitable interpreter for the event. When confirming the assignment, provide the interpreter with information to help prepare for the event: the exact location of the event, description of participants, objectives, format (e.g., an interview as opposed to a training course), etc. Let them know of any specific documentation (e.g., forms, technical reports, or manuals) that may be used. If possible, provide a copy of the documents and any additional material that may be useful. A **short briefing** to discuss these or any other matters may also help.



During the communicative event

At the start of the session, explain why an interpreter is present and how the encounter will take place. The interpreter will then explain the basic ethical principles observed and how he/she will intervene to ask for clarification or explanations. It is important to agree on the proper placement of the interpreter, in relation to the other participants, to ensure unobstructed sound and view, in order to facilitate smooth and direct communication. If any tense situations are anticipated, interpreter should be placed where personal safety is not at risk.



After the communicative event

At the end of the session, a conversation or **short debriefing** with the interpreter would help clarify any questions. Check to see how the person is feeling if the session has involved any tensions, or if traumatic or sensitive issues have been addressed.

Interpreting techniques

Three interpreting techniques (or a combination of them) may be used depending on the purpose and format of the communication exchange:

- Consecutive interpreting:** involves just the one interpreter who listens to the interlocutors, takes notes, and then interprets. The scenarios in the third sector are best suited for liaison or bilateral interpreting, where **dialogues** (e.g. interviews) of varying lengths are interpreted, with the interpreter working in both language directions. There may be also **monologues** (e.g. training courses and group briefing sessions) where interventions can be longer and interpreting is provided only into the target language. In both cases, the interpreter can take notes to support memory.
- Sight translations:** written documents (for example brochures, forms, informed consents, etc.) are orally translated into the target language by the interpreter.
- Simultaneous interpreting:** involves interpreting into the target language in real time with a minimum time lag. It can either be whispered interpreting (without external aids) or through the use of dedicated technical equipment (booths, microphones, headsets, or a portable interpreting system).