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Summary report: Ad-hoc query on interpreting in reception facilities (AHQ 2022.63)

CONTEXT

Different from the asylum legislation, especially in the context of the asylum interview, there is no obligation under the Reception Directive (2013/33/EU) to use interpreters in reception facilities. However, the use of interpretation (understood broadly as the practice of conveying a message from a source language to a target language) facilitates communication between the staff and the linguistically diverse group of residents in reception facilities.

Fedasil, the Belgian Reception Agency, aims to harmonise the use of interpreters in its reception facilities and is therefore interested to know if EMN Member States have established guidelines or instructions (e.g. policy directive, administrative decree, ...) on the use of interpreting services and how these services are provided in reception facilities.

The query also addressed the use of remote interpretation by video calls, as Belgian reception facilities have successfully experimented with them in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Online interpretation allows to overcome practical limitations, such as sanitary and distance requirements. It is also considered advantageous compared to telephone interpreting because it allows for improving the quality of conversations.

Fedasil would also like to inquire about the organisation of interpreting in reception facilities in other EMN Member States. In Belgium, reception facilities do not employ their own interpreters and depend on external service providers to provide interpretation or on multilingual staff and sometimes residents.

INTRODUCTION

This summary report analyses the results from the ad-hoc query on interpreting in reception facilities, requested by the Belgian National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, EMN Belgium, on behalf of the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) on 16 November 2022. This report was produced by Nicolas Van Puymbroeck, Staff member of the Study and Policy Unit of Fedasil. Twenty-three Member States have answered the ad-hoc query (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria,

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Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden).

SUMMARY

In contrast to the asylum legislation, especially in the context of the asylum interview, there is no obligation under the Reception Directive (2013/33/EU) to use interpreters in reception facilities. However, the use of interpretation (understood broadly as the practice of conveying a message from a source language to a target language) facilitates communication between the staff and the linguistically diverse group of residents in reception facilities.

Fedasil, the Belgian Reception Agency, aims to harmonise the use of interpreters in its reception facilities. Therefore, the query focused on the existence of formal guidelines or instructions (e.g. policy directive, administrative decree, ...), on the use of interpreting services and on how these services are provided in reception facilities in the EMN Member States. The query also addressed the use of remote interpretation by video calls, as Belgian reception facilities have successfully experimented with them in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Online interpretation allows to overcome practical limitations, such as sanitary and distance requirements. It is also considered advantageous compared to telephone interpreting, because it allows to improve the quality of conversations. The query also inquired about the organisation of interpreting in reception facilities in EMN Member States. In Belgium, reception facilities do not employ their own interpreters, but depend on external service providers or on multilingual staff and sometimes residents to provide interpretation.

This report is structured in accordance with the original questionnaire, which was composed of six questions. Where applicable and appropriate, citations have been provided to illustrate the results.

In summary, **six key findings** can be discerned:

1. A minority of Member States have (extensive) formal requirements and guidance, including specific legislation, on the use of interpreters in the field of reception. However, this does not impede Member States from using interpretation services. All Member States use (at least) occasionally interpreting services. When formal guidelines are provided, they are seldom comprehensive, leading many issues to the discretion of reception facilities, including the contexts which require interpreters, who can provide interpretation and how.
2. Member States generally prefer certified interpreters but often allow multilingual staff or residents to do the interpretation. On-site interpretation is equally preferred, yet remote interpretation has been developed in most Member States as well.
3. A majority of Member States provide video call interpretation possibilities but mention that this requires precautionary and preparatory measures to ensure privacy and technical support.
4. Almost no Member States have their own interpreters. Reception authorities do however consider language skills during recruitment procedures to reduce the need for interpreting services.
5. Interpretation services are mostly provided by external agencies that have been appointed through a public procurement process on a central level. Budgets are often heterogeneous, including AMIF funding. The European Union Agency for Asylum, EUAA, is also increasingly providing support through interpreters.

6. Most Member States experience difficulties in finding interpreters, especially for very rare or very frequently requested language combinations.

Question 1. Does your Member State have guidelines, legislation, policy directives that allow and regulate the use of interpreters in reception facilities? YES/NO. If yes, please attach the directives/guidelines and describe the content.

Eight Member States (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) answered negatively and nine (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain) answered positively to the question of having guidelines, legislation, policy directives that allow and regulate the use of interpreters in reception facilities. Also, six countries (Estonia, France, Luxemburg, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia) did not affirm or deny the question directly. Instead, they gave a description related to the use of interpreters. Sometimes this information was related to the asylum procedure, which transcends the scope of the query. In general, the information provided by Member States who did not explicitly answer the question was mostly negative. Therefore, we can conclude that the majority of Member States have little or no formal guidelines on the use of interpreters within reception.

For those who answered the question positively a majority has a specific legal basis to provide interpreters in reception. This is the case for Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands. In a number of Member States, the legislation on reception contains a specific article addressing the responsibility to provide interpretation. For instance, Belgium's Reception Law stipulates in Article 15 that "The Reception Agency or its partners should ensure that beneficiaries of reception have access to the services of interpretation and translation agencies to enable them to exercise their rights and duties as specified in the law. The Reception Agency or its partners can establish agreements with service providers or agencies that are specialised in providing interpreting or translating services." In Finland, "the Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings provides for reception services. According to Section 13 of the Act, reception services include interpretation and translation services." If not in the reception law as such, it might also be in other legal texts that the provision of interpreters is included. For instance, in Italy, it is the "Terms of reference 2021 which regulates the interpretation services in Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers".

Looking into the content of the formal guidelines, they might include information on the need for an interpreter as such. For instance, in Finland, "according to Section 27 of the Act, the reception centre must take care of interpretation or translation if the customer does not know Finnish or Swedish". Whether there is a threshold degree of knowledge of a national language, below which an interpreter should be provided to an applicant, was not specified by any of the Member States. Interestingly, a few Member States explicitly mentioned the use of non-national languages as an alternative to using interpreters. For instance, in Hungary "communication is ensured by multilingual staff, mostly using the English language." Slovakia was the only Member State that mentioned the use of translating applications "especially for immediate basic communication, while verifying the meaning and understanding as well by different expressions, if possible."

There can also be formal guidelines on the language combinations for interpretation. Some Member States explicitly mentioned other languages than the applicant's mother tongue. For instance, in

Finland “the matter can be interpreted or translated into a language that the customer can reasonably be expected to understand. (...) The interpreter may not necessarily interpret into your mother tongue if there is another language that you understand sufficiently well.” This is also the case in Slovenia, although a preference for the mother tongue of the applicant will always be implemented: “We could say, that in some cases, non-national languages are used as relay language. For example, if there is no interpreter for the mother tongue of the person, and the person in question speaks two or more languages, we will make sure an interpreter is available who will translate into the other language of choice. Nevertheless, our policy is to provide an interpreter for the mother tongue of any person.”

The formal guidelines can also include information on the contexts in which interpreters should be provided. This topic is sometimes addressed at the level of reception legislation. In Greece for instance, the reception law mentions a range of specific instances that might require an interpreter, in particular “information provision after the submission of an international protection application, communication with unaccompanied minors, medical examinations, or in the context of the reduction or withdrawal of material reception conditions.” In Austria, “legal counselling and return counselling” were explicitly mentioned as contexts in which the help of interpreters can be required. It is more common however that specific guidelines on the use of interpreters are provided at an operational level. For instance in Finland, “according to the guidelines of the Finnish Immigration Service, reception centre employees may book an interpreter to help in situations where they handle important official matters that concern the customer. For example, information sessions organised by the reception centre will be interpreted into a language that the customer understands. An interpreter is often booked for visits to the nurse, the social worker or the social counsellor. (...) Reception centres will not book an interpreter for all everyday situations.” Also in Belgium, a set of internal quality reception guidelines has been validated which contains several standards on the contexts in which interpreters are required, in particular during psychological and medical counselling. In other Member States, such as the Netherlands, the contexts in which interpreters are available are regulated in the framework agreements with contracting agencies. In general, settings in which rights and obligations are discussed, as well as medical settings, psychological counselling in particular, are often mentioned by Member States as contexts in which interpreters might be required, but there seems to be less agreement on whether social counselling and daily interactions in reception facilities also require the help of interpreters.

Formal guidelines sometimes also contain information on who can(not) perform interpretation. In Finland, “according to Section 28 of the Act, the reception centre may not use persons as an interpreter or translator if they are in such a relationship with the customer or the matter that their reliability or that the safety of the customer may be jeopardised. Interpreters and translators always have an obligation to maintain secrecy.” In Italy, there is an explicit requirement to have both male and female interpreters available: “The service is organised by the employment of an adequate number of male and female linguistic-cultural mediators in an instrumental manner with regard to the other services provided in the centre”. In Belgium, a specific guideline prohibits children are asked to provide interpretation, especially not to their parents.

In few Member States, there are explicit formal guidelines about the type of interpreter, for instance, certified interpreters. In the Netherlands, “COA deploys interpreters that are provided by the external service provider ‘Global Talk’. Global Talk is required, in principle, to deploy interpreters that are registered with the Bureau of Sworn Interpreters and Translators (*Bureau Wet beëdigde tolken en vertalers – Bureau Wbtv*). The Bureau of Sworn Interpreters and Translators manages the Register of Sworn Interpreters and Translators (*Rbtv*), for certified interpreters, and the Relay List, for uncertified interpreters, respectively.” In Belgium, the type of interpreters that can be consulted is related to the

type of contexts in which they have to perform. More specifically, “according to the quality guidelines, reception staff should use interpreters or (inter)cultural mediators during psychological counselling. In medical consultations, the requirements are less strict. Although interpreters or (inter)cultural mediators are recommended, reception staff can also interpret if the resident agrees. Only when no other interpreting options are available, can residents be accompanied by fellow residents or acquaintances to interpret in the medical field. For social and legal counselling, the requirements are less strict. The quality guidelines recommend first evaluating if a reception staff member can perform interpretation. If not, either an interpreter or a resident can be used. In case there is no personal connection between the resident in need of interpretation and the resident-interpreter, the former always has to give their consent.”

In a few Member States, there exists formal guidance on how interpretation should be performed. There was little mention in the answers about specific grounds for on-site, telephone or video call interpretation. For example, the Netherlands responded: “The manner in which interpreters provide their services to applicants for international protection or refugees in reception centres is not regulated and may be in person, by phone or by video call. In practice, the reception facility staff decides which means of communication is best suited for the situation at hand.”

Importantly, it should be stressed that the absence (or limited content) of formal guidelines does not exclude the use of interpreters in reception centres. In fact, all Member States have mentioned that interpreters are (at least) occasionally used. For example, in France, despite the absence of clear formal guidelines on whether and when to use interpreters, “the use of professional interpreting (excluding the intervention of family members) is therefore, in practice, a major budgetary priority in the centres and a fairly widespread practice in the various establishments.” In Luxembourg, “The National Reception Office (ONA - Office national de l'accueil) has in the primary reception centres a dedicated unit of interpreters. This unit is managed by the Luxembourg Red Cross (Luxembourg reception law does not provide for such a unit) which has a yearly convention with the Luxembourg State. The service works with interpreters who speak more than 45 languages and dialects.” Also in all other Member States interpreters are used. It should be investigated in more detail how the presence or absence of formal guidelines is related to the use of interpreters.

Question 2. When using interpretation in reception facilities, can you indicate who provides interpretation (e.g. (certified) interpreters, (intercultural) mediators, multilingual staff, multilingual residents) and how (e.g. on-site, by telephone, by video call, etc.)?

The second question inquired into how and who performs interpretation in practice. As was previously mentioned, all Member States use interpreters on an occasional basis, also when there is no formal guidance. In a majority of 14 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain) interpretation was available on-site or remotely by telephone and video call. In three cases (Cyprus, Hungary and Portugal) interpretation was only performed on-site. In four cases (Czech Republic, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Sweden), apart from on-site interpretation, remote interpretation was only performed by telephone, not by video call. From the answers provided by Finland and Greece, it was unclear if video call remote interpretation was available alongside phone interpreting and on-site interpretation.

Although almost all Member States offer the possibility of on-site and (a kind of) remote interpretation, this does not mean that both options are equally used in practice. As already mentioned in the case of the Netherlands, reception staff should decide by themselves which type of interpretation they prefer. A number of Member States mention that remote options are used when no interpreters on-site are available. This can be because no interpreters are present in the reception facility, or because interpreters cannot come to the reception facility for a range of reasons, for instance, financial reasons or in emergency situations. In the case of Greece for example “the option of remote interpretation is used only in cases where the required language is not available by physical presence. (...) Interpreters assist all reception procedures with physical presence (which is the most common modality) or remotely (Microsoft teams, telephone) in case there is a need for interpretation in a rare language (e.g. Somali, Amharic, Tigrinya, Krio, Lingala, etc.).” In Luxembourg “in case of an emergency and if interpreters are physically unavailable a telephone call can be arranged.” Also in Lithuania “at the Refugee Reception Centre, interpreters typically work on-site. Interpretation is provided by phone only as an exception.” In Slovenia, “in case of a lack of an interpreter for a specific language, remote interpretation by video call is used via the application Zoom.” In Spain “before the pandemic, interpretation through telephone calls and video calls was used for some situations, especially in the case of infrequent dialects, and especially when interpreters could not travel.” Distance was also an important reason to use remote interpretation in Austria: “Apart from Vienna, there is no fixed assignment of interpreters to specific locations. All locations make use of the existing pool of interpreters. Using video interpreting, it is possible to react flexibly to existing needs by accessing this pool of interpreters.”

Although there seems to be a preference for on-site interpretation, this does not imply that remote interpretation is seldom used across the Member States. For instance, in Finland “interpreting remotely or by phone is common.” Regarding more specifically the possibility of remote interpreting by video call, it should be noted that this is the latest progress in many member states and generally lags behind. For instance in France “the use of video-conference or video-call is still not very developed (...) but is a subject that several associations in charge of reception centres are trying to promote as an alternative to phone exchanges.”

Regarding who can perform interpretation in reception facilities, seven Member States (Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal) answered that they only allow interpreters with a type of proven expertise. In the rest of the Member States, interpretation can be performed by a range of people, including multilingual staff and residents. Some Member States do have an explicit preference to use so-called ‘certified’ interpreters first. The option to include other people can be related to situations in which certified interpreters are not available. For instance, in the Netherlands the service provider “Global Talk is required to first try to match interpreters from the Rbtv [Register Register of Sworn Interpreters and Translators], if this is unsuccessful, Global Talk can relay to the Relay List. Only when this also does not lead to a desired match, Global Talk can deploy other unregistered interpreters.” Using non-expert interpreters might also be related to the context during which the interpretation is to be performed. For instance, in France, the level of required expertise is related to the importance of the conversation: “Moreover, professional interpreters or multilingual staff in the reception centre are generally preferred to ensure interpretation for social, administrative, legal and health-related support. Volunteer interpreters can be mobilised for workshops and language courses. Multilingual residents can be called upon to facilitate understanding between the persons supported in the reception centre and the staff for any other situation, or as long as the confidentiality of the exchanges is assured.” Also in Belgium, the level of required expertise for interpreters is often related to the context of the conversation. Yet, an additional factor in Belgian reception facilities is the likeliness to find someone who can interpret on-site very quickly. Fellow reception staff and

multilingual residents often have the advantage of being physically available, whereas certified interpreters are at best directly available for remote interpretation.

There is no common standard across Europe that institutionalises the interpreter profession. Therefore expertise can be attested and certified in different ways. Some reception authorities have their own expertise assessment. For instance, in Austria “interpreters are subject to competence and quality control which can be proven by a demonstrable subject-specific qualification or the positive completion of the course ‘Interpreting for the Asylum and Police Sector’ as well as a positively completed competence check. External interpreters are subject to an initial competence check and/or an internal competence check by Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services (*Bundesagentur für Betreuungs- und Unterstützungsleistungen - BBU*), depending on whether they successfully provide evidence of a prior qualification. Interpreters with a university education in interpreting as well as official court interpreters receive an accreditation once they have provided proof of the necessary qualification.” In Greece “the Central Service of the Reception and Identification Service keeps a Registry/interpreters list/intercultural mediators who meet the following criteria: sufficient knowledge of the Greek language, optimal knowledge of the requested language, are Greek citizens or foreigners who reside legally in the country.” Reception authorities may also rely on interpreter listings drawn up by other governmental agencies, such as in the example of the Netherlands given above or as is the case in Flanders in Belgium. Member States may also rely on service providers to be responsible for the level of expertise of interpreters. In Poland “the framework agreement concluded between the Ministry of Interior and the provider of translation services applies also to translations and interpretation outside the asylum procedure (procurement/open public tender). (...) If the interpreters are from the Agency (Provider), then they are certified interpreters.”

Looking into the content of the certification, different elements can be discerned. The first element concerns the linguistic level of competence an interpreter has in the source and target language. For instance, in Greece: “Interpreters in the context described above, are certified both on the source language (or combination of languages) and the relay language (usually Greek, English, or both).” Importantly, none of the Member States has referred to the European Framework of Reference for Languages and the required linguistic levels of competence. A second element concerns the subject-specific qualification to interpret in the field of asylum, for instance, knowledge of the asylum procedure and relevant terminology. This was only explicitly mentioned by Austria. Interestingly, none of the Member States explicitly referred to interpreting skills, such as note-taking or consecutive translation. Apart from knowledge and skills, several Member States did mention that interpreters have to go through security checks before they can be employed. For instance, in Croatia “a list of translators/interpreters is published on the official website of the Ministry, and they all must undergo a detailed security check before concluding a contract with the Ministry. For all official purposes, we use people who are on that list.” Member States that also use non-professional interpreters have flagged that this might involve security concerns. For instance, in Slovakia “some of the experts working in the facilities are multilingual, at least to some extent. As we are lacking the interpreters of some languages, or we need immediate assistance, we also ask other residents for their support, bearing in mind the potential risks (so their services are not used in sensitive personal issues).” For this reason, in Belgium, applicants always need to give their consent when fellow residents provide interpretation.

In the context of who can provide interpretation, some Member States also made reference to ‘(inter)cultural mediators’ or ‘community interpreters’. In the case of Italy, a mixed category was used of “the linguistic-cultural mediation service”. As mentioned by Belgium “from a conceptual point of view, it is important to distinguish interpretation, which consists in the practice of faithfully and

neutrally conveying a message from a source language to a target language, from (inter)cultural mediation, which consists in establishing a relationship of understanding and trust between people from different backgrounds. Often (inter)cultural mediation is connected to linguistic differences which is why (inter)cultural mediators are also sometimes asked to perform interpretation as well.” In the Belgian case, “in 2017, the Federal Public Service for Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment launched a platform called ‘Intercult’ for (inter)cultural mediation, including interpretation, through video call. The medical services of reception facilities which are run by Fedasil can be granted access to the platform by obtaining a special login.” Recently, the Belgian reception authorities have also started recruiting directly a number of intercultural mediators, however, their official task is not to translate/interpret. Similarly, in Slovakia, the Department of Migration and Integration (responsible e.g. for social work in the asylum facilities) also cooperates with two community interpreters (Arabic and Farsi speaking) upon a common written agreement (per service fee applies in this case). (...) In the case of “community interpreters”, they are more like (intercultural) mediators.”

Question 3. If reception facilities in your Member State make use of remote interpretation by video conference or video call, can you explain how this is organised?

As mentioned above, a majority of 14 Member States enable remote interpretation through video calls. Several Member States have indicated that using an interpreter through video call requires additional precautionary and preparatory measures. On the level of infrastructure, this involves using a secure internet connection, and separate rooms which ensure privacy. For instance, in Croatia “for official purposes, we use the Ministry of the Interior network and computers with cameras. Skype and Microsoft Teams are the most common internet applications that we use. Communication takes place in explicit rooms with internet connection and with minimum possible interference or disturbance from other people.” In Estonia “in case of a video conference, the official usually uses his/her laptop and additional gadgets (such as a conference call speaker) in a separate room to assure privacy and better conversation quality.” In Lithuania “at the Refugee Reception Centre, the interpreter is provided with a computer in a separate room to ensure privacy.” Also in Poland “reception centres are equipped with the necessary equipment for video conference or video call, which is available to residents during the conversation. Separate rooms are available in the centres to ensure privacy and conversations are always conducted in the presence of an employee. In the rooms, conversations can be conducted in the scope of: interviews, matters regarding the current functioning of the centre, medical matters, and meetings with a psychologist.” Still, not all Member States take similar measures. For instance, in Malta “all AWAS (Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers) interpreters may use an office mobile and thus the video call can be organised.” In Finland, precautionary measures are also taken on a contractual level. Interpreters who work remotely need to sign an additional clause: “Phone and remote interpretations done for reception centres require the interpreter to take a non-disclosure agreement. The duty of the Finnish Immigration Service is to protect the processed information with sufficient and appropriate measures and requirements. When interpreting for reception centres, the interpreter must be in a place where others cannot hear the interpretation. The interpreter cannot therefore interpret from e.g. a public or semi-public space and outside parties must not have a line of sight to the space during the interpretation. After the interpretation is done, the interpreter must destroy the notes he/she has taken in an appropriate manner.”

Member States have also referred to the availability of remote services through video conference. Especially in Member States where video conference is still in its early stages and is not frequently

used, it seems as if video conference interpreters are less available than for instance phone interpreters. Reception facilities are required to plan ahead when they want to use interpreters through video conference. In Latvia, the “Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has a contract with translation companies that provide translation via conference or video call. This service has to be ordered in advance.” However, the example of the Netherlands suggests that the availability of video calls might be equal to phone interpretation: the service provider “Global Talk has developed an app for COA. With this app, COA employees can easily and rapidly request interpreting services by telephone or video call. The connection with the right interpreter is made within 3 minutes.”

Question 4. Does your Member State employ its own interpreters as reception administration or reception centre staff?

Only two Member States (Austria and Malta) answered that they recruit their own staff whose explicit task it is to provide interpretation. In the case of Austria, “The Federal Agency for Reception and Support Services (*Bundesagentur für Betreuungs- und Unterstützungsleistungen*) employs interpreters. If necessary, external interpreters are employed as independent contractors”. For Malta, no further explanation was given. Additionally, some Member States mentioned that their operating partners sometimes recruit interpreters or mediators as part of their staff. For instance, in Croatia “NGO and International organisations who provide services in reception facilities co-funded by AMIF fund have staff members for translational purposes with other activities.” Interestingly, Greece mentioned having “a special administrative Unit (...) competent to monitor the bodies or persons who cooperate in the provision of intercultural mediation or interpretation, in order to ensure sufficient interpretation in all reception and identification procedures in a language that the third country nationals/or stateless persons can understand”. Although Greece does not have its own interpreters, it does have a specific internal service to monitor the availability of interpreters.

Instead of recruiting interpreters, reception authorities sometimes take into account the linguistic skills of new staff to avoid needing interpreters. For instance, in Estonia “language skills such as Russian and English, are required when applying for a post in a reception centre so that the staff is able to communicate with residents in the facility at least on a basic level.” Also in Slovenia, the “Slovenian Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants has one social worker employed, who speaks Farsi and will have another social worker employed in the near future, who speaks Arabic.” In Italy, “when tendering for managing new reception centres, as outlined in the 2021 Terms of Reference, the presence of staff - other than the linguistic-cultural mediator - who possess an adequate level of English, Arabic or French, is an element in favour of the managerial body that submits a bid.”

Question 5. Do the reception facilities in your Member State use external service providers to perform interpretation? YES/NO. If yes, please indicate through which means you employ them (e.g. procurement/open public tender, per service fee, project funding (such as AMIF), operational support by EUAA).

The majority of Member States rely on external service providers to perform interpretation. The notion of external service providers covers a wide range of different actors. It can refer to interpreting agencies, being divided into non-profit and profit-based agencies. Interpreting agencies may have a

staff of interpreters or may also work with freelance interpreters or volunteers. Interpreting agencies may also be government-based. For instance, a rather unique situation occurs in Estonia, where the Police and Border Guard Board has “a special translation unit and certified interpreters are used of whom some can act as intercultural mediators at the same time. (...) Counsellors working in a reception centre (accommodation centre for asylum seekers) also has access to involve Police and Border Guard Board’s interpreters for performing counselling with a resident in the reception facility (legal counselling etc.)” Also in Belgium, medical services of reception facilities can use intercultural mediators provided by another government agency. Although external to reception, the mediators concerned are still recruited as part of a government agency. Also, the Flemish authorities have established their own interpreting agency. It does not employ interpreters and only takes a mediating role in connecting the demand for interpreters to the supply, provided by self-employed interpreters.

The decision on which external service provider performs interpretation is most often arranged at the central level of the reception authority. There are Member States (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain) in which the central authority establishes a public procurement process to appoint one or several external service providers. For instance, in the Netherlands “COA deploys interpreters that are provided by the external service provider ‘Global Talk’. The organisation ‘Asylum Seeker Healthcare’ (*GezondheidsZorg Asielzoekers – GZA*) which provides medical assistance to persons living in COA reception facilities deploys medical interpreters that fall within the agreement between COA and Global Talk. (...) The COA and GZA use the services of Global Talk on a procurement basis. In this procurement, besides a price, minimum standards for quality have also been established.” Likewise, in the Czech Republic “interpreting is provided by certified interpreters with whom a contract is concluded at the central level for interpreting in all facilities.” In Greece, it is at the level of the Ministry that public procurement is set up: “Reception authorities do not have direct work contracts with interpreters. The Ministry makes contractual agreements to cover interpretation needs through an open public tendering procedure.” Still, there are Member States (Belgium, Croatia, France, Portugal and Slovakia) in which no central public procurement is established. For instance, in France “some reception structures decide to contract with an interpreting company according to their operating budget within the framework of services provision and on bilateral contracts.” In Belgium, there is no public procurement as such and individual reception facilities cover interpreter expenses on a per-service fee.

In terms of budget, Member States have different ways to finance interpretation services. Several Member States (Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta and Slovenia) mentioned that they at least partly use AMIF project funding to cover interpretation. Other Member States indicate they use regular state budgets. Apart from Belgium, no other Member States went into detail on the amount of resources spent on interpretation. Five Member States (Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, and Slovenia) mentioned that they receive interpreter support from EUAA. This is in-kind support, in the sense that EUAA provides interpreters through its own sub-contractors which have been appointed by a European public procurement process.

Question 6. Does your Member State experience difficulties in finding interpreters for specific language combinations? Please specify whether non-national languages are (sometimes) used as a relay language.

All Member States except for Sweden answered the question. A majority of 15 Member States experience difficulties in finding interpreters. The most common explanation is the absence of

interpreters for rare language combinations with the national language. For instance, Austria experiences “difficulties in finding interpreters for specific language combinations, namely German in combination with e.g. Amharic, Bari, Brazilian Portuguese, Bengali, Burmese, Creole languages, Kurdish languages (Sorani/Badhini/Gorani), Igbo, Lingala, Malay, Maay Maay, Mongolian, Nepali, Swahili, Tamil, Tigrinya, Uzbek, or Yoruba.” Similarly, in France “there are real difficulties for reception facilities in meeting specific needs for specific languages. Some languages are not always represented by interpreting providers and some languages are not represented at all. This is the case with Burmese for example, for which no provider seems to be able to offer an interpreter. (...) The lack of or insufficient number of professional interpreters is, therefore, a blocking factor in the quality of care/support provided by the reception structures.” As mentioned by Italy, it is difficult to predict linguistic needs because asylum populations are changing rapidly: “Given the constant changes in the incoming flows, the nationalities/provenances and languages spoken also vary constantly throughout Italy.” Difficulties are not only restricted to exceptional interpretation needs but can also be related to frequently requested language combinations. For example, Pashtu and Tigrinya were mentioned by several Member States as languages for which there is a high need, but insufficient supply of interpreters. As explained by Finland “Sometimes there is a shortage of interpreters, because the volume of customers speaking the same language is suddenly very high.” To cope with interpreter supply, all Member States try to take recourse to non-national relay languages. However, even this strategy might not always be available. In Belgium for instance, not all reception staff have a sufficient level of English to use it as a relay language.

In seven Member States (Czech Republic, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal) (almost) no difficulties were experienced to find interpreters. In the Netherlands this is explained in reference to the language offer of the external service provider: “Global Talk offers interpreting services in 180 languages. This includes 17 variants of Arabic, 7 of Berber, 7 of Fulfulde, 6 of Chinese, and 5 variants of Kurdish. Global Talk manages to deliver almost 100% of the requested interpreting services.” There are also Member States such as Hungary that mention they do not experience difficulties because they allow non-national languages to be used as relay language: “No significant difficulties encountered. In case of problems, cross-interpretation (using English as an intermediary language between staff and English-speaking residents mediating) is used.” In the end, Member States that indicate they do not experience difficulties, might not necessarily rely to the same extent on interpreters as do other Member States. Linguistic needs may also greatly vary across Europe, related to the composition and number of asylum inflow. It is therefore important not to confuse this self-evaluation with an objective analysis of interpreter needs.
