



## **Useful information on managing interpreting services in Scotland during the conflict in Ukraine**

### **Introduction**

This information guide has been developed from a range of sources, including the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), the UNCHR Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum procedures, and the “Caring for children moving alone: protecting unaccompanied and separated children” MOOC (Massive Open Online Course developed by CELCIS in collaboration with partners including UNICEF, UNHCR and Save the Children). These resources do not, individually, specifically address the complete range and complexity of issues regarding the management of interpreting services that will be required in Scotland at present. However, together they provide a broad range of information and guidance that will aid consideration of how to quality assure individuals who offer interpreting services in response to the current conflict in Ukraine, and ensure that the children and adults who require interpreting services receive a high quality of service.

### **Defining the interpretation task**

The primary task of interpreters is to enable communication between participants who do not speak the same language and do not share the same cultural background. This means that interpreters:

- translate what has been said without adding or omitting anything or changing the content
- reproduce the content of the source text completely and accurately in the target language
- pay attention to participants’ non-verbal behaviour and culture-specific formulations and modes of expression, in order to better understand their utterances. For this, they need to know about intercultural differences in non-verbal communication.

Interpreters are only able to produce a correct and complete translation if they understand what the speakers mean and ask for clarification if something is not clear. The context in which the interaction takes place, knowledge about the nature and communicative norms of the type of interpreting event (e.g. an assessment) and information provided during the course of the conversation provide vital cues to the interpreters and help them comprehend the meaning of what is being said. When they have understood, they can reformulate the content in the target language. Generally, there is not just one correct and complete interpretation. The original message can usually be reproduced in the target language in many different ways, and all these translations can be correct and complete.

## **Interpreting services with children**

The impact of the current conflict in Ukraine, the trauma of being displaced, and for some the separation from family and friends, will profoundly impact on the physical and emotional well-being of children. Given these circumstances, it is preferable for children to have access to trained interpreters who are both trauma informed and trained to adapt their approach to take account of children's emotional, cognitive and social development. They must also provide for adequate time at the beginning and end of the interpreting session to create a friendly atmosphere where the child can remain calm.

Interpreters must also render, as precisely as possible, the specific linguistic modes of expression and argument used by children, which are usually different from those of adults. Interpreters must also refrain from changing the language used by children and young people.

The need for very high quality interpreters has been identified both by unaccompanied and separated children and by front-line workers. Children want to make sure that information they share is accurately recorded, and mistakes are not made that could jeopardise their situation either at that time, or in the future. It is also important that the interpreter can speak to the child in their language, so they know what is happening, give them information they need, and let them know what decisions are being taken. Inaccurate translation might result in what a child says being inaccurately recorded. This can greatly impact on subsequent decisions made on the basis of poor, incomplete, or inaccurate information.

UNICEF has recommended the following specifically in relation to interpreting services for children, to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place:

- Make sure that the interpreter has no control or influence over the child
- The interpreter should understand that they must translate what the child actually says, adding nothing, and leaving nothing out
- The interpreter should not change the child's answer in the interpretation, for example to improve grammar or to add detail
- The interpreter should not be allowed to take over the interview and to ask questions themselves: their role should be neutral
- The interpreter should be taught not to show shock, fear, or other strong emotional reactions which may influence the child
- Interpreters should remain calm and professional. They should be warm, non-judgmental, and open in their attitude to the child
- Consideration needs to be given regarding the gender of the interpreter, taking account of the appropriateness of the interpreting situation and the needs and wishes of the child.

This specific guidance was originally developed by UNICEF in response to the crisis in Kosovo, but remains relevant to the current conflict in Ukraine.

## **Culturally sensitive translation**

Language and culture are inseparably linked. Our culture influences our thinking, our language and the choices we make. Culture can be defined as the norms, conventions and beliefs which guide the behaviour of individuals or a social group.

Many of these norms, conventions and beliefs are culturally determined, and differ significantly between cultures. Often there are no equivalents in the target language for terms denoting concepts and practices in the child or adult's own culture. Interpreters do not translate de-contextualised words but they mediate between different cultures. It is important that interpreters:

- know and can identify culture-specific concepts and references and are aware of culturally determined behaviour that may be misread
- draw participants' attention to culture-specific concepts that may give rise to misunderstanding
- ask a participant to explain culture-specific concepts and references and then interpret these for the other person
- seek clarification if they feel that they do not (fully) understand interactants because of their use of culture-specific expressions and concepts. Cultural mediation **does not mean** that interpreters intervene to offer their own opinion or comment and pass judgement on whether a person's culturally determined behaviour is "correct" or "incorrect". If interpreters ask for clarification, they need to inform all participants about the questions they have posed and answers they have received.

### **Cultural mediators**

Some organisations working with unaccompanied and separated children also employ cultural mediators. A cultural mediator is someone who can facilitate successful communication between people of different cultural backgrounds. They can help a child understand the differences between the social, cultural, legal and other features of the background they come from and the one they have arrived in. They can also help child protection staff or other officials understand information provided by a child from a different background as well as help them understand aspects and perspectives of where the child has come from. It is important, however, that those working as cultural mediators really do have a full and sensitive understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of the cultural background of the child they are working with.

### **Suggested Code of Conduct**

The National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) is a UK-wide organisation which has a well-developed Code of Conduct for all professional interpreters that are registered with them: <https://www.nrpsi.org.uk/for-clients-of-interpreters/code-of-professional-conduct.html>

The Code of Conduct contains key principles and obligations in respect of interpreting and translating services, and could be adopted, and potentially adapted if necessary, by the Scottish Government. In the current context, we anticipate that many individuals who come forward to offer translation services in response to the Ukraine crisis will not be professionally trained interpreters. In this context, it will be particularly important for those who offer services to agree and sign up to a Code of Conduct, and to be offered support and training.