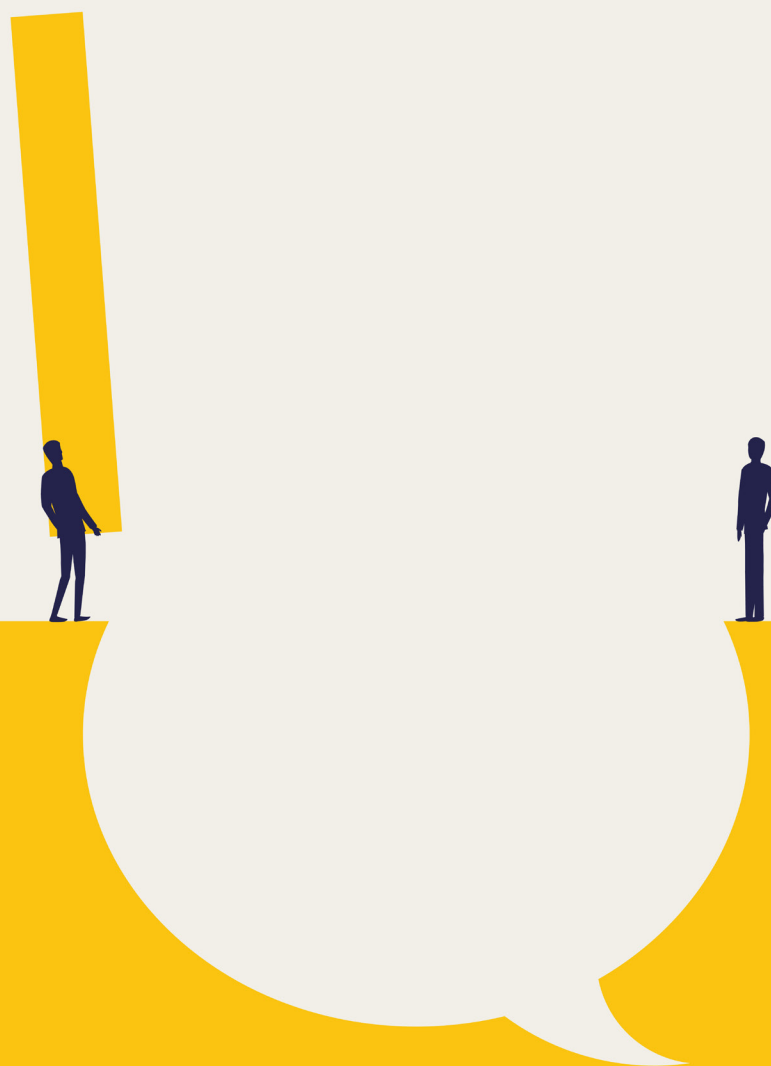


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# Interpretation in the Asylum Procedure

# **Practical Guide on Interpretation in the Asylum Procedure**

**February 2024**

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and EASO bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.



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## About the guide

**Why was this guide created?** The mission of the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) is to facilitate and support the activities of EU Member States and other Schengen countries (EU+ countries <sup>(1)</sup>) in the implementation of the Common European Asylum System. In accordance with the EUAA's overall aim of promoting the correct and effective implementation of the system and of enabling convergence, it develops common operational standards and indicators, guidelines and practical tools.

The Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC) is a state-led, multidisciplinary, interregional consultative process. It facilitates informal information exchange, policy debates and cooperation among its 19 participating states <sup>(2)</sup> on recent trends in international migration and emerging policy and operational challenges across the migration continuum, including procedures on interpreting in the asylum context.

Jointly developed by the EUAA and the IGC, this guide combines the wealth of expertise of both the EUAA Asylum Processes Network and the IGC transatlantic network of interpreting experts.

**How was this guide developed?** This guide was created by experts from EU+ countries and non-EU countries, with valuable input from the European Commission, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles <sup>(3)</sup>. Its development was facilitated and coordinated by the EUAA and the IGC. Before the guide's finalisation, a consultation was carried out with all EU+ countries through the EUAA Asylum Processes Network.

The EUAA and the IGC extend our thanks to the members of the working group who prepared the draft of this guide, including, among others, Farihah Karim, Fien De Pauw, Hetty Klinker, Nicola Fischer, Roska Weber and Rustem Yunusov. We also thank Sonja Pöllabauer, who shared her insights in a dedicated review.

**Who should use this guide?** This guide is primarily intended for interpreters in the asylum procedure. In addition, the tool is useful for interviewers, interpreter coordinators, quality assurance officers and any other people working or involved in the field of international protection.

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<sup>(1)</sup> The 27 Member States of the European Union and Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

<sup>(2)</sup> The participating states are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. The IGC participating states contributed to the development of this guide as part of the IGC network on interpreting in asylum procedures.

<sup>(3)</sup> Note that the finalised guide does not necessarily reflect the positions of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles.





**How does this guide relate to national legislation and practice?** This is a soft convergence tool and it is not legally binding. It reflects commonly agreed standards as adopted by the EUAA Management Board on 22 January 2024.

**Disclaimer**

This guide was prepared without prejudice to the principle that only the Court of Justice of the European Union can give an authoritative interpretation of EU law.





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# Abbreviations

| Abbreviation                                   | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>APD (recast)</b>                            | asylum procedures directive (recast) – Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast)                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>COI</b>                                     | country of origin information                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Dublin III regulation</b>                   | Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast)                             |
| <b>EU</b>                                      | European Union                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>EUAA</b>                                    | European Union Agency for Asylum                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Eurodac regulation</b>                      | Council Regulation (EC) No 2725/2000 of 11 December 2000 concerning the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of the Dublin Convention                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>IGC</b>                                     | Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>LGBTIQ</b>                                  | lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>qualification directive (recast)</b>        | Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast) |
| <b>reception conditions directive (recast)</b> | Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast)                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Refugee Convention</b>                      | Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), as amended by its Protocol (1967)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>SOGIESC</b>                                 | sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>THB</b>                                     | trafficking in human beings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |



# Introduction

The asylum procedure guarantees that those in need of international protection can enjoy it in a country of asylum. Interpreters play a key role in the procedure. They act as a mirror between all actors involved in the process. A particularly important role of interpreters is enabling the interviewer and the applicant to communicate with each other. Language is a key component in all stages of the asylum procedure. Throughout the asylum procedure, including the access to the procedure, the examination phase and the appeal procedure, it is essential that the applicant, the interviewer and the other participants understand each other fully. At the heart of the asylum procedure is the personal interview. This is the main opportunity for the applicant to present their claim for international protection along with all relevant information, based on which the authority will make a decision.

This practical guide is for interpreters working in the asylum procedure. In it, you will find clear and concrete information on:

- what you can expect when working in the asylum procedure;
- your role in the procedure;
- guidance on how to perform your tasks in line with international standards.

The guide starts by providing key information on the asylum procedure (its context, main stages and actors), with a focus on the personal interview. It continues by highlighting key principles that any interpreter working in the asylum procedure must uphold. It also provides specific guidance on how to interpret, including for remote interpretation. The guide then presents considerations related to applicants in a vulnerable situation and strategies for interpreting for them. Furthermore, it focuses on how you can take care of your well-being.

The guide is supplemented by the following additional resources to support you in your daily work:

- ten essential rules, to remind you of the most important aspects of interpretation in the asylum procedure (available as a poster and on the back cover of the folder);
- checklists to help you to ensure the quality of your interpretation.

The guide and its additional resources are also available online.

This practical guide is a product that you, as an interpreter working in the asylum procedure, can easily consult to better understand the requirements and key considerations related to your work. However, it does not replace the necessary training for interpreters or more specific guidance that may be provided by the asylum authorities at national level.

The guide focuses on interpretation in the asylum procedure in both EU Member States and non-EU countries. It does not cover other contexts where interpretation for applicants for international protection may be necessary, such as reception, legal counselling or the provision of psychosocial or medical support. Likewise, cultural mediation is outside the scope



of this guide, as it goes beyond the task of interpreting. Finally, the guide focuses on oral interpretation and sight translation and does not include guidance on written translation.

More specifically, the following topics are covered:

- core elements of the asylum procedure, in particular the personal interview;
- key principles to respect and actions to take during your work as an interpreter;
- how to prepare for your interpretation assignments;
- technical skills to guide your work;
- recommendations on what to do before, during and after an interview, including in the context of remote interpretation;
- working with applicants in a vulnerable situation;
- how to take care of your well-being.



# 1. Overview of the asylum procedure

As an interpreter in the asylum procedure, your role is to enable communication between the applicant for international protection, the national asylum authorities and any other relevant stakeholders involved in the asylum procedure. Your work may be needed throughout the various stages of the procedure, from the moment an application is made until a final decision is taken. As the asylum procedure relies on correct understanding between the applicant and the authorities, and given the complexity of the topics covered, your role is of utmost importance.

This chapter provides you with an understanding of the asylum procedure and the context in which you will be called on to interpret. More specifically, you will be introduced to:

- the core elements of international protection;
- the rights and obligations of applicants for international protection;
- the main stages of the asylum procedure and the different types of interviews;
- how a personal interview is conducted.

In the overview of the asylum procedure, some of the relevant terminology and the procedures described are based on EU law and practice. Terms and procedures may differ in non-EU countries.

## 1.1. International protection and the asylum procedure

The right to seek asylum is recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights <sup>(4)</sup> and in regional legal instruments such as the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights <sup>(5)</sup>, the EU law on asylum <sup>(6)</sup> and the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man <sup>(7)</sup>. When a person is unable to live in their country because they are at risk of persecution, they have the right to seek protection in another country. This protection is called **international protection** or **asylum**.

---

<sup>(4)</sup> United Nations General Assembly, [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), 10 December 1948. Article 14(1) states: 'Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.'

<sup>(5)</sup> European Parliament, [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#) (OJ C 326, 26.10.2012, p. 391). Article 18 states: 'The right to asylum shall be guaranteed with due respect for the rules of the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 and the Protocol of 31 January 1967 relating to the status of refugees and in accordance with the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union'.

<sup>(6)</sup> The EU law on asylum – that is, the Common European Asylum System – is the legal framework regulating international protection in EU Member States. It is based on five legal instruments governing all aspects of the asylum procedure: [Directive 2011/95/EU](#) (qualification directive (recast)), [Directive 2013/32/EU](#) (APD (recast)), [Regulation \(EU\) No 604/2013](#) (Dublin III regulation (recast)), [Regulation \(EU\) No 603/2013](#) (Eurodac regulation (recast)) and [Directive 2013/33/EU](#) (reception conditions directive (recast)).

<sup>(7)</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), [American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man](#), 2 May 1948. Article 27 states: 'Every person has the right, in case of pursuit not resulting from ordinary crimes, to seek and receive asylum in foreign territory, in accordance with the laws of each country and with international agreements.'



One of the foundations of international protection is the **principle of *non-refoulement***. This principle is a fundamental right applicable to all people, regardless of their nationality or migration status, who arrive at the borders or in the territory of a country, or wherever else a country exercises its jurisdiction.



### What is the principle of *non-refoulement*?

The principle of *non-refoulement* (prohibition of expulsion or return) is a core principle of international law according to which nobody should be transferred or returned to a country where they would face persecution, threat to their life or liberty, other forms of serious harm such as torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or other serious human rights violations <sup>(8)</sup>.

This principle allows people who are in any of these situations to apply for international protection. To do so, the country must grant them access to its territory and asylum procedure and refrain from removing applicants from its territory before a decision is issued on their application.



### What is an applicant for international protection?

An applicant for international protection, also referred to as an asylum seeker, is a person who has made an application for international protection for which a decision has not yet been made. To become an applicant, a person must be either a citizen of another country or a stateless person. An applicant is considered as such from the very moment they express their wish to apply for protection to an authority. How and when a person expresses this wish (i.e. at the moment of arrival in a country or later) are irrelevant for the purposes of being considered an applicant for international protection. The rights and obligations deriving from a person's status as an applicant are applicable from the moment they express their wish to seek protection.

International protection can be enjoyed through the recognition or obtention of a variety of statuses, depending on the legislation applicable in the receiving country. Some of these statuses, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, are discussed below.

The key legal instruments regulating international protection are the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and its 1967 Protocol (**Refugee Convention**) <sup>(9)</sup>. The Refugee

<sup>(8)</sup> Protection against *refoulement* is granted in several international and regional legal instruments protecting human rights. It is also granted in international refugee law, for example in Article 33(1) of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) (see footnote 9) and in the EU law on asylum (see footnote 6).

<sup>(9)</sup> United Nations General Assembly, [Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#), 28 July 1951, United Nations Treaty Series, Vol. 189, p. 137 (referred to in EU asylum legislation and by the Court of Justice of the European



Convention sets out the principle of *non-refoulement* as a core obligation and provides the definition of a refugee.



### Who is a refugee?

A refugee is any person who:

- is at risk of persecution because of their:
  - race (e.g. their skin colour or membership of an ethnic group) <sup>(10)</sup>;
  - religion (e.g. the religion and rituals they practise or refuse to practise);
  - nationality (e.g. their citizenship, language, culture or lack of nationality);
  - political opinion (e.g. their actual or perceived political membership or political ideas);
  - membership of a particular social group (e.g. in some countries, a specific gender, sexual orientation, job or lifestyle);
- is outside their country of nationality or, in the case of stateless people (people who do not have the nationality of any country), outside their former country of habitual residence;

cannot enjoy the protection of their country of nationality or their former country of habitual residence.

In everyday language, the term ‘refugee’ is used for all people who are forced to leave their country to escape war, violence or any other serious threat. In the legal context of asylum, a refugee is a person who is at risk of **persecution** in their country of origin or habitual residence for one or more of the reasons described in the box ‘Who is a refugee?’



### What is persecution?

Persecution is a serious violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms and may include physical or mental violence, abusive treatment or punishment, or actions of authorities affecting, for example, a person’s possibility to access medical care, work, education or help from the police or to seek justice before a tribunal.

In line with the Refugee Convention and other international human rights instruments, states have developed other legal instruments regulating international protection that are applicable

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Union as the Geneva convention); United Nations General Assembly, [Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees](#), 31 January 1967, United Nations Treaty Series, Vol. 606, p. 267. The convention, which is applicable in the great majority of countries worldwide, defines a refugee and outlines the rights and obligations of refugees in the hosting country, and the legal obligations of the signatory states for the protection of refugees.

<sup>(10)</sup> The examples provided in brackets are not part of the definition of a refugee included in the Refugee Convention. They are provided to illustrate what the definition of a refugee can mean in practice and are not exhaustive.



at regional level, for instance in the EU, in Africa, in the Americas or at national level. While the Refugee Convention details only one form of international protection (namely refugee status), complementary forms of international protection not applicable in all countries may be provided at regional and national levels, for example **subsidiary protection** in the EU.



### What is subsidiary protection?

Subsidiary protection is a type of international protection that can be granted to a person who does not qualify as a refugee but who would face a serious risk if they returned to their country of origin or habitual residence and that country were not to protect them <sup>(11)</sup>.

Serious risk means death penalty or execution, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or threat to one's life as a civilian due to an armed conflict <sup>(12)</sup>.

International protection in the EU therefore includes both refugee status and subsidiary protection <sup>(13)</sup>.



### What is the asylum procedure?

The asylum procedure, in some contexts also referred to as the 'international protection procedure', is a process that determines whether an applicant for international protection is granted or refused protection in the country where they made their application. The term 'asylum procedure' covers all steps from the moment the applicant expresses their wish to apply for international protection to the issuing of the final decision on the application. It involves a thorough examination of the reasons why the applicant left their country and cannot return.

The asylum procedure is used to determine whether the applicant fulfils the criteria to be recognised as a refugee. Only if these criteria are not met will the authorities proceed to examine whether the applicant is eligible for complementary forms of protection, such as subsidiary protection in the EU.

In the cases of refugee status and subsidiary protection, international protection is granted if the applicant is not subject to the **exclusion** clauses in the Refugee Convention and in other applicable instruments <sup>(14)</sup>.

<sup>(11)</sup> The legal definition of a person eligible for subsidiary protection is provided in Article 2(f) qualification directive (recast).

<sup>(12)</sup> See Article 15 qualification directive (recast).

<sup>(13)</sup> In some EU Member States and outside the EU, complementary forms of protection are provided by national legislation. For example, in the United States 'alternate forms of relief' are provided.

<sup>(14)</sup> [Qualification directive \(recast\)](#); United Nations, [Charter of the United Nations](#), 24 October 1945; United Nations General Assembly, [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#), 17 July 1998.





### What is exclusion?

Exclusion <sup>(15)</sup> occurs when an applicant, after their claim is examined, is denied international protection for one of the following reasons:

- they do not need international protection because they already enjoy protection from organisations or agencies of the United Nations or protection from other countries equivalent to the protection conferred by the possession of the nationality;
- they do not deserve international protection because there are serious reasons to believe that they have committed a crime against peace, a war crime or a crime against humanity, or a serious (non-political) crime prior to entering the country of asylum, or an act contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Exclusion clauses may vary depending on the regional or national context. In the EU, further reasons for exclusion apply to people who would otherwise be eligible for subsidiary protection <sup>(16)</sup>.

Applicants to whom the exclusion clauses apply are not granted refugee status or subsidiary protection.

## 1.2. Rights and obligations of the applicant

Applicants for international protection enjoy a number of fundamental rights and are bound by several obligations throughout the asylum procedure. Most applicants do not speak the official language of the host country sufficiently well or at all. Therefore, as interpreter, you will play a crucial role in enabling them to enjoy their rights and fulfil their obligations.

### Rights and obligations of the applicant in the asylum procedure

The applicant has the right to be informed <sup>(17)</sup> of the possibility of applying for international protection, the steps of the procedure, their rights and obligations during the procedure and the decision.

The applicant has the right to be heard <sup>(18)</sup> by having their views known and to actively participate in the procedure, in particular through a personal interview on the grounds of their application for international protection. The relevant authority is obliged to grant the applicant the right to be heard, unless a positive decision with regard to their refugee status

<sup>(15)</sup> Depending on the national legislation, other provisions similar to exclusion can apply. For example, in the United States exclusion is referred to as a 'mandatory bar'.

<sup>(16)</sup> Namely (1) when the person constitutes a danger to the community or to the security of the Member State, or (2) when the person has committed a crime punishable by imprisonment prior to their admission to the Member State and left their country of origin solely in order to avoid sanctions resulting from those crimes.

<sup>(17)</sup> Article 12(1)(a) APD (recast). For more guidance on information provision for applicants, visit the [LSA portal](#) of the European Union Agency for Asylum.

<sup>(18)</sup> Article 41(2)(a) EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (op. cit., footnote 5).



can be taken based on available evidence without conducting a personal interview <sup>(19)</sup>. Statements given by the applicant are often the primary source used to make a decision on the application.

If a negative decision is taken on the applicant's application for international protection, they have the right to an effective remedy <sup>(20)</sup> and to a fair trial <sup>(21)</sup>. This means that they can lodge an appeal against their asylum decision before the appellate body, court or tribunal, which will review the case in an independent and impartial manner. This also means that the applicant has the right to be informed of the reasons for the decision in order to meaningfully exercise their right to an effective remedy.

Whenever necessary, the applicant has the right to have an interpreter <sup>(22)</sup> to enable them to submit their case to the competent authorities. Communication with the applicant throughout the procedure must take place in a language the applicant understands or is reasonably supposed to understand <sup>(23)</sup>. In some stages, including during the personal interview, communication needs to take place in the language preferred by the applicant or in another language that they understand and in which they can communicate clearly <sup>(24)</sup>. When an applicant expresses a preference for the sex of the interpreter to assist in the personal interview, the asylum authorities will assess the reasons for this request and try to accommodate it if this could help the applicant to fully express themselves <sup>(25)</sup>.

The applicant has the right to have their personal information and all other information related to their case treated with confidentiality <sup>(26)</sup>. This means that nobody who is involved in the asylum procedure can disclose any information to people outside the procedure.

The applicant has an obligation to cooperate <sup>(27)</sup> with the authorities, that, in turn, should provide the applicant with the opportunity to do so <sup>(28)</sup>. The applicant must communicate with the authorities and give full, precise and correct information to the best of their knowledge. In addition, they must share with the authorities all supporting documentation at their disposal.

### 1.3. Main stages of the asylum procedure and types of interviews

With some variations according to the asylum system in place in each country, the asylum procedure consists of a number of stages, which are illustrated in Figure 1.

<sup>(19)</sup> Article 14(2)(a) and (b) and Article 15(3)(c) APD (recast).

<sup>(20)</sup> Article 18(1)(f) APD (recast); Article 8 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (op. cit., footnote 4).

<sup>(21)</sup> American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (op. cit., footnote 7); EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; European Court of Human Rights, [European Convention on Human Rights](#), 4 November 1950.

<sup>(22)</sup> Article 12(1)(b) APD (recast).

<sup>(23)</sup> Article 12(1)(a) APD (recast).

<sup>(24)</sup> Article 15(3)(c) APD (recast).

<sup>(25)</sup> Article 15(3)(c) APD (recast).

<sup>(26)</sup> Article 15(2) and Article 48 APD (recast).

<sup>(27)</sup> Article 13(1) APD (recast).

<sup>(28)</sup> Recital 25 APD (recast).



**Figure 1. Asylum pathway**



Source: adapted from [Asylum Procedure | Let's Speak Asylum \(europa.eu\)](https://euaa.europa.eu/let-s-speak-asylum) (February 2024).  
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Most stages of the procedure involve conducting an **interview** with the applicant for international protection. Various types of interviews may be conducted at different stages of the asylum procedure, including the key types that are presented in this section.

The **main participants** in all types of interviews are:

- the interviewer <sup>(29)</sup>;
- the applicant;
- the interpreter, who enables the communication.

Depending on national practice, on the applicant's personal circumstances and on the stage of the procedure in which the interview takes place, **other people** may be present. These include, for example, legal advisors; representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; people providing psychosocial, medical or other support; and a person of confidence. Children (people below the age of 18) who have no adult responsible for them in the country of asylum can be accompanied to the interview by a guardian/legal representative <sup>(30)</sup> or an adult support person. In some cases, an interviewer's colleague, another interpreter or a typist may also be present. It is the interviewer's task to allow the other people to attend the interview, to introduce them to the applicant, to explain their role

<sup>(29)</sup> Depending on the country, the interviewer may be called for example, a case officer, an asylum officer, a protection officer etc.

<sup>(30)</sup> Article 25(1)(a) APD (recast).



during the interview, to establish their position in the room and, if necessary and as per national practice, to let them take part in the communication during the interview.

Depending on the national asylum system and the stage of the procedure, interviews may be conducted in **locations** other than the asylum authority's premises, such as border points, disembarkation points, detention centres, offices of the responsible authorities, courts or tribunal premises. Similarly, interviews may be conducted by different **authorities or staff** either **in person or remotely**.

In all stages of the procedure and in all interviews, the applicant is provided with **information** on the purpose of the interview and on their rights and obligations. This is complemented by additional information according to the specific stage of the procedure. As you will be interpreting all this information, it is of utmost importance that you understand the asylum procedure and the different types of interviews. It is also essential that you are familiar with the relevant terminology.

The types of interviews that are conducted in the various stages of the procedure differ not only in their purpose but also in their specific content and features, such as duration, location and focus. The different types of interviews and their purpose and specificities are explained in the following sections.

### 1.3.1. Filing an application: registration interview

When a person expresses their wish to apply for international protection, the competent national authority must record the application. Filing <sup>(31)</sup> an application for international protection is the first step in the asylum procedure. People filing an application for international protection are allowed to remain in the territory of the host country until a decision is taken on their application <sup>(32)</sup>. The filing of the application is essential to ensure protection against *refoulement* and to identify the competent authority and applicable procedure to examine the application. In this sense, the work of the interpreter is crucial to ensure the applicant's effective access to the asylum procedure.

Depending on national practice, registration interviews are not necessarily held by interviewers from the same authority as is responsible for the personal interviews (see Section [1.3.3 Examining the application: personal interview](#)). Registration interviews may be held by registration staff, migration officers, border guards or the police. The locations of the registration interviews could also vary and include the premises of the asylum authorities, reception centres, border crossing points and detention centres.

Registration interviews are not lengthy interviews. Registration staff collect basic personal data and information from the applicant, such as their name, date and place of birth, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, education, family members, employment and travel route. Identity

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<sup>(31)</sup> Depending on the country, the filing of an application for international protection may be referred to as 'registration', 'statements made at the border', an 'affirmative process' or 'lodgement'.

<sup>(32)</sup> Unless an exception to this general principle is provided for by law.



documents or other documents supporting the applicant's claim that are in the applicant's possession are also gathered. The applicant is often photographed and fingerprinted.

Depending on national practice, the applicant's main reasons for leaving their country of origin and what they fear in the event of their return may be recorded. However, the detailed account of these reasons is not part of the registration interview.

The registration interview also enables the identification of applicants in need of special procedural guarantees as early as possible in the asylum procedure.



### **Who are the applicants in need of special procedural guarantees?**

Applicants in need of special procedural guarantees are those whose ability to present their claim and to fully understand and participate in the asylum procedure is limited due to their individual circumstances. These circumstances may include age, gender, disabilities, mental disorders, serious illnesses and experiences of serious violence.

Applicants in need of special procedural guarantees should be provided with adequate support to ensure that they can effectively present all elements required to substantiate their application for international protection. Such support can be provided in different ways, for example through medical or psychological assistance, providing the applicant with the opportunity to request an interpreter of a certain sex, postponing the personal interview or giving extra time for the interview.

Applicants in need of special procedural guarantees are commonly referred to as applicants in a vulnerable situation. For more information, see [Section 4 Interpreting for applicants in a vulnerable situation](#).

## **1.3.2. Admissibility procedures: admissibility interviews**

Depending on applicable laws and procedures, before examining an application for international protection on its merits, authorities may first examine the admissibility of the applicant's request for international protection.

As an interpreter, you may be asked to interpret in such admissibility interviews. These interviews focus only on the elements relevant to deciding on the admissibility of the application for international protection and do not involve discussing the details of the applicant's claim.

In the following sections, you can find more information on some of the admissibility procedures applicable in some EU Member States. Countries outside the EU may have similar or other admissibility procedures.



### **(a) Safe country concepts**

The safe country concepts are based on the assumption that, under some circumstances, a country other than the one where the applicant is applying for international protection may be considered safe for them. In these cases, the country of asylum may be exempted from its responsibility to examine the application.

In these admissibility interviews, you may notice that the topics discussed do not focus on the reasons why the applicant left their country of origin and is applying for asylum. The applicant will mainly be invited to speak about the reasons why, considering their personal circumstances, they cannot return to the other safe country.

Two examples of safe country concepts are outlined below.

#### **First country of asylum**

When an applicant could return to another country (referred to as the first country of asylum) where they have been recognised as a refugee and can still benefit from the protection deriving from this status, or where they can otherwise enjoy sufficient protection, their application can be considered inadmissible.

In such cases, interviews will focus on the circumstances of the applicant in the country where they enjoy protection and the reasons why the applicant left and could not be readmitted to their first country of asylum.

#### **Safe third country**

When an applicant is considered to have a connection with another country where they can be safe, their application may be considered inadmissible without examining its merits. For a third country to be considered safe, the applicant needs to be able to request international protection and enjoy refugee status if eligible, be protected against *refoulement* and not be subjected to persecution or serious harm.

In this case, admissibility interviews mainly focus on the connection of the applicant with the third country and the reasons why the applicant cannot seek protection there.

### **(b) Subsequent applications**

When an applicant whose initial application was rejected makes a subsequent application, the asylum authority will first consider the admissibility of their request and may decide to proceed with a full examination of their application.

If an admissibility interview for a subsequent application takes place, the topics discussed are the new elements of the application, instead of those from the claim that was previously examined.



### **(c) Determining the country responsible: Dublin procedure**

In the European countries within the Dublin area <sup>(33)</sup>, any registration of an application is followed or accompanied by the determination of the country responsible for its examination, to ensure that the application is processed in one country only. The criteria used to determine the responsible country relate to the protection of family unity and to the responsibility of the country that played the largest part in the applicant's entry into or residence in the Dublin area.

The interview to determine the country responsible for the examination is referred to as the Dublin interview. Dublin interviews enquire about the existence, identity and status of family members in another country within the Dublin area, visas or residence documents issued by other countries, the applicant's travel routes and previous entries into or stays in other countries, the applicant's potential need for special procedural guarantees, and possible factors preventing the applicant's transfer to the responsible country. Dublin interviews do not focus on the applicant's reasons for leaving their country of origin. They take place after or as part of the registration interview. They may be conducted by registration staff, Dublin officers or other interviewers.

### **1.3.3. Examining the application: personal interview**

After an application is filed, and determined to be admissible if an admissibility procedure took place, the applicant will be called for a personal interview <sup>(34)</sup> before the competent national authority. The personal interview is the cornerstone of the asylum procedure, as it is the stage in which the applicant can fully explain their need for international protection. Often, most of the information that the asylum authority will assess during its examination of the claim is gathered through the personal interview <sup>(35)</sup>.

Personal interviews focus on the reasons why the applicant left their country of origin or habitual residence (if stateless) and what they fear may happen to them if they return. They also cover the applicant's personal and family background and travel route, and any other relevant circumstances. In addition to the applicant's oral statements, the interviewer will collect all written documentation and other evidence the applicant can provide and consider all relevant evidence already at the disposal of the authority. The interviewer will also seek to identify any vulnerabilities or need for special procedural guarantees on the side of the applicant that have not already been identified.

Depending on the case, a personal interview can take several hours and more than one personal interview may be needed. Possible reasons for exclusion from international protection may be addressed and explored in the personal interview or through a separate interview. The interviewer may go into detail to enquire about any specific past experiences or any acts and related circumstances in which the applicant was involved that may result in the

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<sup>(33)</sup> The Dublin area comprises the 27 Member States of the EU and four associated countries, namely Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

<sup>(34)</sup> Depending on the country, the personal interview may be referred to as an 'asylum interview'.

<sup>(35)</sup> In some countries, when specific procedures apply and the authority already has substantive information but wishes to confirm some aspects of the claim, the interview may focus on these specific aspects only.



applicant's exclusion from international protection. Applicants, in turn, are given the opportunity to explain in detail any relevant facts and to clarify inconsistent information, address any evidence that is presented to them or to further substantiate their claim for international protection.

Interviews on exclusion can be particularly intense and long. Sometimes, more than one interview is necessary.

For more information on the conduct of the personal interview, see Section [1.4 Phases of the personal interview](#).

### **1.3.4. Communicating the decision**

After the personal interview, the interviewer or other people in charge will examine the application for international protection on its merit and make a decision on whether the applicant can be granted international protection. After completing this examination, the national asylum authorities will notify the applicant of whether they are granted protection or their application is rejected. In the case of a negative decision, the notification will also cover the reasons for the decision and information on how to challenge it. The applicant will be notified in writing and, depending on national practice, in person. When the applicant is notified in person, you may be asked to provide interpretation.

### **1.3.5. Second instance procedure: appeal interview**

In the case of a negative decision or a decision granting a type of protection other than refugee status, the applicant has the right to make an appeal before the competent authority, for example an appeal board, a court or a tribunal. Second instance procedure may include an appeal interview that focuses on issues related to the grounds for the appeal and on any relevant information or concerns presented by the applicant with respect to the (first) decision on their application. Therefore, an appeal interview is in general not a full personal interview, unless this is necessary to decide on the outcome of the appeal <sup>(36)</sup>.

The provision of interpretation during the appeal interview depends on the national regulations.

### **1.3.6. End of international protection**

In some cases, the national asylum authorities may need to assess whether international protection should be ended.

International protection status may be ended for several reasons, including because protection is no longer needed or justified, for instance if the beneficiary re-avails themselves of the protection of their country of nationality or habitual residence or acquires a new nationality and enjoys the protection of that country, or if there are changes in the circumstances that led to the granting of protection (e.g. developments in the country of origin). Protection may also

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<sup>(36)</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), [Procedural standards for refugee status determination under UNHCR's mandate](#), 26 August 2020.



be ended if evidence arises that signifies that the person should have been excluded from international protection in the first place, or that the person has been incorrectly granted protection due to a misinterpretation or the omission of facts.

Depending on national practice and the applicable legal provisions, procedures for ending international protection can include an interview that focuses on elements that could justify the end of protection.

## 1.4. Phases of the personal interview

This section focuses on the conduct of a personal interview (see Figure 2), as it is the cornerstone of the asylum procedure and the type of interview in which you are most likely to interpret. Please note that many aspects are also relevant to other types of interviews.

**Figure 2. Phases of the personal interview**



### 1.4.1. Preparing

Before conducting a personal interview, the interviewer will make arrangements depending on the case, the stage of the procedure and the context in which the interview will take place.

The interviewer will prepare for the personal interview by familiarising themselves with any information available on the case and with the situation in the applicant's country of origin. Depending on national practice and on information available to them, the interviewer may brief you before the interview with relevant information on the case, so that you are ready to interpret.

The ideal **seating arrangement** in the interview room will establish a line of communication between the interviewer and the applicant: they must be able to see each other at all times. As an interpreter, you may be asked to sit at equal distance from the applicant and the interviewer, usually in a triangular configuration <sup>(37)</sup>, to emphasise your impartiality (for more information on impartiality, see Section [2.4 Impartiality and neutrality](#)). Normally, you will all be sitting around a table. You may also find water and tissues. Different arrangements may be made for applicants in need of special procedural guarantees, for example applicants with a hearing impairment, applicants who use sign language or children (for more information on

<sup>(37)</sup> See UNHCR Austria, [Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures](#), Vienna, 2022, p. 29.



interpreting for these groups, see Chapter [4 Interpreting for applicants in a vulnerable situation](#)).

Depending on national practice, the interviewer may escort you and the applicant from the waiting area to the interview room.

You will find detailed information on how to get ready for interpreting in an interview in Section [3.2 Before the interview](#).

### 1.4.2. Opening

During the opening of the personal interview, it is the interviewer's task to establish an atmosphere of trust so that all participants feel comfortable. This can be done in several ways, for example by starting off with a neutral topic to put the applicant at ease.

The interviewer will open the interview by **introducing** themselves. They may also introduce you as the interpreter or ask you to introduce yourself. For security reasons, introductions may not be by name.

The interviewer will check whether you and the applicant speak the same **language** and/or dialect and fully understand each other.

The interviewer may **inform** the applicant that:

- the aim of the interview is to gather detailed and reliable information about their reasons for claiming protection;
- the personal interview follows a certain structure and involves the verification of personal data, country of origin, travel route and the reasons why the applicant left their country and does not wish to return;
- all people involved in the interview are bound by confidentiality;
- the interpreter is neutral and impartial and does not have any influence on the outcome of the examination;
- they should say if they do not understand a question;
- they have the right to ask for a break;
- it is their obligation to cooperate by disclosing all relevant information: giving false information intentionally may lead to a negative outcome of their application.

The applicant is also notified in this phase of how the interview is **recorded and reported**. Depending on national practice, interviews can be audio- or video-recorded and/or documented in a written interview report. The interview report can be either a verbatim record or a factual report containing essential information given by the applicant during the interview.

The interviewer may also ask questions about **the applicant's health** to find out whether they are fit for the interview and/or are in need of special procedural guarantees.



### 1.4.3. Conducting

This section describes the most common interviewing techniques adopted in personal interviews. Depending on national practice, other techniques may be used. Moreover, the interviewer's plan for any given personal interview may vary and/or change during the interview, as each applicant has their own individual history and narrative.

The interviewer needs to gather as much detailed and relevant information as possible about the **applicant's reasons for applying for protection**. Therefore, they are likely to enquire about any relevant past events mentioned by the applicant and ask about, for example, what happened, when and where the events happened, who were the victim(s) of and participant(s) in the events, what are the reasons the events occurred and whether any documents or evidence about the events were submitted.

Furthermore, the interviewer needs to know what the applicant fears might happen if they return to their country, why they think this would happen and whom they fear.

The interviewer may also ask **questions on other topics**, such as follow-up questions about the applicant's characteristics, how they were perceived in their country of origin, the applicant's opportunity to receive protection in their country of origin and the possibility of the applicant safely accessing and living in another area in their country of origin.

The interviewer will generally introduce the topic that is about to be discussed, for example by saying, 'Now I will ask you a few questions regarding your journey.' They will draw up clear, simple questions taking into account the applicant's age and cultural and educational background. They will pose one question at a time. They will ask mostly open-ended questions beginning with 'How ...?', 'Tell me (the reason for) ...', 'Explain to me ...', 'Please describe ...', etc. Closed questions will be asked to a lesser extent, generally to confirm understanding of the applicant's claim by the interviewer. Closed questions usually require a short response, for example a date or location, or simply a 'yes' or 'no' answer. During certain parts of the interview, the interviewer may touch on some topics briefly without in-depth exploration. They may also ask the applicant to clarify certain aspects of their statements or terms they use <sup>(38)</sup>.

Throughout the interview, the interviewer will monitor both the applicant and the interpreter and allow them to take **breaks** whenever necessary (see Sections [2.1 Professionalism and integrity](#) and [3.3.4 Strategies of interpretation](#)).

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<sup>(38)</sup> See EASO, [Practical Guide: Personal interview](#), 2014; UNHCR Austria, [Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures](#), Vienna, 2022, p. 32.



The following sections outline the main parts typically covered in the interview.

**(a) Confirming the applicant's identity**

This part of the interview aims to confirm the applicant's identity and registration data. The interviewer may ask a number of questions about the applicant's country of origin, hometown or home area, schooling, etc.

In some cases, such as in the absence of identity documents, this phase may take considerable time, as certain issues may need to be explored or understood in depth.

**(b) Free narrative**

In this part of the interview, the applicant speaks about their reasons for applying for international protection. The interviewer will introduce this part of the interview by asking the applicant to explain in detail the reasons why they are asking for international protection. Most likely, the interviewer will not interrupt the applicant in order to gather as much information as possible. However, the applicant may be asked to use short sentences so that you can thoroughly interpret what they narrate (for more information on short consecutive interpretation, see Section [3.3.1 Consecutive interpretation](#)). While some applicants will easily speak freely, others may be shy or reluctant to do so. The interviewer will adapt their interview strategy accordingly. The interviewer may also restate and emphasise the principle of confidentiality, to foster a climate of trust and encourage the applicant to speak openly.

During this phase of the interview, the interviewer may repeat parts of what the applicant has said. This is to help the applicant with recalling memories. They may sometimes need to get the focus of the narrative back on the topic they initially asked about, or they may want to start speaking about a new topic.

**(c) Probing**

During the probing part of the interview, the interviewer will follow up on different parts of the free narrative in order to further explore any information that the applicant has given about their reasons for applying for protection. In this part, the interviewer may return to any topic mentioned in the free narrative or seek confirmation of any of the applicant's key statements. Generally, the interviewer will introduce each topic before asking detailed questions.

**(d) Clarifying inconsistencies**

For the applicant to present their claim as completely as possible, the interviewer needs to give them the opportunity to clarify any inconsistencies or contradictions that may otherwise have a negative impact on the decision.

Clarifications may be related to the applicant's statements or to information from other sources.



### 1.4.4. Closing

During the closing phase, the interviewer will ask whether the applicant has anything to add or any questions to ask. The interviewer may also check whether the applicant had problems understanding.

In accordance with national regulations and practice, the opportunity to add statements or to ask questions will also be given to other participants, such as the legal advisor or guardian of the applicant.

Depending on national practice and on whether there is a **written report** of the interview, you may be asked to sight translate or ‘read back’ the report to give the applicant the opportunity to correct and clarify any mistakes or misinterpretations <sup>(39)</sup> (for more information on your role in sight translation, see Section [3.3.2 Sight translation](#)).

According to national practice and depending on the type of interview and the stage of the procedure, you may need to **sign procedural documents** such as the written report. In countries where interpreters are obliged to state their name and/or give a legible signature, a procedure may be applied aimed at not revealing your name if your safety could be jeopardised.

The interviewer may then inform the applicant about the **next steps in the procedure**, such as how the decision will be notified, the consequences of a positive decision, the applicant’s right to appeal and free legal aid in the event of a negative decision, how the applicant can submit further evidence and the applicant’s rights, benefits and obligations while waiting for the decision.

Depending on national practice, the interviewer may escort you and the applicant from the interview room to the waiting area or exit. The interviewer may discuss how the interpretation went with you.

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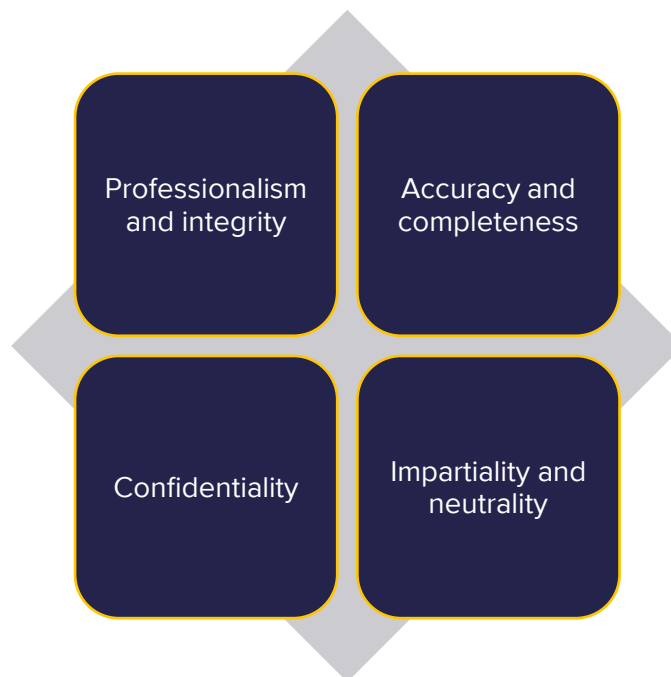
<sup>(39)</sup> Article 17(3) APD (recast).



## 2. Key principles of interpreting in the asylum procedure

You need to know how to behave in the various situations that may occur throughout your career as an interpreter in the asylum procedure. Most national asylum authorities have professional ethical standards or codes of conduct for interpreters and you will most likely be requested to sign them before taking up an assignment. They indicate key principles that interpreters are expected to uphold in exercising their functions, inside and outside the interview room. All the principles mentioned in Figure 3 are considered essential. Not acting in line with any of them may have grave consequences in the asylum procedure.

**Figure 3. Key principles of interpreting in the asylum procedure**



This chapter will help you become familiar with the principles required of an interpreter in the asylum procedure and will provide you with guidance on how to best act as an interpreter. More specifically, you will be introduced to:

- the key principles guiding your work as an interpreter – professionalism and integrity, accuracy and completeness, confidentiality and impartiality and neutrality;
- challenging situations that you may face during your assignments and guidance on how to behave in such situations.



## 2.1. Professionalism and integrity

**Professionalism** relates to how you carry out your duties. Your professional conduct can be shown by your attitude and behaviour.

Maintaining a professional attitude involves upholding respect for the people involved while conducting your duties. It also consists of separating your personal and professional life and remaining professionally detached from the topic you are interpreting.

Moreover, your professional conduct will be mostly visible through your behaviour. Being punctual and organised by arriving on time at the location of the assignment or by informing the authority in a timely manner in the event of delays or cancellations are signs of a professional interpreter. You should also demonstrate professionalism by managing your emotions and showing moderate and neutral behaviour (e.g. avoid expressing impatience, or using expressions that may be interpreted as you communicating opinions, attitudes or beliefs, etc.). Moreover, you should take notes consistently to ensure accurate and full interpretation, arrive physically and mentally fit for the interview, and keep an open mind and a neutral attitude towards the applicant. A professional interpreter also knows their limits. Be aware of your role, and the limits of your knowledge and skills. Ensure that you do your job to the best of your abilities: ask for a break or refuse assignments when, for any reason, you may not be able to perform according to set standards.

**Integrity** means showing respect towards all participants and behaving in a proper, dignified and respectful manner. For an interpreter, integrity means upholding the ethical standards that the job requires.

In particular, it is of paramount importance that you never take advantage of your position by accepting money, favours or benefits in exchange for help with the interview or other parts of the asylum procedure. Any offer in this sense coming from the applicant should be communicated to the asylum authority or to your immediate supervisor.

During your career as an interpreter, you may be confronted with breaches of the code of conduct by other participants in the asylum procedure, such as other interpreters, interviewers, other staff working with the asylum authority or the applicant's legal advisor. You should be aware of the ways to report alleged breaches of the code of conduct. The authority that assigned you the interpretation job will guide you in the procedures to report such breaches.



### Situational challenge: being fit to interpret

It is the third interview of the day. You are becoming tired, and you are losing your attention and your patience. It has been more than 1 hour since the interview started and you get the impression that it will never end.

#### What to do

When you find yourself in this situation, consider requesting a break to regain energy before continuing to interpret. Always ask for a break if you fear that you might lose your temper or that the quality of your interpretation might be lowered because an interview is longer than expected.



### Situational challenge: dealing with criticism

During the interview the applicant criticises you or your interpretation.

#### What to do

You should stay calm and interpret everything that the applicant says, including comments and possible insults. It is the responsibility of the interviewer to manage the situation. If the interviewer determines that a lack of trust may impair the interview, they may ask you to step aside. This judgement is not based on your performance but may be needed in the interest of the smooth conduct of the interview.



### Situational challenge: accepting gifts

The applicant sees that you are of the same religion and offers you a sweet because today is the religious feast.

#### What to do

Integrity requires that you do not accept any gifts or benefits, even small or symbolic ones such as a sweet. In this case, you can thank the applicant and kindly say that you are not allowed to accept it. You may leave the sweet on the table.

## 2.2. Accuracy and completeness

Making a fair decision on the application for international protection and ensuring that the applicant can exert their rights depend highly on the accuracy of the interpretation. Interviewers need to understand exactly what the applicant says and the applicant needs to understand everything the interviewer tells and asks them. The information shared by the applicant in the interviews is one of the key elements based on which the asylum authority will evaluate the credibility of the applicant's statements. This assessment will have a great impact

on the continuation of the examination and, ultimately, on the decision on the application. Therefore, it is extremely important that you as an interpreter keep the interviewer's questions and the applicant's statements as closely as possible to the original wording and **fully reflect the original message without any addition or omission**. Sometimes a change, even in just a word or a date, can have an impact on the applicant's case. The order in which things are said, the level of detail given and the way in which they are said are relevant factors. You may experience challenges in ensuring accurate and complete interpretation due to the complexity of your assignment but also due to the nature of transcultural communication (see Section [3.1.2 Transcultural communication](#)). It is recommended that you keep the interviewer informed of any obstacles that you are experiencing in interpretation (see Section [3.3.4 Strategies of interpretation](#)).



#### **Situational challenge: avoiding additions**

The interviewer asks the applicant: 'What means of transport did you use to come here today?' You interpret this but notice that the applicant does not understand the question. Can you add: 'bus, taxi or train'?

##### **What to do**

Making additions on your own initiative is not good practice. In this case, it is up to the interviewer to intervene and ask additional questions or clarify for the applicant.



#### **Situational challenge: interpreting figurative language**

The applicant uses a figurative expression such as an idiom or a proverb that is common in their language but has no immediate equivalent in the language into which you are interpreting.

##### **What to do**

Accurate interpretation does not mean literal interpretation. Your aim is to convey the message as closely as possible and not to provide a word-by-word interpretation. You explain to the interviewer that you are interpreting a figurative expression and describe the message through additions and paraphrasing. In such cases, additions and alterations are necessary for accurate interpretation.



### Situational challenge: interpreting repetitions

During the interview, the applicant repeats the same information several times.

#### What to do

You should interpret everything that the applicant says, including repetitions. You are not allowed to omit or summarise the applicant's statements and you are not responsible for what is said.



### Situational challenge: avoiding omissions

During the interview, the applicant mentions a detail but asks you not to interpret it.

#### What to do

You fully interpret the applicant's statements, including the fact that you were asked not to interpret. The interviewer will then decide how to deal with that piece of information and may choose to ask the applicant about the reasons why they did not want the detail to be interpreted.

## 2.3. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an essential element of the asylum procedure as a whole and a key principle in interpretation. If confidentiality in the asylum procedure is not guaranteed, applicants cannot be expected to share in an open and detailed way the threats they faced in their country of origin or their current situation. A lack of confidentiality may put the applicant and their family or friends, including those who remain in their home country, in danger. The whole examination process is jeopardised when confidentiality is not fully respected.

As an interpreter, you must treat any information to which you have access while performing your job as confidential. This means that **no information related to the applicant or to the content of the interview can be discussed outside the interview**. You cannot discuss it with any external parties, your colleagues, or even the applicant, their family members, or their legal advisor or guardian. You should not post on social media or give any statements to the press about any information you become aware of when performing your job. Be aware that, for data protection reasons, you will not be given access to case files or databases before, during or after the interview. Your obligation to respect the confidentiality of the procedure extends beyond the duration of your contract. This means that you need to treat the information as confidential even when you are no longer working as an interpreter.

At the same time, you should take precautions to protect your own privacy. In your own interest and the interest of the asylum procedure, it is also essential that you protect your personal data. Do not share with applicants, on your own initiative or if asked for by them, any

personal information concerning your origin or background, your family, your personal life or your place of residence. Keep your social media accounts and activities private.



#### **Situational challenge: sharing information with the applicant's family**

During the break in between interviews, you are approached by the husband of an applicant for whom you provided interpretation the day before. He says that his wife is stressed and concerned about yesterday's interview and asks you how the interview went.

##### **What to do**

You can explain to him that you understand his wife's apprehension but that you are not allowed to share with anybody any information about the interviews for which you provide interpretation.



#### **Situational challenge: sharing information with colleagues**

During the break, another interpreter asks you about your interview: 'Isn't this applicant the sister of last week's applicant?' You hesitate to answer.

##### **What to do**

The information that you obtain during your interpretation needs to be treated as confidential. This means that you cannot share such information with your colleague, even if you both work for the same authority. In this case, you refuse to answer your colleague and tell them that such information is confidential and that you cannot share it.

## **2.4. Impartiality and neutrality**

Maintaining impartiality and neutrality requires that you **do not take sides or express your personal opinions**, or give suggestions or advice, before, during or after the interpretation. It may be that you feel a connection with the applicant's struggle or the cause they support or, on the contrary, that you do not relate to their position or situation. In all situations, you need to keep a neutral stance on what is being said, without allowing bias to affect the way you interpret.

Bias is favouritism or prejudice towards a certain group based on certain ideas and beliefs. For example, you may think that some cultures are more punctual than others. Similarly, you may think that some cultures are less hardworking than others. Bias may influence your actions even if you are not aware of it.

An interpreter must be impartial and must also be seen as impartial by others at all times, both in attitude and in conduct. You must not let your origin, background, opinions or beliefs affect the way you interpret.



If you think that an applicant no longer sees you as neutral or if you feel that you are emotionally too closely linked to a certain topic to uphold this principle, you have to inform the interviewer. This also applies if you realise that you have had previous contact or relations with an applicant or with other people present during the interview. In such cases, a new interpreter is assigned to the case.

A situation where a connection you have with an applicant may influence your work is called a '**conflict of interest**'. Any real or perceived partiality or conflict of interest may result in lack of trust between the applicant and the asylum authorities and may negatively affect the asylum procedure. You must declare any possible conflicts of interest and refrain from accepting an assignment if you identify any such conflicts.

As you speak the same language, the applicant may see you as someone who will help them to answer the questions or assist them in obtaining a positive decision. Conversely, the applicant may also have hostile feelings towards you. Due to your background, they may associate you with their actor of persecution. Your behaviour has to signal that your role is only to ensure that they can communicate with the asylum authority.



#### **Situational challenge: conflicts of interest**

During the interview, you realise that the applicant comes from your village of origin and you know their family very well.

##### **What to do**

You ask for a break, explaining to the interviewer that you have something to communicate. You inform the interviewer of the exact link you have with the applicant's family, as this may raise a real or perceived conflict of interest. The interviewer will advise on the way forward. However, if you feel that your neutrality and impartiality cannot be ensured you should withdraw from the assignment.



#### **Situational challenge: being asked for your opinion**

After the interview, the interviewer asks you whether the information given by the applicant on their country of origin is correct or if you find the applicant's statements credible.

##### **What to do**

You remind the interviewer that you cannot give your advice or opinion on this, as your only task as an interpreter is to provide interpretation.



**Situational challenge: staying within the boundaries of your role**

You interpret for an applicant who, in your view, is not telling the truth. But the interviewer seems unaware.

**What to do**

As an interpreter, you do not evaluate the truthfulness or credibility of the reported information. You are impartial and you do not express any personal opinions, value judgements or preconceptions.

**Situational challenge: reiterating your neutrality to the applicant**

During a break from the interview, the applicant tries to have a conversation with you on your common ethnic origin and the problems associated with it in your country of origin.

**What to do**

You remind the applicant that you are just tasked with interpretation, that you cannot have this type of conversation and that you are not allowed to reveal information about yourself. You inform the interviewer of what happened. Whenever possible, use a different space from applicants during breaks to avoid interacting with them.



## 3. Interpreting in asylum interviews

Being a professional interpreter in the asylum procedure requires preparation, specific knowledge and technical and soft skills. Your main objective as an interpreter during an interview in the asylum procedure is to ensure that every participant understands all that is said as it is said. Remember that the applicant has the right to a fair and unbiased asylum procedure. This relies partly on the quality of your interpretation. In most cases, applicants only get one chance to participate in a personal interview to substantiate their claims in front of the determining authority. This makes your task as an interpreter a very important one. Any shortcomings can have serious consequences for the applicant.

In this chapter, you will find guidance on how to prepare for a personal interview and how to interpret during the interview. In particular, this chapter will:

- present some key considerations regarding the power imbalance in the interviews, the specifics and challenges of transcultural communication and guidance on how to become familiar with the terminology needed for your assignments;
- explain interpretation methods and techniques, particularly consecutive interpretation, turn-taking, note-taking and sight translation;
- guide you on technical aspects of providing interpretation during in-person and remote interviews;
- provide you with challenging situations that you may face during your assignments and guidance on how to behave in such situations.

### 3.1. Communication and language

#### 3.1.1. Power imbalance

The asylum authority has the power to make a decision on the application for international protection submitted by an applicant. During the asylum procedure the interviewer, you as an interpreter and any accompanying person are present as professionals doing their job. However, the applicant is present in a highly personal capacity, talking about personal experiences, beliefs and convictions during the interview, whose outcome will significantly influence their future.

A **power imbalance** therefore exists in the asylum context.

- The **interviewer** has, or is perceived by the applicant to have, the power to decide on the outcome of the application, or at least a strong influence on the outcome. The interviewer leads the interview, decides when to start and end it and steers the direction of the interview by deciding the questions to ask and the topics to discuss.



- You, as an **interpreter**, may be perceived by the applicant as part of the asylum authority. As the only person in the room not experiencing a language barrier, you may be perceived as having the power to withhold, distort or add information.
- The **applicant**, in turn, has (or thinks that they have) no or little power in the interview, despite their fate depending on the outcome of the interview. The applicant is mostly dependent on the interviewer to manage the interview and on you to convey the messages.

As an interpreter, you have to be aware of these **(perceived) imbalances of power**. Furthermore, your conduct must not reinforce them. These power imbalances cannot be avoided but you and the other parties can mitigate them. Being aware of them will allow you to understand the interview situation from the perspective of the applicant. All the help provided in this guide, particularly in the following sections of this chapter and in [Chapter 4 Interpreting for applicants in a vulnerable situation](#), was built on these considerations. If you act accordingly, you will minimise the risk of the power imbalance negatively affecting an applicant's asylum case.

### 3.1.2. Transcultural communication

Interpretation, if not properly performed, carries a **risk of distorting** the message that is conveyed. This risk increases when the participants in the asylum interview come from different backgrounds.

**Various factors can affect communication.** They include a person's gender, education, and cultural, social, religious, political and ethnic backgrounds and various other aspects of the context in which they have grown up and lived. These factors affect the way in which people convey and understand **verbal and non-verbal messages**, often at an unconscious level. For example, one person might be more direct in their communication than others, or the level of formality of the language used may differ depending on a person's background. Likewise, non-verbal language can vary substantially and be easily misunderstood between speakers from different backgrounds. In the asylum procedure, the interviewer and the applicant most likely come from different backgrounds and environments. Your own background will also differ, to a lesser or greater extent, from that of the other participants. All of these factors can create barriers in communication and generate misunderstanding.

When interpreting you will need to consider all of the factors and ensure that you interpret not only the words as they are stated but also the full meaning that derives from the context and the person's background. The subsequent sections of [Chapter 3 Interpreting in asylum interviews](#) and [Chapter 4 Interpreting for applicants in a vulnerable situation](#) of this guide describe techniques that will help you to achieve this in the best possible way. It is important that you inform the interviewer when you realise that challenges in transcultural communication are affecting the interview. This will strengthen the interviewer's trust in your work and enable all participants to minimise the risks of negative consequences for the asylum procedure. It will then be the task of the interviewer to decide how to act on the information you give them.



### Situational challenge: transcultural communication

During the interview, the applicant refers to their ‘brother’ while narrating an event of their life. You are aware that in the context where the applicant comes from the term ‘brother’ may be used to describe a sibling and in a broader sense to describe a close friend.

#### What to do

You interpret what the applicant said using the exact wording and, once you have finished, you inform the interviewer that you would like to make a note on a term used by the applicant. You then explain to the interviewer the two meanings in which the word ‘brother’ may be used in the applicant’s context.

### 3.1.3. Terminology

Being a professional interpreter in the asylum procedure requires that you **keep up to date** and develop your professional interpreting skills, including your in-depth knowledge of both the source and the target **languages** (for the definitions of source and target languages, see Section [3.3.1 Consecutive interpretation](#)).

You also need to be familiar with the **terminology** relevant to asylum and with the context of the countries of origin of applicants and cases you may be asked to interpret for. To this end, it is helpful to consult, on a regular basis and as needed, sources such as country reports <sup>(40)</sup> and news articles to become more familiar with the terminology regarding relevant political, geographical and cultural aspects of the countries of origin of applicants <sup>(41)</sup>. You can focus on key terminology relating to aspects that are likely to be discussed during the interviews, such as the administrative division of the country, the main towns and regions, the names of law enforcement bodies, commonly used acronyms, the political system, the names and acronyms of political parties, prominent political or religious figures, the names of ethnic groups and tribes, and cultural practices.

You are advised to use **glossaries** to assist with translating technical or specific terminology. Depending on the national context, glossaries may be provided by the authorities. You can also create your own glossaries by noting down the words you come across during interviews alongside their translation and organising them by topic. Create glossaries that are relevant to different types of asylum claims, such as glossaries on military ranks, religion-related terms, and terminology relevant to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, and read them before your assignment.

As a general rule, you need to **be aware of your own competencies** and limitations when accepting an assignment. All interviews are different and some may require specific competencies. If you are given some information in advance on the case for which you need to interpret, for example through a short briefing by the interviewer, this will allow you to evaluate what specific competencies may be needed (e.g. if you are informed that you will

<sup>(40)</sup> Practitioners in the area of asylum often refer to country of origin information (COI). Publicly accessible COI databases and portals exist, such as the [EUAA COI Portal](#) and [Refworld](#).

<sup>(41)</sup> You can also consult and download the [EUAA’s asylum and reception terminology collection](#).



interpret for a child, you will know that you must possess skills for interpreting for children). Only accept tasks for which you can guarantee the required quality and remember that refusing an assignment for which you are not able to guarantee high-quality interpretation is a sign of professionalism.

## 3.2. Before the interview

It is important that you are well prepared for assignments.

Your **dress code** will be your ‘calling card’ when entering the interview room. Dress in a way that is professional and appropriate. What is considered professional and appropriate may vary depending on the specific context you work in. However, business casual is usually considered appropriate. You should at all times avoid wearing clothes that resemble law enforcement or military uniforms or make reference to law enforcement, the military or a particular political ideology. As for religious symbols, there are different practices in different countries. However, you should be aware that clothes and symbols can have an impact on the applicant. If provided, wear your interpreter’s tag visibly.

Before the interview starts, you may receive a **brief** on the main aspects of the case, such as the applicant’s reason for flight and possible vulnerabilities. Arrive at the interview sufficiently in advance to allow time for the briefing, and use the information you receive to ensure you are technically and mentally prepared for the interview. For example, you can review technical terms that may come up during the interview or mentally prepare yourself for a particularly long interview or for sensitive or traumatising topics (see Chapter [5 Taking care of your well-being](#)).

Arriving at the interview with **all material** and tools you may need for smooth interpretation is a sign of professionalism. This may include a pen and paper or a tablet; glossaries; a dictionary, should you have to translate a rare or technical word or one that you do not know; and, if applicable, a digital calendar converter and transliteration tables or guidance. Always check that you are allowed to bring these tools and devices with you into the interview room and to use them during interpretation. If you are not allowed to take electronic equipment, you can use a printed version. Consider using page markers and highlighters to help you navigate these tools quickly.

Depending on the requirements of the authority, make sure that your mobile phone is left outside the meeting room, is switched off or is muted.

## 3.3. During the interview

Consecutive interpretation of oral statements and sight translation of written texts are the two methods that you will use to perform interpretation during an asylum interview. Your conduct and approach while interpreting should be in line with the principles illustrated in Chapter [2 Key principles of interpreting in the asylum procedure](#) and you should ensure that everything all participants say is accurately translated.





### 3.3.1. Consecutive interpretation



#### Consecutive interpretation

The participants take turns speaking and leave time for the interpreter to interpret.

In consecutive interpretation, you will first listen to the message in the source language and then, when the speaker pauses, interpret it into the target language.



#### Source language

The language of the speaker – that is, the original language in which the message is produced.



#### Target language

The language into which the message is rendered by the interpreter – that is, the language of the recipient of the message.

Consecutive interpretation could be either short consecutive interpretation or long consecutive interpretation. Short consecutive interpretation normally involves the immediate translation of one or two sentences, while long consecutive involves the translation of several sentences. In both methods, you need to listen attentively, pay close attention to details and take notes (see Section [3.3.3 Note-taking](#)).

In the asylum procedure, it is advisable to use **short consecutive** interpretation to ensure accuracy and completeness.

Short consecutive makes it easier for you as an interpreter to retain all details and therefore to ensure appropriate interpretation. The interpretation of smaller segments via short consecutive will make it easier to render all the details of the applicant's narrative, including names, places, time references and detailed accounts of events.

Short consecutive entails more frequent **turn-taking**. It can be challenging to find a natural flow in short consecutive interpretation and to easily identify the time when you can start interpreting. Applying turn-taking requires good methods and practice. Even if the interpreter is experienced, it may be the first time the applicant is speaking through an interpreter, which could create a challenge.



While it is important to pay attention to the applicant's intonation and body language and to follow their natural flow and pauses, it is essential that turn-taking occurs with a frequency that allows you to interpret without missing any information or details. The applicant should be informed about turn-taking by the interviewer at the beginning of the session. At this time, you can agree on a small sign or gesture when you want the applicant to pause to allow you to interpret. If the applicant does not follow turn-taking rules during the interview, you can ask the interviewer to explain them to the applicant again. Similarly, you may ask the interviewer to pause if you find it difficult to remember and translate their message in full detail. If you find yourself in a situation where you need to interpret longer messages, your note-taking needs to be comprehensive so that no details are omitted or distorted. This situation is challenging and requires much attention on your side. You can practise your consecutive interpretation skills using the resources below.



### **Exercise your consecutive interpretation skills**

A useful tool to practise consecutive interpreting is the [Speech Repository](#) of the Directorate-General for Interpretation of the European Commission.

The Speech Repository is an e-learning tool. It contains videos of real-life and tailor-made educational speeches to enable interpreters and interpreting students to practise and improve their interpretation skills.



### **Improve your memory and short consecutive interpretation**

The exercises below can prepare your mind to better retain what a speaker says <sup>(42)</sup>.

#### **Option 1**

Pick a text. Read it sentence by sentence. Repeat each sentence without looking at the text. As a second step, you can do the same but interpret the text instead of repeating it in the same language.

#### **Option 2**

Have someone else read a short text to you, or listen to a speaker on TV, on the internet or on a podcast. Ask the speaker to stop or pause the audio every couple of sentences. Try to repeat exactly what the speaker has said. As a second step, you can do the same but interpret the text instead of repeating it in the same language.

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<sup>(42)</sup> More exercises are available on the [Language Connections website](#).



### Situational challenge: managing interruptions

The interviewer does not act as they should: they interrupt you and do not allow you to finish translating all the statements of the applicant.

#### What to do

Interruptions during interpretation can make you lose track, which can have a negative impact on the interpretation. Furthermore, the interviewer has no interest in having incomplete information in the interview report. You should let the interviewer know that interruptions are making the interview challenging to interpret.

## 3.3.2. Sight translation



### Sight translation

The interpreter orally translates a written document from the source language into the target language.

When performing sight translation, you silently read a written text in the source language and translate it orally into the target language.

As an interpreter in the asylum procedure, you may be asked to **translate out loud** a variety of documents. The most common are identification documents such as passports, driving licenses, national identification cards and birth certificates. You may also be asked to sight translate handwritten personal letters, newspaper articles, police or medical reports and other legal documents.

To translate as accurately and precisely as possible and depending on the length and complexity of the document, it may be best to ask the interviewer for some time to review the document as a whole to enable you to understand its context, overall structure and purpose and/or to solve some translation problems beforehand. If certain words are illegible, inform the interviewer.

Follow the instructions of the interviewer on what to translate from the document. If the interviewer does not specify anything, proceed with a full translation. You may otherwise be asked to give a summary of the content of the document or just to translate some parts. In these cases, you will translate the main content or just the specific parts as requested, but you can also highlight significant elements such as the issuer of the document, the place of issue, and dates and other names mentioned in the document.

Before the interviewer closes the interview, depending on national practice, you may be asked to **read back the report or transcript** of the interview to the applicant. It is important to sight translate the transcript as it is and not based on what you remember that the applicant

said. If you realise that some elements were misunderstood by the interviewer and have been wrongly transcribed, you still need to read out the transcript to the applicant as it is written.



### Situational challenge: mistakes in the interview report

When reading back the interview report you realise that one or more pieces of information in the report do not correspond to what you had interpreted. The applicant does not raise the issue.

#### What to do

You ask for a break and point out to the interviewer that you have noticed a discrepancy between your interpretation and the interview report.



### Exercise your sight translation skills

Translate a short text orally.

The first times you do this exercise, start by looking for verbs and the subjects in the text and highlighting them, then translate the text. Once you are familiar with this technique, directly sight translate, without highlighting.

Practise until you can do this at a normal speaking speed. You should concentrate on giving an intelligible and accurate translation of the text.

When practising this exercise, start with simple texts using vocabulary with which you are familiar. Then you can move on to more complex texts with technical vocabulary.

## 3.3.3. Note-taking

When interpreting in a personal interview, you will need to **take notes to help you remember what the speaker says** before you can translate it into the target language. Accuracy and completeness are particularly relevant in the personal interview (see Section [2.2 Accuracy and completeness](#)). Note-taking while interpreting does not mean writing down everything that is said, but rather capturing key elements that will assist you in remembering the speaker's statements and interpreting them completely and accurately.

Note-taking is a technique that needs to be practised a lot and for which training is beneficial. Some flexibility or adjustments to the process will also be required, depending on the circumstances and on what works best for you. For example, you can choose which language you take notes in and use symbols. The following are some **tips and tricks** <sup>(43)</sup>:

- draw symbols instead of words;
- use abbreviations;

<sup>(43)</sup> UNHCR Austria, [Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures](#), Vienna, 2022. See also the EUAA's training module on [interpreting in the asylum context](#).



- use words or phrases to connect ideas in different places;
- use symbols or various signs for emphasising, confirming or negating: for example, use a strike-through line to indicate 'not' or an underscore to emphasise an idea;
- use symbols or signs for noting tenses and modal verbs;
- use recall lines to avoid noting down the same thing twice on the same page;
- use symbols or specific abbreviations to indicate links between actions or events;
- organise your notes in a structured way on the page.



### Example of note-taking

| Applicant's statement                         | Key elements    | Interpreter's notes     |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| I arrived in Austria by plane on 3 April 2023 | Who (subject)   | I                       |
|                                               | Did what (verb) | →d                      |
|                                               | Where/when/how  | AT<br>03/04/23<br>Plane |



### Practise note-taking

Ask someone to read a text or narrate something to you, or listen to a speaker on TV, on the internet or on a podcast. Take notes while the speaker is talking. Pause every couple of sentences. Try to repeat exactly what the speaker said.

Analyse the outcome. Did you leave anything out? Did you change anything? Try to find the reasons for any errors so that you know what to watch out for.

When you are ready, try the exercise again and interpret what the speaker said in the target language <sup>(44)</sup>.

## 3.3.4. Strategies of interpretation

In the following section you will find guidance on **how to perform your tasks during the interview**, how to put in practice the technical and soft skills necessary to ensure accurate and high-quality interpretation and how to display the behaviour expected from you in the interview room. The lists are non-exhaustive and do not contain all potential circumstances that may occur when interpreting. Yet they can serve as a guide and help to remind you of your role while interpreting.

<sup>(44)</sup> See the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada's [interpreter handbook](#).



The guidance applies from the very moment you meet the applicant – for example, when the interviewer is escorting you and the applicant to the interview room – until the interview ends. The basic requirements for good interpretation are that:

- all participants can hear each other clearly;
- you understand the language and dialect spoken by all participants;
- all participants understand you.

#### (a) **Verifying understanding**

The introductory part of the interview is an important point; it allows you make sure that all the necessary conditions are in place.

- Make sure that the applicant and the interviewer **fully understand** you and that you fully understand them. Let the interviewer know immediately if, for any reason, this is not the case.
- You should also make sure that you can **hear and see each other well**. Check that the seating arrangement enables you to see and hear both the applicant and the interviewer. If factors such as noise or the speaker's tone of voice make it difficult for you to fully hear what is being said, you must communicate this to the interviewer as soon as possible so that the problem can be solved. Speak clearly and at a suitable speed. Ensure that your pace allows the interviewer to type or to report what you interpret.



#### **Situational challenge: understanding the applicant's language**

At the opening of the interview, you realise that the applicant speaks a dialect with which you are not fully familiar.

##### **What to do**

You immediately inform the interviewer that you cannot fully understand this dialect and that you cannot ensure accurate interpretation.



#### **Situational challenge: hearing the applicant and the interviewer**

Construction works start outside the window and you cannot hear everything well.

##### **What to do**

You tell the interviewer that due to the noise you cannot hear what is being said well. In addition, be transparent and interpret what you say to the interviewer for the applicant.



## (b) Ensuring accuracy, precision and completeness

Accuracy, precision and completeness are key for correct interpretation during an asylum interview.

- Always interpret using the **same subject or pronoun** used by the speaker. For example, when the applicant says 'I did' you will translate 'I did', therefore speaking in the first person.
- If applicable, adopt the **grammatical gender** of the nouns, adjectives or verbs used by the applicant when referring to people. If either the source or the target language does not have the same grammatical genders (e.g. if a language does not have the feminine and masculine genders or does not have the neutral gender) and therefore you cannot translate completely and accurately, inform the interviewer. It will be up to the interviewer to agree on how to proceed with the interpretation. For example, if the applicant is speaking about a person and says 'it came to my house' and the target language does not have the neutral gender, as an interpreter you would need to make an informed choice on whether to say 'he' or 'she' came to my house. The interviewer would need to be made aware of this choice and decide how to proceed.
- **Interpret all that has been said by the participants as closely as possible** to the original wording, **without adding or omitting** anything and **without changing** the content.
  - Interpret everything the applicant says during the interview, even if it is not a reply to a question of the interviewer or if the applicant addresses you directly. In addition, interpret any repetitions; any statements, even if apparently inaccurate or irrelevant, confusing or illogical; and any unfriendly, vulgar or offensive utterances. You are not responsible for the content of what is said.
  - Interpret questions asked by the interviewer accurately and completely. The way a question is asked has an impact on its answer and there are reasons why the interviewer chooses a given formulation or type of question (see [Section 1.4 Phases of the personal interview](#)). For example, when the interviewer asks an open question, you need to interpret it as it is asked. You should not add anything, such as options for answers, even if in your view this may clarify the question to the applicant.
  - If the interviewer asks the same or similar questions more than once, keep interpreting accurately and completely.
  - If something cannot be translated literally in the target language, for example a proverb or idiom, describe it and inform the participants that you gave a description.
  - If you need to check whether you have understood correctly or want any of the participants to repeat something to ensure accurate interpretation, say so. If you need to double-check something with the applicant, make sure to inform the interviewer, as they must be aware of all interactions with the applicant.
  - Always interpret side conversations and dialogues between the interviewer and other people attending the interview, for example legal advisors. You need to interpret such conversations for the applicant so that they are not excluded.



- In order to guarantee transparency towards all participants, make sure that everyone is informed whenever you state anything that is not strictly an interpretation of a participant's words. This can include, for example, if you are correcting yourself if you make a mistake during the interpretation.
- When you want to say something on your own initiative, for example that you need a break, say 'the interpreter needs a break' and translate this.
- Reflect each participant's way of speaking as accurately as possible. This means that you should **reproduce the register** (choice of words, structure of sentences, etc.) in which the participants express themselves. For example, if they use very simple language, you need to do the same. If, on the contrary, they use complex or technical language, you must do the same when interpreting. This also means that you should not attempt to clarify or embellish the structure of the sentences used by the participants.
- **Reproduce the messages in the same order** as they were generated by the applicant and interviewer. Remember that even the order in which the applicant describes or narrates something may be of importance.
- Depending on the language you interpret, you may be asked to clarify the transcription (or transliteration) of names from a different alphabet. If available and authorised in your national context, refer to **transliteration tables** or guidance. If such tools or guidance are not available, you must exercise due care in the transliteration, as the transliteration of names from one language to another may vary and there may be several ways to transliterate a certain name. Inform the interviewer if this is the case.
- Depending on the practice in your national authority, you may be asked to **convert dates** between different calendars. If allowed, a digital calendar converter should be used. Always take note of both dates, according to both relevant calendars. In order to reduce the risk of confusion and misunderstanding during the interview, in agreement with the interviewer, you can ask the applicant to specify to which calendar they refer when mentioning a date or year.



### Situational challenge: dealing with a comprehension issue

During the interview, there are some parts of the applicant's statements that you have not clearly understood. You do, however, understand the general sense of the statements.

#### What to do

When you do not understand something, you should inform the interviewer and let them know that you will need to ask the applicant to repeat or clarify their statements in order to fully understand what you are about to interpret. Requesting clarification is a hallmark of professionalism and not of a lack of competence.



### Situational challenge: handling ambiguous terms

The applicant uses a word that has more than one meaning. It is not clear from the context what the applicant is saying.

#### What to do

Tell the interviewer that you are not able to interpret because the applicant is using a word with several meanings. Ask the interviewer for permission to check with the applicant the relevant meaning.



### Situational challenge: side conversations

The applicant and their legal advisor have a side conversation during the interview. You cannot interpret it fully.

#### What to do

You can wait for the interviewer to intervene. You can also raise your hand to intervene and kindly ask for one person to speak at a time. You interpret this for all the participants.

## (c) Respecting the boundaries of interpreting

When interpreting an interview, you need to ensure that you stick to your role so that everyone's responsibilities are well understood by the applicant.

- **Limit your task to interpretation.** The interviewer is in charge of the interview and as an interpreter you should not intervene without their permission. Remember that each interviewer has their own plan on how to conduct the interview and this may differ from one interviewer or case to another. It is your task to focus on providing correct and accurate interpretation.
- **Stick to the language and dialect for which your service was requested.** Inform the interviewer if the applicant at any point during the interview speaks a language or dialect other than the one that you have been asked to interpret and in which the interview was supposed to be conducted.
- **Never offer support, personal opinions or advice to any of the participants, especially with regard to the examination of the claim.** For example, do not answer questions on the situation in the country of origin or judge the credibility of the applicant's statements, even if you are asked to do so. It is possible that the applicant will ask you questions about your origin, ethnicity or religion. Do not answer such questions and inform the interviewer immediately.

**Situational challenge: applicant asking for your help**

During the interview, the interviewer asks the applicant when the war started in their country. The applicant cannot remember the date and asks you for assistance.

**What to do**

You will not answer the applicant. You will interpret the applicant's question for the interviewer. The interviewer will explain to the applicant that you cannot answer the question or similar questions.

**(d) Maintaining an attentive and respectful approach**

Ensuring high-quality interpretation during an asylum interview also requires certain soft skills, such as the capacity to adopt an attentive, respectful and responsive approach.

**Listen attentively** to all participants during an interview. This means giving your full attention to what is being said and making a conscious effort to retain the information. Pay attention to the participants' non-verbal cues, as well as culture-specific expressions and modes of communication. This will help you to better understand and interpret their utterances. In order to do so, look towards the speaker when listening.

**Situational challenge: attentiveness to non-verbal communication**

You are interpreting for an applicant of the opposite gender. In your and their culture, it is not appropriate to look them directly in the eyes.

**What to do**

You still look towards the applicant, but not directly in their eyes, to detect non-verbal communication.

Your conduct should also contribute to the establishment of a trusting atmosphere for the applicant.

- **Respect all applicants** and communicate sensitively with them during the interviews, especially those in a vulnerable situation (for more details, see Chapter [4 Interpreting for applicants in a vulnerable situation](#)).
- At times, you may have to deal with aggressive or disrespectful applicants. Applicants may, for example, express anger about the nature of an interview or about certain questions that are asked. If this happens, **remain calm** and avoid engaging in an argument with the applicant. Instead, you should strictly interpret everything the applicant says and, if the situation gets out of hand, ask for a small break to talk to the interviewer separately.
- It may happen that at the beginning of or during an interview an applicant requests an interpreter of a specific gender, religion, ethnic origin or community. They may also indicate that they feel uncomfortable with the interpreter. **You should not take this**



**personally**, as it is not related to the quality of your work but rather to the very sensitive nature of an asylum claim and traumatic experiences the applicant may have had (e.g. domestic violence, abuses occurring in the context of interethnic or inter-religious clashes).

- **Avoid using any verbal or non-verbal expressions based on stereotypes** or personal beliefs about the applicant's appearance, behaviour or account.



#### **Situational challenge: controlling your non-verbal gestures and expressions**

During the interview, the applicant narrates a violent act that they have committed. You feel deeply affected and disturbed.

##### **What to do**

Continue interpreting and make sure that your facial expressions and other non-verbal communication remain neutral. If you need a moment to compose yourself before continuing your work, you can ask for a break.



#### **Situational challenge: aggressive behaviour by the applicant**

During the interview, the applicant becomes verbally aggressive. You do not know how to react.

##### **What to do**

Above all, stay calm and do not take any remarks personally. You should interpret everything that the applicant says, including offensive comments and language, so that the interviewer can intervene. Otherwise, as a last resort, you can ask for a break during which you can talk to the interviewer and request more support. It may be useful for you to agree on a signal with the interviewer before the interview to indicate an emergency situation so that you both can act rapidly.

#### **(e) Asking for breaks when needed**

There are several reasons why a break may be needed during the interpretation.

- Sometimes the long duration of an interview, the nature or sensitivity of the topics discussed or the behaviour of any of the participants may make it more **difficult for you to ensure correct conduct** for the whole duration of the interview. If you find yourself facing such a challenge, you may ask the interviewer for a break. This is a sign of professionalism and will help you maintain the quality of your interpretation.
- Consider asking for a break whenever you wish to **share a comment with the interviewer**, as this should never be done in the presence of the applicant. You should do so if you become aware of something that may negatively affect the interview or



interpretation, either from the applicant's side (e.g. signs of distrust by the applicant) or from your side (e.g. bias).

## 3.4. After the interview

**Securely dispose of the notes** you took during the interview, as per national practice. Never share your notes with anyone and do not take them with you after the interview or leave them unattended (see Section [2.3 Confidentiality](#)).

Make yourself available to receive **feedback** on your performance to make you aware of areas in which you can improve your skills.

Each interview is a **learning experience** for you as an interpreter. As you interpret for more interviews, you will gain more knowledge on how to interpret as accurately as possible.

You should **take note** of how the interview went after you are finished, self-reflect and identify follow-up actions that you may need to put in place. If you had to look up a word you did not know, try to memorise that word for the next time and add it to your glossary.

Remember to **never disclose any information** you have become aware of during interpretation or through accessing written documents to anyone, including friends, family and other interpreters. In addition, never share such information on social media.

## 3.5. Remote interpretation

The use of remote interpreting has increased significantly and this may become an important method of interpretation. Remote interpretation has several benefits, such as increasing efficiency and reducing travel costs. It can be particularly useful when interviewing applicants in remote locations, when there is a lack of interpreters in a country or region, during lockdowns or when the applicant is in detention. However, remote interpreting requires different working methods and presents some specific challenges. As a general rule, in-person interpretation is still preferred and recommended <sup>(45)</sup>.

For the purpose of this guide, remote interpretation is defined as a situation where one or more of the participants involved are connected through a videoconferencing tool, online voice call service or phone. Procedures may vary depending on the national practice. Below are some examples of **possible settings** <sup>(46)</sup>.

- You are in the building of the asylum, immigration or border authority, in the same room as the interviewer. The applicant is elsewhere, for example in a reception centre, alone or with their legal advisor.

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<sup>(45)</sup> See UNHCR, [Key procedural considerations on the remote participation of asylum-seekers in the refugee status determination interview](#), 15 May 2020.

<sup>(46)</sup> EUAA, [Training Catalogue](#), 2023, Section 'Interpreting in the asylum context'



- You are in a specially installed and secured workstation, separated from the interviewer.
- You are on your own, working from home through videoconferencing or phone.

The interpreting mode used in a remote context depends on a variety of factors, including the equipment available and the location of the applicant, of the interviewer and of the interpreter. Legal provisions may also have an impact, particularly in relation to recording the interview.

Remember that even during remote interpretation you need to remain professional and consider the key principles that apply to in-person interpretation (see Chapter [2 Key principles of interpreting in the asylum procedure](#)).

In the following paragraphs, you will find guidance on how to adjust your interpretation to a remote context.

It is important that you **prepare the equipment required for the remote interview well in advance**.

- Make sure that you have received all **relevant instructions** prior to the interview regarding the modality in which the remote interpretation will be conducted. You as an interpreter can also encourage the interviewing authority to share instructions for remote interviews with the participants prior to the interview.
- **Verify how to use the device** required to perform the interpretation and ensure that all necessary equipment is working. The technical devices used in a remote setting can range from the simple – a phone (fixed or mobile), computer or tablet – to more sophisticated – video- and teleconferencing equipment.
- Ensure that the device you will use is **functioning and fully charged** and that you have a charger at hand for when the battery becomes low.
- Verify that the **speaker and microphone** of your device work. Use a **headset** when interpreting through phone or videoconferencing; the quality of the sound is much better and the use of a headset minimises the risk of the interview being overheard and hence the risk of confidentiality breaches. Be aware that prolonged use of a headset set to a high volume can damage your hearing. Check that the **internet or phone connection** is good enough and secure, as per national requirements. Be prepared for delays between sending and receiving messages. Be aware of whom to contact to assist you in resolving technical issues. Inform the interviewer ahead of time if you are facing any technical issues that you will not be able to resolve in time for the interview.
- If the interpretation is to be conducted through **videoconferencing**, use a laptop, a computer or a tablet – not a mobile phone – with an integrated or external webcam, to ensure images of good quality and adequate size. Check that the camera is working and that its angle allows others to see you clearly. Make sure you have a neutral background. Your face should be fully visible, as well as your note-taking. Ensure adequate lighting in the room; if only your silhouette is visible through the camera, you need to adjust the lighting. Be aware that pieces of clothing with stripes and dots can distort the image on screen or have a distracting effect, so avoid wearing them when video-interpreting.



- You may be asked to join a short **test session** before the meeting, or you can request one before the interview. At the test session, you can check that your equipment works well and that all participants can understand each other. Agree in advance with the interviewer on alternative means of communication and what to do in the case of connectivity or other technical issues.

While remote interviewing and interpreting follow the same principles as the face-to-face method, they require more attention and effort on the side of each participant. On your side, particular efforts will be needed to ensure that you operate in an environment conducive to concentration and confidentiality. You are encouraged to perform the following **checks before the interview**.

- Make sure that there is **no noise** in the room and that **nobody can overhear** the interview.
- Make sure that you are **alone** in the room and that a **'do not disturb' sign** is placed outside the door. This is important in order to ensure confidentiality and concentration.
- Make sure that your **working conditions are comfortable** and that you have time for a break between two or more consecutive assignments.
- Agree with the interviewer in advance if you would like to **increase the frequency of turn-taking** or increase the **number of breaks**.

**During the interview**, you need to ensure that conducive conditions are maintained.

- Like in in-person interviews, in remote interviews it is of utmost importance that all participants can hear all that is said well. If you face any **difficulty in hearing or seeing** the other participants, immediately inform the interviewer. Try to solve any problems at the beginning of the session or as soon as possible after the problem emerges.
- Be aware that there may be **delays** between sending and receiving messages in a remote setting. If needed, you can remind the interviewer and the applicant to take turns in speaking and to allow time for interpretation in between.



### **Situational challenge: observing non-verbal cues**

A lack of direct contact with some participants during a remote interview prevents you, as an interpreter, from fully observing their body language, expressions or non-verbal communication. You wish to minimise the negative impact of this situation.

#### **What to do**

If the interpretation is taking place over the phone or without video, pay as much attention as possible to the tone of voice or intonation of the participants and any other vocal signs that may help you understand non-verbal cues.

If the interview is conducted through videoconferencing, adjust the angle of the camera so that your facial expressions are visible. You can also ask the interviewer to adjust their camera or the applicant's camera, if needed to enable you to see them clearly. If you are using multiple screens, look at the one with the camera.

**Situational challenge: risk of missing participants' statements**

You are scheduled to conduct remote interpretation. In the past, you felt it was particularly tiring for you and after some time it was challenging to grasp everything the applicant said exactly. You want to minimise the risk of this happening.

**What to do**

Remote interpreting entails a higher risk of alterations, additions and omissions than in-person interpreting. You will need to concentrate even more than usual to minimise this risk. There are some other actions that you can take. For example, prior to the interview, you can agree with the interviewer to have breaks more often than in in-person interviews, if the schedule allows. During the interview, you can also check the applicant's understanding more frequently. Note-taking is also important.

**Situational challenge: ensuring turn-taking**

You have just interpreted in a remote interview. The applicant's statements were long, which made it challenging for you to interpret. However, you were not sure how to instruct the applicant to pause. You would not like to find yourself in the same situation in the future.

**What to do**

Next time, try to agree with the interviewer before the beginning of the interview on a way to signal when you need the speakers to pause (e.g. by using the 'raise hand' option available with some videoconferencing tools or by typing a message in the chat box). Agree to inform the applicant accordingly in the opening phase of the interview.

**Situational challenge: poor equipment or audio or video quality**

You are soon scheduled to conduct remote interpretation. You know from your previous experience that there can be technical issues. You are concerned that this will affect your work and the interview process.

**What to do**

Prepare properly. Make sure that all your equipment is fully functioning and charged before the interview and that your phone or internet connection is stable. Agree in advance with the interviewer on alternative means of communication and what to do in the event of problems occurring. If any issue arises during the interview, inform the interviewer immediately and implement the solutions identified in advance. Discuss possible solutions if they were not identified beforehand.



## 4. Interpreting for applicants in a vulnerable situation

Vulnerability is the state of being susceptible to harm or adverse effects due to personal circumstances. Applicants for international protection may find themselves in specific situations of vulnerability owing to various factors, including negative events that they have experienced. Applicants in situations of vulnerability are often in need of care, support or protection. They may also need special guarantees to participate in the asylum procedure in the same way as other applicants.

This chapter will:

- introduce the concept of vulnerability in the asylum procedure;
- present different groups of applicants in situations of vulnerability and how their situations may affect their ability to participate in the interviews;
- propose strategies for interpreting for applicants in a vulnerable situation;
- demonstrate challenging situations that you may face during your assignments and guidance on how to behave in such situations.

### 4.1. Vulnerability in the asylum procedure

Most applicants for international protection have been exposed to experiences or situations that could lead to vulnerability. They have left their home countries and their usual lives, often after experiencing threats, violence or abuse. In most cases, they have been exposed to unsafe and extremely difficult situations during their journey, including in transit countries. In the country of asylum, they often find themselves in an uncertain situation without clear prospects and limited access to medical care, social services and the labour market.

Vulnerabilities may also be linked to the applicant's **personal circumstances or characteristics**, such as their age (both young and old); sex; gender; gender identity; sexual orientation; family status; cultural and social backgrounds; education; health conditions, including mental health problems; and urgent security risks.

Applicants may be provided with special procedural guarantees to ensure that their situation of vulnerability does not affect their chances of understanding and effectively participating in the asylum procedure. Such guarantees help them to fulfil their obligations and enjoy their rights during the asylum procedure on an equal footing with others. This may require paying particular attention and adopting a tailored approach when providing interpretation. You should be mentally prepared to meet people in a vulnerable situation and contribute to creating a safe and respectful environment during their personal interview and in any other steps of the procedure in which you participate. As a professional interpreter, you should also point out when you feel that you cannot take on such assignments.



## 4.2. Groups in vulnerable situations

Among all applicants in situations of vulnerability, we can identify the following groups whose capacity to fully and coherently narrate their experiences and articulate their fears and needs for protection during the asylum procedure may be limited. The following are the groups to which you, as an interpreter, may need to pay particular attention:

- children, in particular unaccompanied and separated children,
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) applicants,
- victims of sexual and gender-based violence,
- victims of human trafficking,
- victims of torture or other forms of violence,
- people with mental health issues,
- people with physical or intellectual disabilities.

The list is not exhaustive and sometimes these characteristics co-exist, meaning that the same applicant may be in a vulnerable situation for a variety of reasons and may therefore be in need of special procedural guarantees.

Let's take a closer look at all these groups.

### 4.2.1. Children

As an interpreter in the asylum procedure, you may be asked to interpret for unaccompanied, separated or accompanied children.



#### Who is a child?

A child, also referred to as a minor, is a person under the age of 18.



#### Who is an unaccompanied child?

Unaccompanied children are those who arrived or are currently in the country of asylum without their parents or any other adult responsible for them.





### Who is a separated child?

Separated children are those who have been separated from all adults responsible for them but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

Whether the child is interviewed alone, with an adult responsible for them or with a supporting person, it is important that you keep in mind that children are a group in a particularly vulnerable situation, due to their age, their background and the experiences they may have lived. As a result, interviews with children are undertaken in a child-sensitive manner. This affects you as interpreter, including the skills you need to possess and the preparation you need to carry out. You should also note that the opening phase of interviews with children is normally longer than usual. The interviewer takes time to build rapport with the child and build an atmosphere of trust, for example by introducing neutral topics at the beginning of the interview. This can involve asking the child questions such as ‘How was your day?’ and ‘What’s your favourite sport/activity?’.

When communicating with children, you should remember that their perception of reality, as well as their ability to express thoughts and reasonings or to explain their own emotions, may differ from that of adults. The way children understand, process and talk about events, feelings, emotions and thoughts may differ depending on their age as well as their stage of development, which is different from child to child and depends on their background, their exposure to traumatic experiences and possible development deficits. Children may also be particularly shy or reluctant to open up to adults they do not know. They may also be particularly susceptible to suggestibility, therefore behaving how and saying what they believe adults would like to see or hear.

Moreover, tragic and traumatic events may have a great impact on children’s language, so fragmented and incoherent narratives can be expected in the context of asylum-related interviews.

More guidance on strategies for interpreting for children is included in Section [4.3.3 Interpreting for children](#).

## 4.2.2. LGBTIQ persons

Many societies uphold a system based on the belief that there are only two genders – male and female – and that a person must strictly self-identify as either a man or a woman and that heterosexual people (men who are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to women, and women who are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to men) are the norm. This binary system, known as the heteronormative system, does not realistically reflect the diversity of gender in our societies.



### What is gender and what is biological sex?

**Gender** is a social construct of norms, behaviours, attributes and roles that society considers appropriate for individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Biological sex** is assigned at birth and is typically categorised as male or female, on the basis of external anatomy and other sex characteristics a person is born with.

Most societies expect each person to behave, dress and act in accordance with the rules that are generally attributed to and considered ‘naturally’ appropriate for the person’s biological sex. LGBTIQ applicants may therefore not fit into these socioculturally constructed roles and norms. This is because their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) may place them outside the socioculturally constructed categories ‘female’ and ‘male’.



### SOGIESC

**Sexual orientation** refers to a person’s profound emotional, affectional and/or sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender <sup>(47)</sup>.

**Gender identity** refers to a person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender. A person’s gender identity may be the same or different from the sex they are assigned at birth or the gender attributed to them by society. It includes their personal sense of their body and other methods of expression, such as appearance, clothing, speech and mannerisms.

**Gender expression** refers to how a person expresses, communicates and displays their gender identity to others. They may express their gender through their hair style, clothes, accessories and mannerisms. A person’s gender expression may or may not correspond to their gender identity or the gender they were assigned at birth.

**Sex characteristics** refer to a person’s chromosomes, anatomy, hormones and reproductive organs.

<sup>(47)</sup> These definitions are simplified versions of the ones available in the ILGA-Europe, ‘[Our Glossary](#)’, 2023.

**LGBTIQ**

**Lesbian:** a woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to women <sup>(48)</sup>.

**Gay:** a man who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to men. Other people who are attracted to the same gender or multiple genders may also define themselves as gay.

**Bisexual:** a person who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one gender.

**Trans:** a person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differ from the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Intersex:** a person who is born with sex characteristics that do not fit the typical definition of male or female. Sex characteristics are present from birth, but people may become aware of having an intersex body at different times in their lives: at birth, during childhood, in puberty or even in adulthood.

**Queer:** previously used as a derogatory term, queer has been reclaimed by people who identify as not belonging to the traditional gender categories 'male' and 'female' or complying with heteronormative social norms.

In many countries, people's SOGIESC may be the origin of their fear of persecution.

Identity and sexual orientation reflect some of the most important aspects of our life: who we consider ourselves to be and who we love and are attracted to. Many people would not be comfortable with sharing these personal aspects of their lives with people they do not know. In the same way, not all LGBTIQ applicants are ready to talk about their identity and personal experiences.

Moreover, LGBTIQ applicants very often come from societies where they have not been accepted due to their SOGIESC. Many LGBTIQ people have been subjected to stigma, verbal abuse, harassment, marginalisation, discrimination and violence. Many also face discriminatory attitudes from law enforcement and healthcare authorities when they seek help after maltreatment. Many applicants come from countries where non-heterosexual sexual orientations and transgender and non-binary gender identities are penalised. They may mistrust authorities such as the interviewer, or even you as interpreter, as a consequence of their negative experiences in their home countries or other previous places of residence. Moreover, many of them might have never spoken about their SOGIESC before due to their fears. They may not know what rights they actually have in the country of asylum and may not receive support from their community in the country of asylum.

Being perceived as a person whose SOGIESC does not align with existing norms and being exposed to sanctions for having a non-heterosexual orientation and/or transgender or non-binary identity can be traumatic and can lead to several consequences for the individual. Such consequences may include internalised homophobia and transphobia or, in other words, not

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<sup>(48)</sup> These definitions are simplified versions of the ones available in the ILGA-Europe, '[Our Glossary](#)', 2023.



accepting or despising oneself; feelings of shame and guilt; and mental health problems. These can strongly affect the applicant's ability to present their reasons for seeking international protection and can make it difficult for LGBTIQ applicants to present their reasons for seeking asylum early, openly and clearly <sup>(49)</sup>.

It is also crucial for you as an interpreter to understand the importance of **self-definition and self-identification**, which means allowing applicants to define and describe themselves freely, using their own words and preferred pronouns. This is especially important in the asylum context because in many cultures there are no exact equivalents of the concepts of gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, etc.

You should also be aware of the full complexity and **diversity of identities** and human characteristics. In this context, it is essential that you have an open mind and a sensitive attitude towards all kinds of diversity. Only the person concerned can explain their own vision of their own sexuality and/or gender. At the same time, you need to keep in mind that even LGBTIQ people themselves may have significant difficulties in understanding, accepting, revealing and explaining their own sexual orientation or gender identity and in finding neutral words to do so. This is especially true if they come from sociocultural contexts that are hostile towards such diversity.

More guidance on strategies for interpreting for LGBTIQ applicants is included in Section [4.3.4 Interpreting for LGBTIQ](#).

### 4.2.3. Victims of sexual and gender-based violence

Some applicants may have been subjected to gender-based violence and have gender-related claims.



#### What is gender-based violence?

Gender-based violence refers to any type of harm that is caused to person because of their factual or perceived sex or gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. It can take many forms, including physical, economic, sexual and psychological violence.

Gender-based violence is based on an imbalance of power and may involve acts such as:

- psychological, physical or sexual violence, including rape;
- domestic violence and intra-familial violence;
- honour-based violence;
- forced pregnancy, sterilisation or abortion;

<sup>(49)</sup> UNHCR, [Guidelines on International Protection No. 9: Claims to refugee status based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity within the context of Article 1A\(2\) of the 1951 convention and/or its 1967 protocol relating to the status of refugees](#), 23 October 2012.



- female genital mutilation/cutting;
- societal and legal discrimination.

Sexual and gender-based violence can be a taboo in many cultures. Therefore, people subjected to gender-based violence may feel ashamed or guilty, fear that their experiences become known to their families, be afraid of being rejected or have problems trusting others. Moreover, having grown up and lived in a society where gender-based discrimination and/or violence may be socially and culturally accepted, they may also have interiorised such acceptance. You need to keep in mind that, for all these reasons, it may be extremely difficult for people who have experienced such violence to talk about it and to communicate their need for international protection.

#### **4.2.4. Victims of human trafficking**

Applicants of all genders and age may be victims of trafficking in human beings (THB).



##### **What is trafficking in human beings?**

THB is a serious crime and human rights violation that involves the recruitment, transport or reception of people through deceptive or coercive means for the purpose of forced labour or exploitation. Trafficking can take various forms, such as sexual exploitation, including prostitution; forced labour or services; slavery/servitude; forced criminality (pickpocketing, drug trafficking, etc.); and the removal of organs.

Victims of THB often receive threats, in the form of intimidation or blackmail, from traffickers, directed towards either themselves or their family members in their country of origin or asylum. You should be aware that THB victims may behave in a very restrained way or sometimes become aggressive. They may have a poor state of health. They may also fail to recognise themselves as victims because they have a lack of information or have been misinformed about their rights and the fact that trafficking is a crime, or because they perceive violence and exploitation as normal elements of life. They can be very distrustful due to their experiences and can be extremely suspicious towards authorities.

#### **4.2.5. Victims of torture or other forms of violence**

Experiences of torture or other forms of serious violence may gravely affect the physical and/or psychological well-being of the victim. It is important to keep in mind that the consequences of such events are often still present when the victim reaches the country of asylum and are likely to have an impact on the applicant's capacity and willingness to communicate during the interview. The following are some typical effects that are experienced by victims of torture or other forms of violence and coping mechanisms they may adopt:



- torture or other forms of serious violence can destroy a person's resilience and trust in others and damage interpersonal relationships;
- people subjected to torture or other forms of serious violence may experience a complete loss of trust, in particular towards authorities, as often they were the perpetrators;
- they often feel alone, isolated and excluded from society;
- they may feel guilty or ashamed about what happened to them;
- they may use coping mechanisms such as denial and avoidance to deal with their experiences;
- they may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other conditions, such as chronic pain, flashbacks, sleep disorders and other psychosomatic disorders;
- for victims, it may be important to feel in control, because they experienced an extreme loss of control when exposed to torture or other forms of serious violence <sup>(50)</sup>.

For these reasons, in many cases it is difficult for the victims to communicate and concentrate on their narrative. You should remember that, as a consequence, their stories may be fragmented and appear incomplete, poor or incoherent.

#### **4.2.6. Persons with mental health issues**

Applicants may experience mental health distress in response to various dire and traumatic life situations and events. For these applicants, mental health distress may be triggered by recalling those traumatic memories in an interview situation. Other applicants may suffer from mental health disorders such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and bipolar disorder, which may or may not have been caused by specific events that occurred in their home country or during their journey and may be worsened by the stress caused by their unstable situation in the country of asylum.

You need to be aware that applicants with mental health issues may be less able to cope with stressful situations such as asylum interviews. Depending on their specific personal and mental health conditions, they may become aggressive if they feel they cannot cope with a situation. In other cases, they may experience panic attacks as a reaction to stress. Sometimes they may fall silent and refuse to answer further questions if they feel stressed. More commonly, they may simply not be able to answer questions in the way you would expect. Their language may be incoherent and their narration fragmented. They may provide responses that you may perceive as unusual.

#### **4.2.7. Persons with physical or intellectual disabilities**

Applicants with physical disabilities may experience various difficulties, including sight and/or hearing difficulties. Therefore, different seating arrangements, for instance you and the interviewer sitting closer to the applicant, or more frequent breaks, louder voices or special

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<sup>(50)</sup> See the EUAA's training module on [interpreting in the asylum context](#).



technical solutions may be required. This could also be the case for older people, if they have any hearing or sight problems.

People with intellectual disabilities are limited in their cognitive functioning and skills. Such limits affect their ability to understand information, their language skills, their communication skills and their ability to follow rules. As a result, applicants with intellectual disabilities may face difficulties in understanding the questions asked during the personal interview and in providing structured, clear or coherent accounts or answers. For these reasons, the interviewer may need to adjust the interview techniques and the way questions are asked to facilitate the applicant's understanding and their meaningful participation in the interview. The interviewer may use a more accessible language that consists of short and simple sentences, which you will need to reflect in your interpretation. They may avoid the use of abstract terms and idioms. They may speak slower than usual, use fewer open questions and check the understanding of the applicant more often than usual. They may repeat the questions regularly and give the applicant more time to respond. They may also support their questions with photographs, pictures and body language, including facial expressions and tone of voice.

### 4.3. Strategies for interpreting for applicants in a vulnerable situation

Keep in mind that both the interviewer and the interpreter must be prepared to communicate with all the groups mentioned in Section [4.2 Groups in vulnerable situations](#). In this section, you will find some appropriate strategies and attitudes and useful skills for interpreting for applicants in a vulnerable situation.

These strategies are relevant to all applicants for international protection, and even more so for applicants in a vulnerable situation. In addition to the strategies, all recommendations discussed in Chapters [2 Key principles of interpreting in the asylum procedure](#) and [3 Interpreting in asylum interviews](#) apply.

#### 4.3.1. Contributing to an atmosphere of trust

It is important to build a professional rapport with the applicant, based on empathy, trust and respect. You, as an interpreter, are also responsible for contributing to the creation of a supportive environment during asylum interviews with people in a vulnerable situation.

- Be aware that each applicant is different and that this **diversity** will affect the way they perceive the interview situation and express themselves. Treat the applicant with respect and dignity, regardless of their experiences, problems and behaviour. Be open-minded, avoid stereotyping, be aware of your own attitude and your biases towards all applicants and be careful not to label anybody.
- Always be aware of your **non-verbal communication** and ensure that your body language, gestures and facial expressions are attentive and neutral. Do not let your non-verbal communication show your emotions or feelings, particularly if the



applicants' narratives affect you in a negative way. Be aware that your body language, facial expressions and gestures can make applicants feel ashamed or threatened.

- **Have an empathetic and neutral attitude.** Non-neutral attitudes – for example authoritarian, impatient, surprised, bored or amused attitudes – can make applicants feel uncomfortable or distrustful. Be empathetic and engage in attentive listening, for example using non-verbal signs such as nodding, looking at the speaker or making vocal signals such as 'hmm' to signal that you understand. If you feel mistrusted by the applicant, ask the interviewer for a break and suggest reiterating to the applicant that both you and the interviewer observe confidentiality rules and that they should feel free to express their identity, feelings or past experiences.



#### **Situational challenge: showing a neutral attitude and showing empathy**

During the interview, the applicant becomes emotional and starts crying.

##### **What to do**

You remain mindful of your non-verbal language. You maintain a neutral attitude, not showing any sign of discomfort or impatience, or other feelings. You can at the same time show empathy by, for example, maintaining an open body posture (not crossing your arms, not turning your back, etc.) and lowering your eyes.

### **4.3.2. Cooperating with the applicant and the interviewer**

- It is **not your responsibility to keep the interview going** – it is the interviewer's responsibility. Do not urge applicants to continue speaking and do not show signs of impatience if they are hesitant or searching for words. For instance, LGBTIQ people or people who have faced gender-based violence may need time to be able to open up. Be aware that you will have to be able to cope with long silences and pauses.
- If applicants have opened up and are able to speak about what happened to them, try to avoid interrupting them if possible, as long as this still allows you to interpret accurately. **Taking notes** will help you to better recall what was said. This is particularly important with applicants under severe distress, with those who are cognitively impaired, with older people and with people who have mental health problems.
- Try to capture the applicant's narrative **as closely as possible**, even if it is fragmented or incoherent or they lack words.
- **Do not interfere** with the interviewer's interviewing methods. Try to translate the interviewer's questions as closely as possible. When the applicant is a child, do not simplify or modify the language used by the interviewer because you think that the child may understand it better. In addition, do not make the language used by the child more complex when interpreting for the interviewer.
- Familiarise yourself with the relevant **terminology** in all languages you work with. Technical terms, which may include parts of the body, medical and psychological terms, and sexual orientation- and gender-related terms, may be particularly important for some groups in vulnerable situations.



- Try as much as possible to **avoid disruptive stimuli** (such as pen clicking, moving chairs, repetitively shaking your feet and drawing).
- **Speak louder** to people with hearing impairments and **slower and clearer** to people with intellectual disabilities.

#### 4.3.3. Interpreting for children

- **Children's language** may not be very developed, depending on their age and maturity. Interpret what they say as closely as possible, without changing their register or adapting the language to reflect how adults express their thoughts and feelings. Do not reformulate or correct children's narratives.
- Do not ask children to elaborate on or evaluate their statements. It is the **interviewer's role to conduct the conversation**.
- Children are particularly susceptible to **suggestibility**. Make sure that in your interpretation you do not use suggestive wording or intonation.
- Children may be particularly **intimidated by adults**. Adopt a welcoming and empathetic attitude to facilitate the establishment of a trustful atmosphere.
- **Mirror the language** of the interviewer. Inform the interviewer if, based on the child's cultural and linguistic backgrounds, you feel the need to use any specific term or expression to better translate what the interviewer says.
- Be an **attentive listener**, and send positive signals to children in order to allow them to feel calm and comfortable in the special situation of the interview.
- Be ready to adapt to a **different seating arrangement** than usual. In some interviews, there may be additional participants, such as the guardian/legal representative of the child. Specific rooms with child-friendly features may also be used for children's interviews. Putting yourself, as much as possible, at the same height as the child is often a good way to communicate with them in a more comfortable and less intimidating manner.



##### Situational challenge: incoherent answer from a child

During the interview, a child replies to a question saying something that is not really related to it, as if they have not understood the question.

##### What to do

You interpret the child's statements accurately, without adding or modifying anything, using the words they used. You do not ask the child to repeat or take the initiative to reformulate or ask the question again. It is the role of the interviewer to ask the question again or reformulate it, if needed.

#### 4.3.4. Interpreting for LGBTIQ persons

- Remember that an applicant may wish to **self-identify** – that is, use their own words to describe their sexual orientation or gender identity. You must reflect those words in



your interpretation. Do not use the internationally recognised terminology if the applicant does not use such terms.

- Many languages do not have neutral equivalents of LGBTIQ-related words and terms. Familiarise yourself with **LGBTIQ-related terminology** in all languages you work with. Many applicants may not be aware of the internationally used terms and may use different words to define themselves and other LGBTIQ people, including words that may be considered offensive. These may be the only words known in their country of origin and should be translated as closely as possible.
- Remember that the **nouns and grammatical forms** (feminine or masculine adjectives, verb forms, pronouns, etc.) chosen and used by transgender applicants must be reflected in your interpretation and replicated when you address the applicant directly in their language.



### Situational challenge: feeling of mistrust

The applicant seems uncomfortable, is hesitant to talk and asks you where you come from.

#### What to do

Ask the interviewer for a break so that you can talk with them. Inform the interviewer of the question the applicant asked you and of your perception in relation to their hesitation. In addition, inform the interviewer if you and the applicant come from the same country or community and/or if you currently reside in the applicant's city or community.

Interpreters from the applicant's country and region of origin or from the same ethnic group can be perceived as a threat and many applicants may be afraid to reveal their identity, sexual orientation or experiences in front of them.



### Situational challenge: derogatory terms used by the applicant

A male applicant uses a derogatory word or expression to define his sexual orientation and attraction to men, instead of using a word corresponding to the internationally used term 'gay'.

#### What to do

You need to translate the word or expression used by the applicant, even if it is derogatory. If you feel the need, you can let the interviewer know that this derogatory term was the one used by the applicant in the original language.



## 5. Taking care of your well-being

Taking care of yourself, both physically and mentally, will not only help you to continue working in a sustainable way but will also have a positive impact on the quality of your interpretation. Investing in your well-being is a sign of professionalism.

In this chapter, you will find information about:

- the impact of stress and exposure to traumatic narratives;
- coping strategies that you can adopt in the short and long terms;
- challenging situations that you may face during your assignments and guidance on how to behave in such situations.

### 5.1. Stress

As an interpreter for applicants for international protection, you never know before an interview which emotions you will experience or how you will react to the applicant's or interviewer's statements.

Stress is part of our daily lives. Yet prolonged periods of stress, also known as chronic stress, can affect your well-being and your health. This may in turn reduce the quality of your interpreting.

Chronic stress may influence different levels of your health. On a **physical level**, you can suffer from fatigue or headaches – with possible effects on your ability to concentrate for long interpreting assignments or to work in difficult circumstances. Furthermore, stress can influence your **mental health**. It can result in confusion or forgetfulness. You may therefore misinterpret words or phrases. You may also suffer **emotionally**. You may feel irritated or restless. At a certain point, this could influence your conduct within the interpreting process. Lastly, you may suffer from insomnia or a loss of appetite, which will immediately affect your energy levels and **cognitive function**. Complete and accurate interpretation may be at risk when you experience stress at this level <sup>(51)</sup>.

### 5.2. Impact of traumatic narratives

Applicants' traumatising narratives may relate to your personal life experiences. You may remember or re-live events that have happened in your personal life.

People's reactions to trauma differ based on their characteristics and past experiences and the situation in which a traumatising event occurs. The combination of having a personal

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<sup>(51)</sup> See the EUAA's training module on [interpreting in the asylum context](#). See also UNHCR Austria, [Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures](#), Vienna, 2022.



history of trauma or a similar experience to the one discussed in the interview and the use of the first person while interpreting traumatic content can increase stress.

According to studies, nearly all interpreters working in the asylum procedure experience some psychological issue at some point. Below are examples of consequences of exposure to traumatic narratives.

- To cope with the stress that these narratives cause, you may adopt a **defence mechanism** whereby you refuse to empathise, claiming that such horrible events are simply unbelievable or that the narrative of the applicant lacks credibility <sup>(52)</sup>. Defence mechanisms are psychological strategies that people use without being aware of them in order to protect themselves from anxiety. This may affect the way you approach the applicant.
- **Vicarious trauma** can be summarised as the ‘cost of caring’. Vicarious (or secondary) trauma can be described as an intense reaction whereby people who are exposed to someone else’s traumatic experiences experience trauma symptoms themselves. It involves a shift in a person’s world view. For interpreters experiencing vicarious trauma, it becomes difficult to set boundaries with the applicants they work with. It can also lead to a loss of meaning in life and a loss of hope.
- **Compassion fatigue** refers to a shift in a person’s ability to feel empathy for the individuals they work for and/or colleagues or family members. As an interpreter, you may suffer from compassion fatigue as a result of years of exposure to the traumatic stories that applicants share. This leads to a sense of numbness whereby the accounts you listen to and interpret no longer trigger a reaction.
- **Burnout** is an individual’s psychological response to chronic stressors at work. Although it is not regarded as a medical condition, it can influence health status and potentially require clinical attention. Burnout is also conceptualised as a crisis in a person’s relationship with work in general <sup>(53)</sup>.

## 5.3. Coping strategies

Stress can be managed in different ways. Negative coping strategies such as drinking too much coffee, spending too much time on the phone, smoking or drinking alcohol, or engaging in drug abuse will make you feel more stressed in the long run. On the contrary, the positive coping strategies described in the following sections will help you to maintain and manage your well-being and consequently deliver high-quality interpretation comfortably.

### 5.3.1. Short-term strategies

The first step to enhancing your well-being is to put in place **preventive measures**. It is also important to **identify signs of stress** and **apply positive coping strategies**. The following strategies will help you perform your tasks comfortably and provide high-quality interpretation.

<sup>(52)</sup> UNHCR Austria, [Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures](#), Vienna, 2022.

<sup>(53)</sup> Vlack, T. V., [Tools to reduce vicarious trauma, secondary trauma & compassion fatigue](#), Tend Academy, 2017.



- Agree on **discrete signals** with the interviewer in advance of the assignment so they know when you need a break (e.g. putting your hand on the table with your palm facing upwards). Remember that sufficient breaks are needed to ensure a high-quality interpreting service and as such they benefit everyone.
- **Develop personal rituals** to begin and to end an assignment. For example, wash your face with water before and after an assignment, put on a piece of clothing such as a shawl or a handkerchief before an assignment and take it off once you have completed the assignment, or bring along an object such as a pen to use during an assignment. Such rituals signal to your body and mind that you are entering or leaving your role as an interpreter. They draw a line between your personal and professional lives.
- Practise **therapeutic techniques** to achieve a state of relaxation, such as breathing techniques, muscle relaxation techniques and mindfulness.



### Practise breathing techniques

Before starting the breathing exercise, make sure that you are seated or lying down as comfortably as you can. Then, let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as it is comfortable. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Breathe in gently and regularly, for example counting from one to five. Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting again from one to five.



### Practise muscle relaxation

Contract each muscle, but not to the point of strain, and then release. Pay special attention to the feeling of tension in each muscle and the feeling of relaxation as you release the tension. If you have any injuries or pain, you can skip the affected areas.



### Practise mindfulness

- You can practise mindfulness anywhere and at any time by bringing your attention to the here and now. You can do this by focusing on your breath. You will be distracted by your thoughts. Do not try to control them. Instead, just observe how they come to your mind.
- **Be proactive** by asking the interviewer in advance of your interview if there is any information that would be useful for you to know so that you can prepare yourself emotionally.



- Be self-aware and **know your limits**. Decline assignments that may trigger negative reactions within yourself <sup>(54)</sup> (if the content of the assignment is known beforehand). This is especially applicable to assignments involving applicants in a vulnerable situation).
- **Focus on the task** at hand and remind yourself that your work is essential in ensuring communication between the asylum authority and the applicant. Focus on your role as a bridge between the speakers and remind yourself that the message is not yours but the speaker's.
- Always stay calm when the applicant experiences an emotional crisis and **inform the interviewer** when you feel threatened.
- Make sure you know the **safety and security measures** and escape routes so that you are prepared in the event of immediate danger. This will make you feel calmer and help you focus during the interview. For cases requiring extra security arrangements, for example involving applicants with a history of violent behaviour, the authority may inform you in advance of the interview.
- **Apply grounding techniques**. Hold onto a stress ball or something soft and take notes during the assignment. It can help you to stay mentally present in the interviewing room.
- **Do not take it personally** if an applicant appears not to trust you. Due to past personal experiences or the extremely personal nature of their claim, some applicants may not trust interpreters of specific backgrounds or may not trust others in general.

As **measures of last resort** to adopt if none of the strategies above are suitable and only after agreeing with the interviewer during a break, you can **switch to using the third person** instead of the first person while interpreting. By switching, you can distance yourself from the trauma. For example, interpret 'He was severely beaten' instead of 'I was severely beaten'. Keep in mind, however, that switching to the third person may affect the accuracy of your interpretation due to the change in the subject and pronoun. It may not be clear to the interviewer whom the interpreted narrative belongs to.

If you feel that you really cannot cope with the situation any more, you can ask the interviewer for a **break** in which you can explain to them privately that you cannot continue.

### 5.3.2. Long-term strategies

To enable you to continue working as an interpreter in a professional way, it is also important to pay sufficient attention to your feelings and emotions in the long run. The following are some strategies to enhance your well-being outside the interview situation.

- Practise **meditation**.
- Go for **walks**.
- Be active, doing **physical exercise**.
- Be **creative** and have new experiences.

<sup>(54)</sup> EASO, [Practical guide on the welfare of asylum and reception staff – Part II: Staff welfare toolbox](#), 2021.



- **Learn** something new.
- **Express** your emotions.
- Request a **debrief** with the interviewer or with your manager whenever you need it.
- **Talk about stressful events** with professionals such as psychologists. One of the best strategies for coping with stress is talking about these stressful events. However, as confidentiality is part of the code of conduct for interpreters, you are limited in what you can share. As a consequence, you may feel unable to unload the emotional burden that you accumulated during your assignments. We suggest that you share your experience of a traumatising assignment preferably with a mental health professional, or with a supportive colleague with experience in psychological support, with the interviewer or with your manager. However, it is still essential that you do not mention details that may lead to the identification of the applicant or case-specific details (e.g. the name of the applicant, or their nationality, tribe or profession). In this way, you are still respecting your obligations regarding confidentiality.
- Ask your asylum authority whether it has any recommendations or offers any services aimed at supporting **staff well-being**. In some countries, guided peer support sessions, supervision and training courses are organised that focus on crisis intervention or trauma. This can help improve your well-being <sup>(55)</sup>.



### Situational challenge: managing emotions

In today's interview, the applicant tells how she had to leave her mother behind in her country of origin. This touches you for personal reasons. You become emotional and feel that you are about to cry.

#### What to do

Do not forget that asking for breaks when needed is a sign of professionalism. Ask the interviewer for a break and take a short rest. During the break, practise breathing techniques, muscle relaxation or mindfulness. You may also consider sharing your feelings with the interviewer. You need to assess whether you can continue interpreting without any impact on the quality of your work. Consider that having an emotional reaction during the interview, indicated through verbal and non-verbal communication, can also influence the applicant. You can reflect on why that specific narrative triggered you. In the long term, you can work on your triggers so that you can deal with them better in the future. In the future, you can also choose not to accept assignments that may trigger negative reactions and hence affect the quality of your interpretation.

<sup>(55)</sup> Resources providing additional information are referred to in UNHCR Austria, [Handbook for Interpreters in Asylum Procedures](#), Vienna, 2022, p. 210.

**Situational challenge: feeling overwhelmed**

After heavy assignments in recent weeks, you feel mentally tired and impatient towards the applicants.

**What to do**

It is important to recognise these feelings and not to ignore them. Consider the impact that this has on the quality of your work and whether you can continue taking up new assignments at this stage. Talking about your feelings with a mental health professional, a supportive colleague, the interviewer or your manager can be helpful. You can also ask about any well-being services the authority you are working for might provide. It is important to act on the feelings by adopting these positive coping strategies.





Consult also the **Essential Rules on Interpretation in the Asylum Procedure**



Consult also the **Checklists on Interpretation in the Asylum Procedure**



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