**FURTHER EVIDENCE REGARDING THE USE OF INTERPRETERS IN THE ASYLUM PROCESS**

## (1) Your experiences of the Home Office's readiness to provide language services (both interpretation and written translations) during the asylum process and (2) The timeliness and quality of the services provided

*These categories of information are combined in this document because of overlap and the fact that we did not receive a high level of feedback on these topics.*

a) One of our respondents felt that the current system was functioning well in terms of interaction with interpreters, highlighting that interpreters for Immigration are currently "in-house" as they are on an internal panel and are offered work on a freelance basis. Direct contact between the Central Interpreters Unit (CIU) and interpreters means that issues/problems can be resolved in a timely manner.

b) As regards quality of the service, one member commented that they knew of a number of interpreters working with asylum seekers who did not have qualifications (also see (3)f) or "great language skills", adding that timely interpreting does not mean having decent interpreting, and it can give a false sense of security when an interpreter is brought in quickly.

Another respondent who works in-house at a solicitor's office said that clients seeking asylum had the opportunity to read through transcripts of interviews conducted and amend any errors or mistranslations. They stated that around half of the clients they worked with had had to clarify parts of their responses to interview questions, which were altered due to errors in translation (but also see comments on recording interviews at (4)c below). As regards translated documents that were being submitted to the Home Office, they said that half the documents contained translation errors of varying degrees, including overly 'free' translation (e.g. in one case, the translation of a witness statement had changed "the times he was hiding in my house" to "the time he spent as a guest").

## (3) Factors affecting the accuracy and value of interpretation and translation, and their impact on asylum decisions

*This was the category in which we received most responses from members.*

a) The value of adequate briefing and sight of relevant documents before the start of the interview were stressed by respondents as a way of maximising the quality of interpreting during an interview.

b) One interpreter spoke of long hours of very slow-progressing interviews (Substantive Interviews) which has the potential to cause the interpreter to become very tired and be distracted.

c) One of our respondents has done a considerable amount of work at a solicitor's office in recent months with asylum seekers from Central America (Also see (1)(2)b above). In their role, they have had access to the recordings and transcripts of screening interviews and full asylum interviews. Reinforcing a point ITI made in its original evidence, the biggest complaint they have had from clients is the interpreter not understanding them due to dialect differences. They are under the

impression that the majority of interpreters used are from Spain, and there are occasions when certain expressions or words are incorrectly translated due to language variations in Central America. They feel there should be greater emphasis on interpreters being familiar with the particular dialects and accents they are working with.

d) The Institute's original evidence covered the need for caution in the use of remote interpreting, and three of our members also raised this issue. The respondent at (3)c said that many clients have expressed discomfort at this method due to difficulties in understanding, and connection problems that can make hearing the other party difficult. They give one example where 'thirteen' was interpreted as 'thirty', which impacted a vital part of a client's story. Another reason for disliking phone interpreting is concerns about confidentiality and privacy*: "when discussing potentially sensitive issues, such as torture or sexual abuse, many clients (particularly female) have told me that they felt very uncomfortable talking about their experiences to an anonymous voice, not knowing who was listening and what they could potentially be doing with the information. Having an interpreter in person would make them feel more comfortable during such a stressful process."*

Another respondent said they felt there was an increasing use of video/remote interpreting by the Home Office for asylum interviews. They said it put both the claimant and the interpreter at a disadvantage *"because many of the nuances used in face-to-face interpreting are lost in telephone and remote/video interpreting sessions"*.

e) Specific working conditions can impact on morale and also the calibre of individuals working in a particular environment. One interpreter said that the remuneration rates for face-to-face interpreting had not changed for at least 10 years, and no travel time is paid if the journey time is less than three hours each way nor mileage costs for journeys of less than 100 miles return. They say this contrasts with Her Majesties Courts and Tribunal Services (Ministry of Justice) and Police Forces (Home Office) who pay travel time and all travel costs irrespective of time and distance. Such financial considerations may result in a proportion of interpreters deciding that this type of work is not for them, reducing the available pool of qualified professionals.

Another commented on "low payment for interpreters seeping into asylum cases", meaning that quality was bound to drop off. This could negatively affect worthy applications but also, conversely, lead to applicants receiving approval despite not being deserving.

Some concerns were also expressed about the possibility of the interpreting service being outsourced. One respondent highlighted problems they believed had arisen following outsourcing in courts, police forces and the probation service (e.g. interpreters not being booked or turning up; lack of qualifications and competency among interpreters) which they did not wish to see repeated in relation to the asylum process.

f) The level to which interpreters and translators are qualified will also impact on the accuracy achieved. One respondent referenced a recent email sent by the Home Office CIU regarding the recruitment of new interpreters: "*The eligibility criteria is as follows: have been resident in the UK for the last three years; are a British/EU citizen or have indefinite leave to remain in the UK; and speak English and another language fluently: and hold one of the following be a full member of the National Register of Public Services Interpreters (NRPSI); or hold a Diploma in Public Services Interpreting (DPSI) (Law) or a letter of Credit in all oral components (Law); or have been assessed by the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT) (formerly the Immigration Appellate Authority); or have been assessed by the Metropolitan Police or Hold Diplomas in Police Interpreting*." The interpreter commented that the level of quality represented by these qualifications varied quite a lot, and that a

standardisation of qualifications would benefit the process, the Home Office and interpreters themselves.

g) One respondent said that interpreters had different views on how to conduct themselves in interviews and that there had never been a refresher training course with the Home Office on this aspect, or any other activities aimed at updating interpreters on the law, security levels which might be helpful in conveying information accurately during interviews.

h) Another comment was that it was important to ensure the impartiality of the interpreter/translator in all cases.

**(4) Opportunities to correct possible misunderstandings and errors**

a) Existing checking mechanisms described seem to be useful in flagging up errors ((1)(2)b).

b) Misunderstandings can arise not just because of language issues, but also cultural differences.

One respondent referenced examples such as different calendars (e.g. the Buddhist and Gregorian calendars are quite different with the potential for errors relating to dates); typical family living arrangements; perceptions of weather/heat/cold; issues surrounding medication (e.g. much that is on prescription in the UK is available over the counter at a pharmacy in Thailand, and clients may be unable to identify what they have taken or describe the details of the medication) – all of which could be sources of confusion and misunderstanding during an interview and could need clarification by the interpreter present.

Looking at a completely different aspect of cultural issues, another member said they had "*seen a number of cases where the interpreter told the client off for saying things that were against their culture*".

These comments do once again highlight the importance of using professional interpreters who speak the language as a native speaker; are fully sensitive to the cultural issues/challenges and the specific circumstances (e.g. whether an adult or child is being interviewed); are completely impartial; and know when additional clarification is needed for any of those present at an interview.

c) One of our respondents said that, in their experience, asylum seekers changed their statements regularly which can cause confusion between the interviewer, interpreter and the interviewee. They suggested that all asylum interviews should be recorded by the Home Office or any other third party involved for quality control and to identify whether it is the interpreter misinterpreting or the asylum seeker misleading. Two interpreters commented that it was frequently assumed that the interpreter had made an error which was not necessarily the case.

d) Another respondent said they had been involved in a number of interviews where recording had started before they realised it was taking place. They felt interviewers should ensure they state when recording is starting.

e) Greater standardisation to achieve more consistency in the process has already been considered in relation to qualifications (3)f and how interpreters conduct themselves during

interviews (3)g. In addition, one member has suggested that the compilation of shared glossaries of standard translations could be useful; for example, relating to 'administrative' information (e.g. personal, family, employment details), parts of the process and other commonly used words.