

Working with Interpreters

**A Toolkit for Refugee Service Providers on
Effectively Using Language Interpretation**

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Introduction

This guide accompanies Switchboard's popular self-paced eLearning courses, [Introduction to Working with Interpreters](#) and [Overcoming Challenges in Interpretation](#).

Service providers' communication with refugees is often mediated through language interpretation. Most refugee clients are multilingual and speak one or more languages in addition to English. While their English proficiency varies, many require language interpretation to communicate effectively and comfortably with service providers, particularly when discussing personal or sensitive matters. Therefore, it is crucial to understand what interpretation involves, clients' rights

to interpretation, and how to effectively prepare for and facilitate interpreted conversations. This toolkit is a written guide to working effectively with interpreters in all spheres of newcomer services.

To further support newcomer clients' access to multilingual information and resources, visit [Settle In](#), a **digital companion for life in the U.S.!**

Settle In empowers newcomers to navigate life in the U.S. with confidence by providing timely, accurate, and culturally relevant information in multiple languages.



Key Terms and Concepts

Interpretation vs. Translation

An **interpreter** is someone who converts a spoken (or signed) message in one language into a corresponding spoken (or signed) message in a different language. On the other hand, a **translator** is someone who converts a written text in one language into a corresponding written text in a different language.

For more on culturally validated and translated written materials, please refer to the International Rescue Committee (IRC)'s toolkit on [Cultural Validation and Translation](#).

While translated materials and language access rights in written resources are very important in newcomer services, **this toolkit addresses verbal interpretation** rather than written communications. See the orange box above for a toolkit on translated resources.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and LEP Rights in the United States

When service providers use interpretation or translated materials, it is generally because they are serving clients with **limited English proficiency (LEP)**, which refers to a level of comfort with English that is insufficient to ensure equal access to public services or benefits without language assistance. In the U.S., those with limited English proficiency have the **legal right to language access in federally funded programs**, as ensured by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, interpreted in federal guidance below:¹

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires all federal funding recipients to “take reasonable steps” to “provide meaningful access to the benefits, services, information, and other important portions of their programs and activities for individuals who are limited English proficient.”

This means service providers must provide language access when working directly with clients. In addition, providers should help limited English proficient (LEP) clients receive qualified interpretation when accessing other federally funded services, such as public hospitals and health clinics, food or financial benefits and assistance, and in schools, child care centers, or other federally funded educational institutions. In particular, working with local health centers and providers to establish meaningful language access for refugee and newcomer clients is crucial to improving health outcomes and quality of care. For more, refer to the [section on supporting and advocating for quality interpretation in health care settings](#).

Service providers also have ethical and professional obligations to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate services, well-summarized in the [National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services \(CLAS\) in Health and Health Care](#). See the orange box on the next page for the CLAS standards on Communication and Language Assistance.

Immigration Courts are legally required to provide free interpreters for court hearings. However, applicants must provide their own interpreters for administrative federal interviews, such as those with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).² Other private legal entities or non-federal offices that operate without federal funding are typically not required to provide free translation services.

To learn more about LEP rights, including multilingual “know your rights” resources, visit the [Office for Civil Rights website](#), or refer to this [National Partnership for Community Training info guide](#) to

¹ Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons, 67 F.R. 41455 (effective June 18, 2002). <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/02-15207>

² Settle In. (2026). *Interpretation requirements for affirmative asylum applicants*. <https://www.settlein.us/org/life-us/your-immigration-status/interpretation-requirements-affirmative-asylum-applicants>

learn how to advocate for clients' interpretation rights. You can also prepare clients to directly request and advocate for interpretation services, using resources such as the Settle In guide [How to Get Interpretation and Translation at Your Medical Appointments](#), available in English, Dari, Pashto, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Haitian Creole. Refer to the [end of this guide](#) for more relevant resources. Also be sure to familiarize yourself with all laws and regulations relevant to your work, including donor requirements tied to specific grants or programs, as well as your organization's own policies for ensuring fair access to services across language barriers.

CLAS National Standards on Communication and Language Assistance

- Offer language assistance to individuals who have limited English proficiency and/or other communication needs, at no cost to them, to facilitate timely access to all health care and services.
- Inform all individuals, in writing and orally, of the availability of language assistance services in English and other languages that serve their linguistic needs.
- Ensure the competence of individuals providing language assistance through training and certification, when available, recognizing that the use of untrained individuals and/or minors as interpreters should be avoided and discouraged.
- Provide easy-to-understand digital and print materials and signage in the languages commonly used by the populations in the service area.³

Fundamentals of Interpretation

The fundamental role of an interpreter is to transmit information accurately and completely.

Interpreters must fully understand the message in the source language and convert it into the target language while managing the pacing and flow of the conversation.

Interpreted conversations are longer than usual interactions, because interpreters need time to accurately and effectively convey all spoken information and provide time and space for questions, concerns, and clarification. Remember to schedule adequate time for any interpreted interactions and be open to scheduling follow-up sessions if needed.

The interpreter's role may vary depending on the setting. When interpreting for one client or family, such as at a health care appointment or a meeting to apply for benefits, interpreters are often responsible for conveying every sentence in the conversation. However, in group settings, such as in

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health. (2013). *National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care*. [Think Cultural Health](#).

a classroom, the interpreter may be called on to summarize group conversations or liaise between the students and the instructor.

It is not the interpreter's role to advocate for the client, unless the client's safety, health, well-being, or dignity is at serious risk. The interpreter is also not an advocate for the service provider. This means the provider should not rely on the interpreter to guide or support them with their client's case beyond their role as interpreter. The interpreter is not responsible for what the client says or does not say. In addition, do not leave the interpreter alone with the client when you're not present.

Modes of Interpretation

Consecutive Interpretation  The speaker pauses before the interpreter speaks	Simultaneous Interpretation  Participants continue speaking while interpreted messages are reproduced in real time	Sight Translation  An interpreter reads a document and simultaneously speaks about it in another language
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Consecutive Interpretation

Consecutive interpretation is when the interpreter reproduces the original message after the speaker pauses. It is typically used in conversational environments and is the default choice for most social services settings. It takes longer than simultaneous interpretation because the interpreter waits until the speaker completes each sentence or segment before interpreting it.

Simultaneous Interpretation

Simultaneous interpretation is when participants continue speaking while the interpreter reproduces the messages in real time. It is typically used when one speaker is addressing a group, like at a conference. Simultaneous interpretation requires specialized training and is uncommon in social services settings.

Sight Translation

Sight translation is when an interpreter reads a written document and simultaneously converts it into

a spoken version in another language. **Engaging an interpreter for sight translation is not a substitute for having a document professionally translated.** However, it can be useful when a client is not literate in their own language or if they speak a language without a written equivalent. It is not the interpreter's role to answer questions about documents, only to interpret these questions for the provider.

Remote Interpretation

While in-person interpreters are ideal for service provision with newcomers, a useful alternative is **remote interpretation services**. Remote services can be available at short notice and can make interpretation possible for less commonly spoken languages when no local interpreters are available. For timely and cost-effective services, an organization can sign a contract or buy a subscription with a specific remote interpretation service.

Remote interpretation services include telephone interpreting, often referred to as “language lines,” where interpreting is dialed in telephonically, typically through speakerphone or headsets. Video remote interpreting, or VRI, is similar but includes the use of video, which is particularly appropriate for sign language interpreting.

Remote interpretation services, whether telephonic or via video, often require **more intentionality** from both service provider and interpreter to effectively communicate in a virtual or remote setting. Refer to Switchboard's guide [Promoting Client Safety and Security in Virtual Settings](#) (2025) and tip sheet [Nonverbal Communication and Safety Cues](#) (2025) for more on effective and safe communication in virtual settings.

Mitigating Challenges in Remote Interpretation

Remote interpretation can present unique challenges. Here are some suggestions for mitigating common issues:

- **Technical Issues:** Hold a brief pre-session with the interpreter to review communication procedures, including how participants will take turns speaking and how interruptions and clarification requests will be handled. When possible, give clients time to become familiar with the platform before the session.
- **Interpreter Fatigue:** Remote interpreting requires increased concentration due to audio limitations and reduced visual cues. Schedule regular breaks to help interpreters maintain accuracy and quality.
- **Confusion/Miscommunication:** Clear, intentional communication is especially important in virtual settings. Check for understanding throughout the session by using open-ended questions

(e.g., “What are the next steps you’ll take after this meeting?”) rather than yes-or-no questions (e.g., “Do you understand?”).

Choosing the Right Technology for Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

The platforms and apps listed below are for informational purposes only. Switchboard does not endorse any individual for-profit company or product.

First, consider whether you are looking for a VRI service with professional interpreters and built-in confidentiality protections or simply an online platform to use with your own volunteer or staff interpreters. Remote professional services will have their own confidentiality guidelines and technological setup that you should review before enlisting their services.

To choose a virtual platform for videoconferencing clients with your own interpreters, evaluate your clients’ needs and digital access. For one-on-one or small group conversations, consider whether clients have smartphones and are already comfortable using video chat apps such as WhatsApp. While these apps are generally not appropriate when [HIPAA compliance](#) or strict confidentiality protections are required, they may serve as a temporary solution in some situations.

Videoconferencing platforms ([Zoom](#), [Google Meet](#), [GoToMeeting](#), [WebEx](#), etc.) can also support one-on-one or small group sessions but may be less accessible to clients. Assess each of these platforms’ privacy settings and security features to determine if they meet your state’s and organization’s protocols for protecting clients’ personally identifiable information (PII).

You generally should not record any private interpreted client interactions. If there is a compelling reason to record, such as sessions with health or mental health providers undergoing clinical supervision and training, any recording must be disclosed at the start of the session, and you must obtain client consent.

For larger events like cultural orientation or Know Your Rights trainings, you may need platforms with simultaneous interpretation features. Zoom offers an affordable [interpretation option](#) for multilingual presentations, while platforms such as [Kudo](#) and [VoiceBoxer](#) provide more robust interpretation capabilities and dedicated technical support for organizations with greater resources. If online classes or group information sessions with clients are recorded, make that clear to clients in their own language upfront. If sensitive questions or topics still arise during the session, pause and ask clients to speak with you privately in a different forum, reiterating the public nature of the event and the ongoing recording.

A reliable [technology set-up](#) is also essential. Clear audio is critical for interpreted sessions. Participants should use headphones or earbuds with a microphone and avoid speakerphone whenever possible. Interpreters should use a quality headset with a noise cancelling microphone. A stable internet connection is also important; wired Ethernet connections are preferred to Wi-Fi or cellular data when available to help maintain sound quality and reduce disruptions.

Training Interpreters and Testing VRI in Advance

Many interpreters can successfully transition to remote interpretation with the right support, especially if they are already familiar with your services and client population. Keep in mind that interpreters may have varying levels of comfort with remote technology, and be prepared to address questions or concerns.

Before selecting a platform, check whether your organization has approved technology requirements or guidance. Once a platform has been chosen, schedule a test session with the interpreter(s) to ensure everyone can use the technology effectively and to identify potential issues before the meeting. This preparation is especially important for large events or sessions using simultaneous interpretation. For these events, consider hiring an interpreter trained in conference interpretation and arranging technical support if needed.

Professional Interpreters

Professional interpreters have received formal training and are bound by a professional code of ethics corresponding to their sphere of interpretation services. To see a list of some relevant codes of ethics, see the [recommended resources](#) at the end of this guide.

When available, the ideal practice is to use face-to-face professional interpretation. However, an interpreter is generally not needed when there is an available **bilingual provider**, someone able to provide services directly to LEP clients in their non-English language. (However, being a bilingual provider does not necessarily mean someone is equipped to interpret for other providers, without additional training.) Several studies have found that using professional interpretation or bilingual providers is associated with improved communication, client satisfaction, and certain client outcomes, particularly in health services.⁴ Even when in-person professional interpreters or bilingual providers are not available, using remote professional interpretation services often assures quality and confidentiality for clients.

Volunteer or Paid Community Interpreters

Recruiting community members as volunteer or paid interpreters can also be a cost-effective measure and a great way to build connections for supporting the local refugee community. However, it's crucial to recognize the limitations and risks of using community interpreters, such as breach of confidentiality, potential preexisting relationships with clients and conflicts of interest, and possible

⁴ Karliner, L. S., Jacobs, E. A., Chen, A. H., & Mutha, S. (2007). Do professional interpreters improve clinical care for patients with limited English proficiency? A systematic review of the literature. *Health Services Research*, 42(2), 727–754. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6773.2006.00629.x>; Li, S., Pearson, D., & Escott, S. (2010). Language barriers within primary care consultations: An increasing challenge needing new solutions. *Education for Primary Care: An Official Publication of the Association of Course Organisers, National Association of GP Tutors, World Organisation of Family Doctors*, 21(6), 385–391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14739879.2010.11493944>; Wollscheid, S., Munthe-Kaas Menzies, H., Hammerstrøm, K. T., & Noonan, E. (2013). *Effect of interventions to facilitating communication between families with children or single young people with minority language background and public services*. Knowledge Centre for the Health Services at The Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29320065/>

re-traumatization. To help overcome these challenges, volunteer and paid community interpreters must receive adequate training and oversight.

Recruiting Interpreters from the Community

Some key strategies to expand your network of potential interpreters and recruit from local communities are:

- Collaborate with faith or cultural leaders to reach new volunteers and networks.
- Host informational sessions at spaces that are neutral or familiar to the target community. Avoid using your organization's official headquarters, government buildings, or institutional spaces that may intimidate or deter participants.
- Advertise through community-specific channels (e.g., language-specific WhatsApp groups, your organization's or other community organizations' Facebook pages).
- Partner with your agency's English language learning (ELL) classes to connect with your LEP community and learn more about their needs.
- Recruit interpreters from local colleges and universities by reaching out to language departments, career centers, and student organizations to find multilingual talent.

Hiring Community Interpreters

When hiring interpreters or enlisting volunteers, use a **standardized application process** that evaluates prospective interpreters for their language skills and any potential conflicts of interest. Applicants may not have experience interpreting with refugees, but they should display enough professionalism to navigate the sensitive sphere of newcomer services.

Verify candidates' actual fluency instead of assuming proficiency based on their background. Being a native speaker or raised in a bilingual household **does not guarantee professional fluency**. You should strictly **test every candidate in both English and the target language**, or outsource the evaluation to a professional language assessment agency.

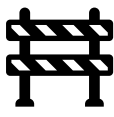
Learn more about a [promising practice to contract with former clients as paid community interpreters for an agency!](#)

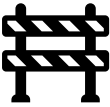
In 2019, Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA) launched its Community Interpreter Program to recruit, train, and contract with former clients as paid community interpreters. Interpreters are required to complete training about proper interpreting techniques, an interpreter's role and scope of practice, and tools to handle various situations. After the training, interpreters must complete a 20-hour practicum to further develop their newly acquired skills. Upon completion of the practicum, interpreters sign an independent contractor agreement to provide interpretation services during client trainings and workshops (e.g., job readiness trainings, cultural orientation).

Training Community Interpreters

Official certification for interpreters can be expensive or hard for volunteer interpreters to access. For many of your social service needs, it may be sufficient to pull from Switchboard's resources (such as those referenced in the orange box below) and other suggested resources from this section to design your own training pathway for new community interpreters. You can also offer shadowing opportunities for new hires to learn from skilled interpreters in action. No matter how you choose to structure onboarding for new interpreters, consider the **three key training areas** described in the table on the next page, and refer to the [Recommended Resources](#) at the end of this guide for more.

If you are onboarding community members to interpret for your agency, watch Switchboard's archived webinar [Training and Supporting Community Members Serving as Interpreters](#). You can use Switchboard's self-paced course [Basic Protocols and Practical Skills for Interpreting in Newcomer Services](#) to help directly train community members.

Key Training Areas	Description of Training Need	Sample Training Resources
Relevant Terminology 	Explain terminology related to your services , including the names of key programs and benefits. It may be helpful to provide bilingual glossaries of key terms.	HIAS Glossary: Commonly Used Terms & Definitions (n.d.) Switchboard Refugee and Newcomer Services 101: A Sample Onboarding Guide for New Service Providers (2025) Switchboard Blog Post: A Collection of Resources for Onboarding New Refugee Service Providers (2021)
Appropriate Boundaries, Role Expectations, and Confidentiality 	The interpreter must accurately convey messages without influencing the client or the service provider. They must remain strictly neutral and not advocate for their own goals or insert their personal opinions or values during the interaction. Interpreters must understand that maintaining client confidentiality is crucial , especially for personally identifiable information (PII) and	Switchboard Guide and Template: Client Rights and Responsibilities National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC): National Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Health Care University of Glasgow: Interpreting for Refugees: Contexts, Practices, and Ethics – available with a free trial for 3 weeks MCIS Language Solutions: Interpreting

Key Training Areas	Description of Training Need	Sample Training Resources
Appropriate Boundaries, Role Expectations, and Confidentiality, Cont. 	personal health information (PHI). They need a basic understanding of the limits of confidentiality, such as a service provider's obligation of mandatory reporting of abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults, or if there are critical incidents such as a danger of a client hurting themselves or others.	101 American Association of Interpreters and Translators in Education (AAITE): National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education (2023)
Basics of Trauma-Informed Care 	Interpreters are at risk for occupational hazards that come from extended trauma exposure, including burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic exposure, vicarious trauma, and re-traumatization (if they themselves come from a background of trauma). Training should include psychoeducation and strategies to mitigate these risks. You can provide the same support options offered to service providers, such as peer support groups or communities of practice, or even a dedicated supportive space or group specifically for interpreters.	Blue Horizon Webinar: Trauma Basics for Interpreters Switchboard Guide: Trauma-Informed Care: A Primer for Refugee Service Providers Switchboard Archived Webinar: Supporting Others. Sustaining Yourself: Trauma-Informed Care in Action Switchboard Blog Post: A Collection of Resources for Supporting the Mental Health of Newcomers and Direct Service Providers (2025) Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) Handouts Self Care Tools: Fundamental Skills for Self-care

Avoiding Ad Hoc Interpreters

An **ad hoc interpreter**, also known as a *chance* or *lay* interpreter, is an untrained individual who is asked to interpret, such as a client's family member or friend, or a bilingual staff member pulled away from other duties. While an ad hoc interpreter may be convenient, there are many important **reasons to avoid this situation**:

- It may violate your client's legal rights or your organizational policies.
- It can violate client confidentiality, create conflicts of interest, or simply prevent open communication. Clients may be uncomfortable raising sensitive topics in front of people they know.
- The interpreted message may not be accurate, complete, or impartial. Refer to the section on [Supporting Ethical, High-Quality Interpretation](#) for more details.
- Ad hoc interpreters may unintentionally or intentionally omit uncomfortable or sensitive messages or insert their own opinions.
- There may be safety concerns if an untrained interpreter fails to convey crucial information clearly and in a timely fashion. This can include health situations such as communicating about emergencies or high-risk medical circumstances, or in other situations where there might be disclosures of domestic violence, child abuse, suicidality, or other threats of harm to a client's self or others.

While you may find yourself using ad hoc interpreters as a last resort if no other resource is available, keep in mind that **minors under 18 should never serve as interpreters**. Children usually are not prepared professionally or emotionally to interpret sensitive conversations. Using a minor as an interpreter places undue stress on them, especially if they are the client's family member or the client is their caregiver.

Be discerning and sensitive when a client states a preference for using an ad hoc interpreter they personally trust. **Assess the level of influence** that the proposed interpreter has over the client. For example, if a client wants their interpreter for a health appointment to be a faith leader whose input they highly value, and the faith leader disagrees with the physician, that can cause serious complications for the client. The faith leader might not interpret the physician's words accurately or might insert their own opinions into the interaction.

Take the time to explain to clients why ad hoc interpreters are usually not in their best interest, and remind clients they always have the right to free and quality independent interpretation.

Preparing for Interpreted Interactions

Understanding Your Client's Interpretation Needs

Identify the appropriate language and any specific dialect needs of the client ahead of time.

To establish effective communication and trust with your clients, it's essential to understand the nuances of their specific linguistic needs. Read the orange box on the right for detailed examples.

Consider religious or cultural factors when choosing an interpreter or interpretation service.

Depending on the client's religious and cultural background, using an interpreter of the opposite sex could cause discomfort. A female client might feel uncomfortable discussing personal or sensitive matters with a male interpreter, or vice versa.

Clients may also have cultural sensitivities with others, even if they share their language and dialect. For example, some Ukrainian refugees who fled following the 2022 war speak Russian rather than Ukrainian, but they may be uncomfortable with having Russian-origin interpreters because of their personal wartime trauma.

Choose an interpreter suited to your context, within the limits of your resources.

When meeting a client in person, it is usually best to have an interpreter physically present when possible. However, if the only interpreters available share social or community connections with the client and the topic at hand is particularly sensitive, it may be best to use a contracted remote interpretation service to help the client feel more comfortable sharing private details. If possible,

Dialects. One language can differ enough between regions to hinder communication. For example, Modern Standard Arabic is today's recognized "standard" Arabic. However, outside of formal contexts (e.g., news programs), contemporary spoken Arabic is a collection of many different dialects spoken across the Middle East and North Africa.⁵ Speakers of Arabic from different regions may not be able to understand each other well. For example, an Iraqi interpreter will likely not be able to interpret effectively for a Sudanese client.

Native language. Don't assume a client speaks the most common language in their country of origin, particularly for clients from rural areas or indigenous communities. For example, a client from Guatemala, where Spanish is commonly spoken, may only feel comfortable in their native language K'iche'. A client from Afghanistan may have biodata indicating they speak Dari, but their best language may be Uzbek. Always confirm what language is best for each individual.

⁵ Faheem, M. A., Wassif, K. T., Bayomi, H., & Abdou, S. M. (2024). Improving neural machine translation for low resource languages through non-parallel corpora: A case study of Egyptian dialect to modern standard Arabic translation. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1), 2265. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-51090-4>

discuss these options with the client before arranging the meeting and the interpretation.

If using technology in remote interpretation, consider the client's access to and ability to use smartphones or video platforms. Newcomers with varying [digital literacy](#) levels will need varying levels of support. Medical conditions or disabilities, like speech impediments or deafness, may also affect interpretation, particularly for phone or remote video interpretation.

Pre-sessions with Interpreters

A **pre-session** or **pre-conference** is a short conversation (usually one to ten minutes) between the provider and interpreter that takes place away from the client prior to beginning the interpretation session. The purpose is for the provider and interpreter to introduce themselves to each other, make sure they both understand the interpreter's role, and briefly discuss key information about the session. Pre-sessions allow providers to give the interpreter important context and details on the sensitivity of the meeting, while also offering an opportunity to learn from the interpreter's expertise, such as common nonverbal communication cues or phrases that may indicate distress.

Use the pre-session to give the interpreter general information about what to expect in the meeting, share any job aids (such as glossaries), and provide any documents for sight translation. You can also agree on a signal they can use if you are speaking too quickly or for too long, or if the interpreter is overwhelmed by the topic. Finally, allow the interpreter to share questions or concerns, including anticipated linguistic or cultural differences.

If using a phone interpreter, you can conduct a brief pre-session with them prior to conferencing in the client or sitting down with the client in person. Explore whether it's possible to send the phone interpreter digital copies of relevant job aids or documents for sight translation, particularly if you continually engage the same interpreters. See the blue box on the next page for a sample script of a pre-session.⁶

⁶ Scripts adapted from O'Hara, M., & Akinsulure-Smith, A. M. (2011). Working with interpreters: Tools for clinicians conducting psychotherapy with forced immigrants. *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*. 7. 33–43. 10.1108/17479891111176287. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254191696>

This script can be adapted to your needs as you conduct pre-sessions with interpreters:

- Thank you in advance for interpreting today. In this session, I will be speaking with a client about *[topic of session]*. My goal for today is *[session goal(s)]*.
- Please keep in mind that everything we say today must remain confidential.
- When interpreting, please use the first person to make the conversation more direct (do not add “he says” or “she says”).
- Please interpret everything we say, without adding anything or leaving anything out. There will be times when I’m sure that you could “clean up” or summarize what the client and I have said to make communication smoother, but please don’t do that. It’s crucial that everything we say be interpreted as-is. If not, I won’t be able to learn and improve my communication with the client.
- Please do not insert your own emotions or judgments into your interpretation.
- As much as you can, try to mirror the tone of whoever you are interpreting for.
- If anyone speaks for too long or too quickly, please let us know by putting your palm up.
- If I say something and your interpretation is much longer or shorter than what I said, I might confirm with you to make sure nothing was added or left out.
- If you are not familiar with a word the client or I use, or if you feel there may be a miscommunication between me and the client, please alert me by putting your palm up and saying: “The interpreter would like to ask/suggest...”
- There may be times when you will feel emotional about what you are hearing. Please let me know if you need any support. If there is anything I can do to make your job easier, feel free to ask.
- Do you have any questions for me? Do you have any concerns?

Engaging in Interpreted Client Interactions

Setting Up In-Person Interpreted Client Meetings

Consider seating and positioning.

The interpreter should position themselves in an unobtrusive manner where they can still hear and see both the client and the provider, and where both the client and provider can hear them. Appropriate positioning will depend on the configuration of the room. Keep in mind that not all interpretation takes place in a sit-down office setting. The provider and interpreter should use their best judgment to decide what type of positioning is the most appropriate, considering situational factors and client preferences. See below for different seating arrangement options.



The Triadic Interview. Graphic adapted from [Think Cultural Health, Department of Health and Human Services](#).

Interpreter between client and provider.

This positioning is known as the triadic interview, and it can be helpful in social service situations to reinforce the neutrality and impartiality of the interpreter. It also allows the interpreter to more easily view both the provider's and the client's body language. However, this positioning can discourage eye contact between the provider and client and can disrupt the two-way flow of conversation.

Interpreter near client.

Positioning the interpreter to the side of and slightly behind the client encourages eye contact and connection between the provider and client. It is also beneficial if the client is hard of

hearing. However, it may create the perception that the interpreter is acting as the client's advocate. Seating the interpreter behind the client may also be uncomfortable for some clients, in particular those who have experienced trauma. If this is the case, position the interpreter directly beside the client, facing the provider in a single line.

Interpreter near provider.

This positioning encourages eye contact between the provider and client, is ideal for sign language interpretation, and allows the interpreter to see the client's body language. However, it may feel intimidating for the client.

Clearly explain the role of the interpreter to the client.

Introduce the interpreter to the client and explain their purpose: to provide language interpretation. Clarify that the session is still a service provision meeting between you and your client, to maintain the trust and rapport you have already established together. You can say, "This interpreter will make sure to tell you everything that I say, and they will tell me everything that you say." Encourage the interpreter to professionally introduce themselves and set boundaries for a successful session. See the blue box on the next page for more language on how to open an interpreted session.

Reinforce confidentiality.

Remind clients that all information discussed is confidential, and make sure they understand that the interpreter is bound by that same privacy policy. For example, you can say to the client, "No one present will discuss the contents of this meeting with anyone else, unless you give consent or if someone is a danger to themselves or others." Refer to Switchboard's guides [Client Rights and Responsibilities](#) and [Fundamentals of Mandatory Reporting](#) for more information on explaining confidentiality and its limits.

Provide a framework for successful interpretation.

The interpreter may help create this framework as part of their professional introduction, describing their role and how they will support the interaction. You can explain to the client that the conversation will involve frequent pauses so the interpreter can convey your message accurately. Ask the client if they can also pause after every few sentences to help the interpreter thoroughly convey their message back to you. Also, make sure the client knows they can ask to stop or clarify with you or with the interpreter at any point. See the blue box on the next page for a sample script⁷ of how to set up an interpreted session for success.

⁷ Script adapted from Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center. (2022). *Script: Health care provider's introduction for working with telephone/remote interpreters*. <https://www.refugeehealthta.org/access-to-care/language-access/preparing-for-a-remote-interpreted-session/pre-session-script/index.html>

Example of How to Open an Interpreted Session

Once the provider, interpreter, and client are together and ready to start the session, it's important to orient the client by leading a brief introduction. This is especially useful when clients are new to communicating through interpreters.

- Hello, [*interpreter's name*]. Before we begin, I'd like to lead a brief introduction with the client. I will pause during the introduction so that you can interpret. *Pause here and after each subsequent line.*
- Hello, [*client's name*]. My name is [*provider name*] and we will be communicating through an interpreter today.
- *If the interpreter is joining the session by phone or video, add:* The interpreter is joining us by phone/video and is probably in a different city or state.
- The interpreter's job is to interpret everything we say to each other.
- If there is something you don't want me to know, please do not say it to the interpreter.
- Please pause after each sentence to allow the interpreter to accurately tell me what you just said.
- The interpreter will not add to, change, or leave out anything that we say.
- If there is something you don't understand, please say so and the interpreter will let me know what you've said.
- If there is something I don't understand, I will say so and the interpreter will let you know what I've said.
- Everything we say today will be kept confidential.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

Supporting Ethical, High-Quality Interpretation

Culturally Responsive Interpretation

Language is more than speech; it embodies culture and worldview. Skilled interpreters can bridge words and phrases across languages and provide insight into clients' nonverbal communication. When working with an interpreter, remember that the meaning of any message is rooted in cultural values and assumptions. Many idioms could lead to confusion if interpreted literally from one language to another, or if the same terms have different meanings or connotations across languages. For example, terms of relationship such as "brother," "aunt," or "cousin" might be used differently in English than in other languages, where they may refer to unrelated friends or more distant family members.

Interpreters are responsible for recognizing when unshared cultural assumptions are creating barriers to understanding. The interpreter's role in these situations is not to "fix" the miscommunication but to help both the provider and client navigate it.

When an interpreter has an expanded function beyond typical interpretation to explain cultural concepts, beliefs, or practices that might cause a misunderstanding between the client and the provider, they are serving as a cultural broker.⁶

For a client, sharing a cultural background with an interpreter may be comforting. But it can also be uncomfortable, for instance, due to issues of confidentiality or power dynamics within the shared culture. Shared cultural background can also be emotionally activating for the interpreter. To help mitigate this, always **rely on the client rather than the interpreter** to explain themselves and their cultural experiences. Every person's cultural experiences are unique. By referring to the client as the authority on their own cultural meanings, you make sure not to undermine their experience, perpetuate stereotypes, or receive incorrect information by following an interpreter's mistaken assumptions. In such cases, support the interpreter in identifying where there might be miscommunication, rather than expecting the interpreter to resolve it.

Impartial Interpretation

The interpreter should remain impartial and not insert personal feelings, opinions, or advice into the conversation. They should speak on their own behalf only when necessary, for example, to ask you to slow down or to explain to you that they will need to define a term you've used for the client. Help your interpreter keep a low profile by minimizing your direct interaction. If you need to speak directly with the interpreter for more than a moment, it's best to pause the session and exit the room briefly with the interpreter. Additionally, if a conflict arises between you and the client, keep in mind that the interpreter is a neutral third party and cannot mediate.

Be proactive in addressing and mitigating conflicts of neutrality in interpretation:

- Add a "conflict of interest" discussion and protocol to interpreter training.
- Avoid assigning an interpreter to assist a client they may be related to or have close personal connections with.
- Screen for potential conflicts by discussing the content of the meeting in advance with the interpreter.
- Do not ask an interpreter to assist with other client-related responsibilities, unless that interpreter is also trained as a service provider within your agency and has capacity to support with other case management tasks.
- Continue recruiting interpreters from wide networks to expand your pool of qualified interpreters in many languages.

- State clear role descriptions in community-based interpreter agreements.
- Avoid relying on a single interpreter for one client if possible.
- Remember that you can always use remote interpretation services if that is the only impartial and professional option available for a specific situation.

Example of How to Respond if an Interpreter Inserts Their Own Opinion

Imagine Carol needs to speak with a client, Luis, about enrolling his children in school. She is working with a Spanish-speaking interpreter to communicate.

Carol says: “Luis, in the United States, it’s required for all children up to age 16 to regularly attend school.”

The interpreter begins speaking, and Carol listens to the message in Spanish. She notices that it seems unusually long based on her previous experience discussing similar topics with Spanish-speaking clients.

Carol says: “Interpreter, can you confirm that you did not add anything to my statement?”

The interpreter replies: “Well, I also mentioned that it’s okay to take your older children out of school if you need them to find a job.”

As before, Carol responds: “Let’s step out of the room so that the two of us can clarify your role as the interpreter. Please interpret what I’ve just said to the client, then we will pause our session and be right back.”

Once they step outside together, Carol can say, “I need to remind you that as an interpreter, you shouldn’t add to, change, or leave out anything I say. When you said to Luis that it is okay to take his older children out of school, you told him something I didn’t say, which could potentially create a serious issue for all three of us. Does that make sense?”

Direct Communication

There are several ways to support direct communication between you and your client. When you are speaking, **look at and speak directly to the client**, not to the interpreter. Continue looking at and engaging with the client while they are speaking to you, even if you do not understand their language. Speak slowly to model deliberate speech and use hand gestures to ask for pauses.

The interpreter should speak in the first-person (“I”) while relaying messages both ways. If the interpreter begins sentences with “he says” or “she says,” pause and ask the interpreter to use first-person speech. Explain to the client (through the interpreter) that the interpreter will use first-person speech, unless they are making a correction or explaining a misunderstanding.

Example of How to Navigate Side Conversations

Carol has arranged an interpreter for a meeting with her client Pierre. Pierre wants to discuss an issue he has encountered with his landlord. After opening the interpretation session, Carol begins, “So, Pierre, can you tell me your concerns about your apartment?”

Pierre replies in French, but the interpreter doesn’t convey the response in English. Instead, the interpreter answers Pierre himself, and the two of them begin to have a side conversation.

Carol can respond, “Let’s step out of the room to clarify your role as the interpreter. Please interpret what I’ve just said to the client, then we will pause our session.”

The interpreter and Carol step out of the room together to clarify.

Carol: “After Pierre answered my question about his concerns with the apartment, I noticed that you continued the conversation with Pierre without interpreting his response in English. I’d like to clarify that as the interpreter, your role today is only to interpret what I say and what the client says, not to answer the client’s questions yourself. If a client has a question or doesn’t understand something, please interpret what the client said so that I can respond. Do you have any questions?”

Accurate Interpretation

An accurate interpreted message has the potential to elicit the same response in the listener as the original message would. Interpretation should be **message-for-message**, not word-for-word. All languages are different. Keep in mind, a message that takes a certain number of words to say in one language may take more or fewer words in another.

You can support accurate interpretation by **avoiding technical terminology**, jargon, abbreviations, and slang. It is also helpful to avoid using idioms or metaphorical language. Instead, **speak in literal terms** to reduce misinterpretations across languages and cultures. If the interpreter does not understand a concept or does not completely hear a statement, encourage them to ask for clarification or repetition (announcing to the client that this is due to the interpreter’s need).

Remember that miscommunications may take place for many reasons, so don’t jump to conclusions. Try to have patience and explore the client’s understanding. You can also repeat your own statement, rephrasing as needed. It is possible that the interpretation was accurate, but the client misheard the interpreter or heard correctly and still chose to respond as they did.

A good example of how to clarify if you think there has been a misunderstanding or inaccurate interpretation is to say to the client, “Actually, I need to clarify that. Let me say that a different way.”

Example of How to Navigate Possibly Inaccurate Interpretation

In her conversation with Pierre, Carol learns that the hot water is not consistently working in his apartment and that he hasn't been able to communicate this to his landlord. Together, they call Pierre's landlord, who says she will call back once she has arranged for a plumber to visit the apartment. The interpreter conveys what the landlord has said to Pierre.

Carol adds: "Hopefully this will be taken care of in the next few days."

Pierre replies: "Thank you, that's great news. My cousin is arriving tomorrow for a visit, so I'm happy the hot water will be working by then."

Carol can respond, "I think we might have a misunderstanding. Can you tell me in your own words what your landlord is going to do?"

Complete Interpretation

It is important that the interpreter **conveys everything that has been said without omitting or changing anything**, not even to "clean up" what you or your client says. Interpretation should be comprehensive, including any seemingly inconsequential or incoherent statements.

Sometimes a client may speak at length without pausing and then the interpreter only provides you a brief summary, or you may notice that the interpreter and client seem like they're having a separate conversation. Though it can feel rude to interrupt, it's important to **request a pause and ask whether the interpretation was complete**. Without jumping to conclusions, calmly ask the interpreter to clarify. The interpreter may be knowledgeable about the topic at hand and may have provided their own answer to the client's question, or they may have felt compelled to comfort or assist the client. Assure the interpreter that you appreciate their support, but remind them that **their role is to interpret your interactions directly with the client**. You can then discuss any concerns or improvements [after the session](#).

Interpreters should never edit a speaker's original message to make it seem more polite or less controversial, even if it may be tempting to soften the tone or make the interaction less tense. Their job is to convey the original message accurately so that client and service provider can mediate any issues directly. If an interpreter finds it uncomfortable to interpret about culturally sensitive topics or when strong feelings are present, try to address this in ongoing interpreter training, and provide support after tense meetings in a [debriefing](#).

It can also be challenging for interpreters to balance **accurate** message-for-message interpretation with conveying the **complete** message without changes. As the provider, you can support the interpreter by **choosing what you say carefully**, making sure to include all necessary details while leaving out extraneous information. Remember to speak in short sentences or segments, pausing frequently. However, sometimes an interpreter may need to hear the complete thought before beginning to structure the message in the target language.

An interpreter should make sure that every voice in the room is interpreted to the others. They should interpret all side comments made in the room, such as from a client's family member or a provider's colleague. It's important that everyone present understands that if they wish to keep something private, they should not say it during an interpreted session.

Supporting and Advocating for Quality Interpretation in Health Care Settings

Effective communication is crucial for quality health care, making access to trained medical interpreters a key component for client safety and well-being. While many clinics, health centers, and hospitals offer interpretation services (especially when required by the Civil Rights Act), availability and quality vary. Service providers should build relationships with health care partners and learn about their language access capabilities, including how staff access and use interpretation services. While multilingual administrative staff at health care centers can be helpful in serving LEP clients who visit, they should not be expected to interpret clinical interactions without further training.

As much as possible, **encourage health care providers to use trained interpreters** rather than ad hoc interpreters such as family members, friends, or untrained staff. Qualified interpreters help reduce the risk of miscommunication, improve health outcomes, and support compliance with language access requirements.

Service providers can also strengthen language access by:

- Connecting clinics with trained community interpreters or medical interpreters
- Offering guidance on best practices for working with interpreters
- Identifying and communicating to clinics and insurance providers about community language needs and clients' rights to quality interpretation
- Supporting efforts to recruit and train multilingual staff who can provide appropriate language support

If interpretation costs are a concern, clinics may be able to explore grants, operating budget allocations, or available insurance reimbursements to support language access services.

Ultimately, strong partnerships with health care providers can help ensure that clients have access to quality interpretation services, staff who know how to work effectively with interpreters, and health care environments that are responsive to the linguistic needs of the communities they serve.

To learn more about overcoming common challenges facing refugees and newcomers in health care, see Switchboard and the [Society of Refugee Healthcare Providers' blog on transportation, interpretation, and competing demands](#). You can also view the accompanying information guide on [Service and Health Care Provider Collaboration](#).

After a Session

Debriefing

Once an interpreted session is over, consider **debriefing** with your interpreter, ideally right after the session ends and the client has left. Debriefing is especially important if a session:

- Had high trauma exposure or discussion of directly traumatic events
- Involved high stakes or high-risk decisions
- Was particularly complex or sensitive (e.g., technical, legal, or medical discussions)
- Had significant communication breakdowns throughout

A debrief conversation is also necessary when you are establishing a working relationship with a new interpreter whom you plan on working with again. This is your opportunity to provide feedback (see below) and to ask the interpreter if they have any feedback that you can use to improve communication in future sessions. You can reiterate the importance of boundaries and provide reminders on confidentiality. Be prepared to share resources on [self-care and any support services](#) available to the interpreter, especially when there are risks for secondary trauma and/or if the interpreter has their own trauma history (which you may or may not be aware of).

Giving Feedback to Interpreters

Always demonstrate your professional respect for the interpreter whenever providing constructive feedback. **Give feedback privately**, ideally soon after the session has taken place. It is not appropriate to give such feedback in front of the client, as it could be embarrassing to the interpreter or diminish their credibility.

Use specific examples of what should be improved and ask if the interpreter understands your feedback. Try to proceed patiently—you may have identified a need for more training that your organization or the interpreter's agency can provide. However, if you continue to encounter challenges when working with a certain interpreter despite providing clear feedback, or if a client has raised concerns with you directly, discuss the challenges with your supervisor or with the interpreter's agency.

Recommended Resources

Working with Interpreters

- Switchboard eLearning courses: [Introduction to Working with Interpreters](#) and [Overcoming Challenges in Interpretation](#)
- Switchboard archived webinar: [Training and Supporting Community Members Serving as Interpreters](#) (2023)

- [Settle In](#): Client-facing culturally relevant resources in multiple languages
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: [National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services \(CLAS\) in Health and Health Care](#) (2025)
- Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) promising practice: [Employment and Economic Stability – Community Interpreter Program](#) (2024)
- Society of Refugee Healthcare Providers blog post: [Tips for Overcoming Three Common Challenges to Health Care: Transportation, Interpretation, and Competing Demands](#) (2024)
- The National Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters: [Remote Interpreting Resources](#) (n.d.)
- The National Health Law Program and The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care: [Language Services Resource Guide for Health Care Providers](#) (2006)

Advocating for Language Access and LEP Clients' Right to Interpretation

- Settle In client-facing resources, available in English, Dari, Pashto, Russian, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Haitian Creole (2026)
 - [How to Get Interpretation and Translation at Your Medical Appointments](#)
 - [Interpretation Requirements for Affirmative Asylum Applicants](#)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: [Limited English Proficiency \(LEP\) Resources](#) (2025)
- National Accreditation of Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages tip sheet: [What to Expect from an Interpreter: Communicating Effectively with Your Child's School](#) (2021)
- National Partnership for Community Training info guide: [Language Access: Understand and Advocate for Your Clients' Right to Interpretation Services](#) (2016)
- International Rescue Committee (IRC) toolkit: [Cultural Validation and Translation Toolkit](#) (2022)

Resources for Training Interpreters

- Switchboard eLearning course: [Basic Protocols and Practical Skills for Interpreting in Newcomer Services](#) (2023)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: [National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services \(CLAS\) in Health and Health Care](#) (2025)
- University of Glasgow: [Interpreting for Refugees: Contexts, Practices, and Ethics](#) (free trial with access for 3 weeks)
- MCIS Language Solutions: [Interpreting 101](#)
- Interpretips: [Youtube Channel](#) (n.d.)
- District of Columbia Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants Manual: [Breaking Silence: Interpreting for Victim Services - A Training Manual](#) (2015)
- District of Columbia Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants Workbook: [Breaking Silence: Interpreting for Victim Services – A Workbook of Role Plays and Exercises](#) (2015)
- Formal interpreter credentialing programs. *This list is for informational purposes only. Switchboard does not endorse any individual for-profit companies.* Examples include:
 - [Cross-Cultural Communications](#)

- [The Community Interpreter International](#) Live Training
- [The Community Interpreter Online](#) Self-Paced Training
- [The Medical Interpreter Online](#) Self-Paced Training
- Local universities and community colleges

Sector-Specific Concepts and Vocabulary

- HIAS Glossary: [Commonly Used Terms & Definitions](#) (n.d.)
- Switchboard [Refugee and Newcomer Services 101: A Sample Onboarding Guide for New Service Providers](#) (2025)
- Switchboard blog post: [A Collection of Resources for Onboarding New Refugee Service Providers](#) (2021)

Scope of Role, Ethics, and Confidentiality

- Switchboard guide and template: [Client Rights and Responsibilities](#) (2022)
- National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC): [National Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Health Care](#) (2005)
- International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA): [Code of Ethics](#) (2006)
- American Association of Interpreters and Translators in Education (AAITE): [National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Education](#) (2023)
- National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators (NAJIT): [Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities](#) (n.d.)

Trauma-Informed Care, Boundaries, and Self-Care

- Switchboard tip sheet: [Setting Better Boundaries: 7 Tips to Maintain Professional Relationships with Newcomer Clients](#) (2026)
- Switchboard archived webinar: [Supporting Others, Sustaining Yourself: Trauma-Informed Care in Action](#) (2026)
- Switchboard archived webinar: [Creating Balance in Case Management](#) (2025)
- Switchboard blog post: [A Collection of Resources for Supporting the Mental Health of Newcomers and Direct Service Providers](#) (2025)
- Switchboard guide: [Trauma-Informed Care: A Primer for Refugee Service Providers](#) (2023)
- Interpretips webinar: [Trauma Basics for Interpreters](#) (2023)
- Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) Handouts [Self Care Tools: Fundamental Skills for Self-care](#) (2021)

Cross-Cultural Communication

- Switchboard guide: [Navigating Difficult Conversations with Newcomers](#) (2026)
- Switchboard archived webinar: [Navigating Difficult Conversations with Clients](#) (2026)
- Society of Refugee Healthcare Providers blog post: [Working Across Cultures in Mental Health Services](#) (2025)
- Switchboard blog post: [Getting to Know Afghan Newcomers: Considerations for Culturally Aware Communication](#) (2022)

Client Safety and Incident Reporting

- Switchboard guide: [Promoting Client Safety and Security in Virtual Settings](#) (2025)
- Switchboard tip sheet: [Nonverbal Communication and Safety Cues](#) (2025)
- Switchboard toolkit: [Critical Incident Response: Toolkit for Developing Organizational Policies and Procedures](#) (2025)
- Switchboard Resources on Mandatory Reporting (2026)
- Guide: [Fundamentals of Mandatory Reporting: A Guide for Refugee Service Providers in the U.S.](#)
- Toolkit: [Mandatory Reporting with Refugees and Newcomers: Sample Scripts and Additional Resources for Refugee Service Providers](#)
- Archived webinar: [Foundations of Mandatory Reporting for Refugee Service Providers](#)

Appendix: Potential Apps for Interpretation and Translation

For an interactive version of this guide and for more on integration apps for newcomers, see Switchboard's blog post: [Making Sense of Mobile Apps: A Collection of Interpretation, Translation, and Integration Apps for Newcomers](#) (2023). *This list is for informational purposes only. Switchboard does not endorse any individual for-profit company or product.*

App/Service (linked) and Description		Positives/Pros	Negatives/Cons	Why this app? What contexts?
	Tarjimly is an on-demand live interpretation app using volunteers, available in 80+ languages including many common refugee languages	✓ Fast, on-demand access: interpreters can be found in five minutes or less ✓ 80+ languages across 95 different countries, including many common refugee languages ✓ Live volunteer interpreters with ratings based on credentials, Tarjimly language test modules, and internal quality assurance ✓ Can be used directly by newcomers	✗ Connectivity issues can interrupt interpretation ✗ Interpreters are volunteers who are not required to be professionally trained, may be less reliable and skilled	• Widely used due to convenience • Offers live one-to-one interpretation for phone, video, and text conversations • On-demand interpreter access • Use when you have a strong Wi-Fi connection on a phone or video-call-enabled device • Works for many common refugee languages • Consider coaching clients on how to use this app

App/Service (linked) and Description	Positives/Pros	Negatives/Cons	Why this app? What contexts?
 SayHi relies on machine learning for translated conversations via voice or text, image/document translation	✓ User-friendly messaging style interface between two languages ✓ Performs text, voice, conversation, and image/document translation ✓ Can use voice dictation and text input methods with customizable gender and speed of voice playback ✓ Accessibility features such as Voiceover, Dynamic Type, and improved navigation per ADA guidelines	✗ Does not consistently punctuate conversations ✗ Machine learning does not always understand accents or regional pronunciations outside of dialect-supported languages ✗ Does NOT currently translate Burmese, Dari (only Persian), Karen, Pashto, Rohingya, Tigrinya, Urdu	• Best for short conversations with some back and forth; longer discussions/meetings could get tedious • Relies on machine learning, so use where live translation may not be necessary • Excellent functionality for image and document scanning and translating; uses clear text overlaid on top of the original document
 Microsoft Translator is a personal translation app for 70+ languages with functions for text, voice, conversation, and image/documents. It also allows for language downloads to use translation offline.	✓ Performs text, voice, conversation, and image/document translation ✓ Conversation mode can be used remotely by exchanging a conversation code ✓ Includes phrasebooks to help language learners hear and see the basics ✓ Can save languages offline for more reliability in Wi-Fi limited settings ✓ Built-in pronunciation guides and alternate	✗ User interface has a more pleasant design but is a bit less functional ✗ Does NOT currently translate Karen, Rohingya, Tigrinya	• Highly functional for varied needs, especially for conversations • Effective and user-friendly (based on highly positive user reviews) • Strong transliteration (translating across different alphabet systems) • Often provides multiple definitions to account for ambiguous context, leading to better comprehension

App/Service (linked) and Description		Positives/Pros	Negatives/Cons	Why this app? What contexts?
		translation look-up functions		
	<u>Google Translate</u> performs text, voice, conversation, and image/document translation. Also has “Tap to Translate” function for users to translate any text on their device screen and a drawing feature to handwrite characters.	✓ Performs text, voice, conversation, and image/document translation ✓ Widely used and known for its ease of user experience ✓ Includes phrasebooks to help language learners hear and see the basics ✓ Can save languages offline for more reliability in Wi-Fi limited settings ✓ Handwriting tool is useful for languages with characters different from the Latin/Roman alphabet ✓ Has a transcription function that performs continuous/simultaneous interpretation for eight	✗ Low translation accuracy due to lack of machine understanding of nuance, idioms, expressions, tone, etc. ✗ Complex sentences and ideas do not translate well ✗ Does NOT currently translate Dari (only Persian), Karen, Rohingya	• Simple user experience and prevalently used, so expect newcomer clients to default to this app • Document and image translation works well, comparable to SayHi • Works well with other apps and browsers on a smart device, offering on-screen translations through “Tap to Translate” • Struggles at times with context and nuance, so use sparingly and keep speech/text simple and straightforward

App/Service (linked) and Description		Positives/Pros	Negatives/Cons	Why this app? What contexts?
		languages		
	DeepL uses machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) to provide high-quality text-to-type translation	✓ Performs text, voice, and image/document translation ✓ Better use of AI and machine learning than other interpretation/translation apps; provides higher-quality and more accurate translations in comparison ✓ Simple user interface makes for ease of use	✗ Lacks functionality for conversations ✗ Does NOT currently translate Arabic, Burmese, Dari (only Persian), Farsi, Karen, Kinyarwanda, Pashto, Rohingya, Swahili, Tigrinya, Urdu	• Provides extremely high-quality and high-accuracy translation due to use of AI and machine learning • Only useful for French, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian; lacks other common refugee languages

About Switchboard

Switchboard is a training and technical assistance project helping to build capacity in resettlement services across the U.S. We offer tools and training to service providers, newcomers, state agencies, and local communities to strengthen support for newcomers and promote integration.

Switchboard offers an online resource library, learning opportunities, research, and personalized technical assistance covering a range of topics related to the newcomer experience. In addition, we provide trusted information for newcomers through Settle In and for community members through the Switchboard Community Support Line. Switchboard is implemented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

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