

Working with mediators and translators

Query: Use of cultural mediators or translators in child programming, particularly with unaccompanied or separated children (UASC), or in any GBV programming.

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1. Overview

As part of the European Refugee and Migrant Response, there is an increasing need to provide Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Child Protection case management services using an interpreter or cultural mediator due to language barriers. Within case management, clients are required to communicate about difficult experiences, which can be challenging to do effectively when using a language in which they are not fluent. While interpreters or cultural mediators are used across the humanitarian response, the sensitivity, safety and confidentiality requirements highlight the need to ensure they are well trained and equipped with the relevant skills to act as an inter-mediatory between the client and service provider.

Interpreters and cultural mediators are terms that have been used interchangeably. However, they are different jobs with different skill sets. Not all interpreters will be able to provide cultural mediation, and not all cultural mediators will have professional interpreting skills.

- An **interpreter** translates verbal communication between two languages. An interpreter may provide an oral translation of a written document, i.e. sight interpretation, under exceptional circumstance, but does not provide written translations (this is the work of a translator).
- A **cultural mediator** facilitates mutual understanding between a person or a group of people (e.g. the migrant/refugee population) and a caregiver (e.g. a doctor) by providing two-way verbal translation (interpreting) and helping them overcome cultural barriers.¹

Regardless of the term that is used, any individual engaged in case management to facilitate communication between a client and case worker must ensure a survivor centred approach and adhere to the GBV Guiding principles of respect, safety, confidentiality and non-discrimination. This also applies if they deal with a disclosure outside of the case management setting.

Section 2 contains:

- A) **General overview to working with interpreters and cultural mediators** with some best practice, guidelines and communication do's and don'ts [Resource 1] as well as considerations and good practice for interpreters and service providers [Resource 2-6] and research on the use of interpreters or cultural mediators in the European response and in clinical settings [Resource 7-9].
- B) **Guidance and training materials to build skills and understanding among interpreters and cultural mediators on GBV.** These range from a basic introduction to GBV [Resource 1-3] to more specialised communication skills when dealing with child and adult survivors. [Resource 4-7].

These should provide a basis for incremental learning and skills development among newly recruited or existing interpreters and cultural mediators. To the extent possible, they should be the same sex as the client and should undergo a minimum level of training before participating in a session. This should include GBV Guiding principles, types of GBV, causes and consequences, Psychological First Aid (PFA), basic communication do and don'ts, roles, responsibilities, boundaries and code of conduct.

¹ [Guide-to-Humanitarian-Interpreting-and-Cultural-Mediation-English-1 \(1\)](#)

2. Mapping of available evidence

| | Topic | Name of Resource | Description |
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| A | General background and overview to working with interpreters and cultural mediators | | |
| 1 | Guidance for working with interpreters and cultural mediators | Guide-to-Humanitarian-Interpreting-and-Cultural-Mediation-English-1 (1) | Guidance for humanitarian service providers to interpreters and cultural mediators including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Overview of interpreters and cultural mediators outlining similarities and differences. ○ Do's and Don'ts for interpretation and cultural mediation. ○ Best practices for working with interpreters and cultural Mediators including use of language, ethical and safety considerations. ○ Humanitarian principles and how to apply to interpreters and cultural mediators. |
| 2 | Consideration for psychologists on how use an interpreter with a client | Working with Interpreters: A Practice Guide for Psychologists 2013, Australian Psychological Society Working with interpreters: Guidelines for psychologists 2017, British Psychological Society | Guidance for Psychologists on when and if they should use an interpreter, practical and ethical considerations when using one, tips for effective communication via an interpreter and debriefing and cultural awareness. |
| 3 | Guidelines for health professionals working with interpreters | Working with Interpreters Guidelines , 2007, Queensland Health Interpreter Service | Guidance to facilitate effective interpreting services for people receiving health services including an overview of when interpreters should be engaged, circumstances where unaccredited bilingual speakers can be used, how to work with an interpreter – on site, over telephone or video conference. |
| 4 | Good Practice Guidance for interpreters, service providers working with interpreters and interpreting agencies | Interpreting for women who have experienced gender-based violence Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership, (GVAWP) Good Practice Guide 2011 Final Nov | Good Practice Guidance for interpreters, service providers working with interpreters and interpreting agencies provides overview of confidentiality, boundaries, limitations, accuracy and self-care. |
| 5 | Tip sheet for using interpreters: Good practice tips for GBV service providers. | Considerations When Using Interpreters for Victims with Limited English Proficiency , Asia Pacific Institute on GBV, 2015 | Provides guidance on ensuring accurate interpretation and confidentiality while avoiding conflicts of interest. This includes confidentiality, legal advice, steps for ensuring competent interpretation and considerations when using an interpreter for victims of domestic and sexual violence (gender/age/proximity) |

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| 6 | Tip sheet for service providers working with interpreters | How to Work with Interpreters Asia Pacific Institute on GBV, 2015 | Brief guidance on preparing the client, pre-session preparation with the interpreter and during the interview. Additional resources on GBV and interpretation from Asia Pacific Institute can be found here . |
| | Other research | | |
| 7 | Research by Translators Without Borders (TWB) on the need for language services to migrants and refugees for the European Crisis, gaps in services and consequences of this on refugees and migrants generally and on children specifically. | Lost for words | TWB partnered with RefuComm to assess how language and format affect comprehension among refugees and migrants. The goal was to gain insights that would help partners improve the information provision in Greece, as well as to refugees and migrants anywhere in the world. |
| | | Putting Language on the map in the European Refugee Crisis | This report details why refugees and migrants are not receiving the language support they need to communicate with service providers. It sets out practical solutions, starting with collecting better data on the languages people understand. |
| | | Bridging the Gap – the Impact of Language Barriers on Refugee and Migrant Children in Greece | This study by TWB analyses how language affects refugee and migrant children in Greece and their language journey since leaving their home country. The research was based on a specially designed, participatory activity for refugee and migrant children and was complemented by interviews with parents, humanitarian aid workers, and teachers. |
| | | Language & Comprehension Barriers in Greece's Migration Crisis | This study analyses the language and communication barriers that exist in the ongoing humanitarian migration crisis in Greece. It was conducted by TWB in April 2017 at 11 sites in Greece and combines quantitative and qualitative research methods. |
| 8 | Academic research on working with interpreters. | Working with interpreters across language and culture in mental health <i>Journal of Mental Health</i> , June 2009; 18(3): 233–241 (full article included) | The paper reviews opportunities and challenges in working with interpreters in mental health services and offers some positive practice guidelines for clinicians based on the available literature. |
| 9 | Research exploring the challenges and opportunities of working with interpreters. | Issues in using interpreters in therapeutic work with refugees. What is not being expressed? <i>European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling</i> , 11:4, 409-424 (full article included) | This paper reveals the complexities of effective clinical work with interpreters, but also what can be achieved: the multiple layers of meaning concerning the client's experience and communication which can be elicited through effective working between interpreter and clinician. |
| B | Guidance and training materials to build skills and understanding among interpreters and cultural mediators on GBV | | |
| 1 | Psychological First Aid – basic guidance to help others who have | Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers , WHO, 2011 | This guide covers psychological first aid which involves humane, supportive and practical help to people suffering crisis events. It gives a framework for supporting people in ways that respect their dignity, culture and abilities. It |

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| | experienced an extremely distressing event. | | includes communication skills and referrals and will provide a useful foundation for all staff. |
| 2 | Basic concepts and guiding principles for GBV | GBV Basic Concepts , IRC 2010 | Introduction to GBV, causes, consequences and potential responses. |
| 3 | Guidance for non-specialised actors in dealing with disclosures. | How to support survivors of gender-based violence when a GBV actor is not available in your area: A STEP-BY-STEP POCKET GUIDE FOR HUMANITARIAN PRACTITIONERS GBV Guidelines Reference Group, draft 2017 (not for circulation) | The Pocket Guide is designed to provide global standards on offering basic help and information to survivors of GBV without doing further harm. Humanitarian actors should not proactively seek to identify GBV survivors, but rather be ready to support in case someone asks for help. The Pocket Guide provides guidance for non-specialist actors on GBV guiding principles, survivor-centred approaches and how to deal with a disclosure, basic communication do's and don'ts, referrals, and linking to services |
| 4 | Communication skills Training of Trainers on GBV | Communication Skills in Working with Survivors of GBV: A Five-Day Training of Trainers Workshop (FHI, IRC, RHRC, 2002) | 5-day training guide, beginning with an overview of GBV and then covering areas focusing on engagement strategies for work with GBV survivors, methods to support the service provider, service provider responsibilities, and community referrals facilitation skills overview, training review, and evaluation. Relevant modules include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Understanding Key Concepts ○ Developing a Framework to Understand and Respond to GBV ○ Understanding the Survivor ○ Introduction to Engagement Techniques |
| 5 | GBV survivors (communication and engagement; health care), | Caring for Survivors Training Pack (UNICEF, 2010) | The training pack provides information and skills development in various aspects related to communication and engagement with sexual violence survivors in conflict-affected countries or complex emergencies. It also focuses on medical care for survivors. Relevant modules include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Modules 1 – 7 [Welcome, Introduction to GBV, impact of GBV, consequences, basic communication skills, survivor centred communication with children] |
| 6 | Case management for GBV survivors | Interagency GBV Case Management Guidelines , 2015 | Global interagency GBV case management guidelines for a 5-7 day training for GBV service providers Relevant modules include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Module 1: Basic Concepts ○ Module 2: Power & GBV |

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| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Module 3: Consequences of GBV ○ Module 4: Causes & Context of GBV ○ Module 5: Basics Review Module ○ Module 6: GBV Attitudes and Perceptions ○ Module 7: Theoretical Foundation for a Survivor-Centred Approach Module ○ Module 8: Guiding Principles & Roles and Responsibilities ○ Module 9: Communication skills for engaging with and communicating with children |
| 7 | Case management steps and communication skills for dealing with child survivors | Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse , 2012, UNICEF/IRC | <p>Global guidelines and tools for health and psychosocial staff working with child survivors of sexual abuse in humanitarian settings. They include new care guidelines for child survivors and tools to build the capacity of service providers working with children affected by sexual abuse and their families.</p> <p>Relevant modules include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chapter 2: Child friendly attitudes and ○ Chapter 3: Core skills for engaging with and communicating with children |

About GBViE Helpdesk Rapid Programme Support: The GBViE Helpdesk is funded by UNICEF, contracted through the UNICEF Gender Based Violence in Emergencies team. Helpdesk rapid programme support is based on half a day's work per query and is designed to provide rapid support on specific programming issues. These queries are particularly appropriate for in-country staff engaged in either direct GBV programming or who are seeking to integrate GBV considerations into sectoral programming. Rapid programme support can also be provided verbally/without any formal written product, or through the review of relevant documents; where written reports are produced, their depth and breadth is necessarily limited by the short timeframe available for delivery.

GBViE Helpdesk services are provided by roster of humanitarian and GBV experts, under the leadership of Social Development Direct. Expert advice may be sought through this roster, as well as from SDDirect's broader in-house and network of expertise. Any view or opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of UNICEF, the GBViE Helpdesk, or any of the contributing experts.

For any further request or enquiry, contact enquiries@gbviehelpdesk.org.uk .