



Action: Developing an EU WEB portal for Webcam Public Service Interpreting to improve access to basic services for non-EU nationals — EU-WEBPSI

## D 3.8: CASE FILE EU-WEBPSI MODEL: HARMONISED MINIMAL STANDARDS FOR WEBCAM PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETING

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Co-funded by  
the European Union

## EU standards for video-mediated PSI

In line with the aims of the EU-WEBPSI project, standards have been developed taking into account three key areas:

1. PSI professional competence, training and certification;
2. Video-mediated interpreting;
3. Training interpreters in languages of lesser diffusion (LLDs).

These have been synthesised and integrated into a harmonised EU-model for video-mediated public service interpreting, the EU-WEBPSI model. Refugee settings are at the heart of this project and have, therefore, been taken as a point of departure for the development of the model. Interpreting in refugee settings can include medical, social welfare and educational settings as well as some legal settings, although it normally excludes interpreting at the police stations and in the courts of law. Whilst our recommendations do not specifically cover legal or medical interpreting, some of them will be applicable to these and other public service settings in which interpreters work.

The EU-WEBPSI model has been built in a stepwise process, starting with a professional competence model for PSI that can serve as a basis for assessment and certification (1), based on the outcomes of WP2 that constitute the rationale behind it. The perspective is that of the interpreter: what should they ideally know and be able to do in a PSI setting, regardless of specific contexts?

Subsequently, the specificities of the contexts of both video-mediated interpreting (2) and working with LLDs (3) have been taken on board. To this end, needs to adjust or extend the standards for PSI professional competence have been identified, and additional requirements have been outlined, e.g. to include the service provider's responsibility towards a successful interpreted interaction. These do, therefore, take on broader perspectives than the interpreter's.

The EU-WEBPSI model integrates all of these perspectives. In its application to specific training or interpreting settings, this model can be used as a benchmark against which the relevant needs can be measured. This may, for example, require adjusted competence levels for specific settings and types of assignments within the asylum reception context. In a next phase, on the basis of this model, and to accompany its application, the EU-WEBPSI project will develop training content for PSI trainers. These modules will cover the following topics: entrance assessment, basic interpreting techniques, deontology, the context of the public service domain, the specificities of webcam interpreting and of training interpreters in LLDs, the organisation of certification and certification tests, and interprofessional training on working with webcam interpreters through the EU web portal.

### 1. Quality framework for public service interpreting

#### Assessment before training

Before candidates can initiate training, they must demonstrate a command of the language at a B2 level relevant to the specific context of interpreting settings. The candidate should, therefore, meet the following descriptors of [the official list of descriptors](#) (Council of Europe, 2020) :

#### **Receptive skills**

- They can understand announcements and messages on concrete and abstract topics delivered in standard language or a familiar variety at normal speed.

- They can follow chronological sequence in extended informal discourse, e.g. in a story or anecdote.
- They can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex discourse on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in standard language or a familiar variety, including technical discussions in their field of specialisation.

### **Productive skills**

#### *Information flow*

- They can communicate detailed information reliably.
- They can deliver announcements on most general topics with a degree of clarity, fluency and spontaneity which causes no strain or inconvenience to the recipient.
- They can give clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to their field of interest.

#### *Linguistic accuracy and correctness*

- Lexical accuracy is generally high, though some confusion and incorrect word/sign choice does occur without hindering communication.
- They can produce appropriate collocations of many words/signs in most contexts fairly systematically.
- They show a relatively high degree of grammatical control and do not make mistakes which lead to misunderstanding.
- They can generally use appropriate intonation, place stress correctly and articulate individual sounds clearly; accent may be influenced by the other language(s) they speak, but has little or no effect on intelligibility.

#### *Register*

- They can adjust their expression to make some distinction between formal and informal registers but may not always do so appropriately.

#### *Language coping strategies*

- They can address most communication problems (such as gaps in vocabulary) by using circumlocution or paraphrase, or by avoiding difficult expressions.
- They can correct slips and errors that they become conscious of, or that have led to misunderstandings.
- They are aware of specific coping and accommodation strategies that also take into account speakers' specific sociocultural backgrounds.

### **Interaction skills**

- They can intervene appropriately in discussion, exploiting appropriate language to do so.
- They can ask for explanation or clarification to ensure they understand complex, abstract ideas.

### **Intercultural skills**

- They can generally interpret cultural cues and conventions appropriately in the culture concerned.
- They can, in intercultural encounters, demonstrate appreciation of perspectives other than that of their own worldview, and express themselves in a way appropriate to the context.

## Professional skills to be developed **during** training and to be honed in further careers

During training, the candidate will acquire a number of professional skills needed to practise the profession of public service interpreter. The list below contains the main competences an interpreter must be capable of in order to perform their work competently in the future. This list also contains several good practices. Some of these skills cannot strictly be taught but are nonetheless important for an interpreter to take into account.

### *Interpreting techniques*

- **Consecutive.** The interpreter should know and be able to apply short consecutive interpreting techniques.
- **Simultaneous.** The interpreter should know and be able to apply the basic techniques of simultaneous interpreting.
- **Interpreting for a group.** The interpreter should be able to use different techniques to interpret for a group.
- **Memory and concentration.** The interpreter should listen actively during an assignment so that they understand the message.
- **Analysis.** The interpreter should be able to analyse the source text message to enable them to take structured notes and/or memorise the message.
- **Note-taking.** The interpreter should be able to adopt their own effective note-taking technique (margin, symbols, abbreviations, etc.), and should know how to select information they should write down during an assignment.

### *Delivery*

- **Introduction.** The interpreter is aware that they should introduce themselves to the interlocutors, stress that they will fully and completely render what is communicated between the interlocutors, are impartial, are bound by professional secrecy, and will interpret in the first person<sup>1</sup>.
- **Context-related vocabulary.** The interpreter knows and is able to functionally use specific vocabulary relevant to PSI settings.
- **Socio-cultural knowledge.** The interpreter has thorough knowledge of both cultures to ensure effective communication between both parties.
- **Turn-taking and intervention techniques.** The interpreter is able to manage turn-taking in a conversation and apply appropriate intervention techniques (e.g. to ask for clarification).
- **Coherence and cohesion.** The interpreter is able to structure their speech coherently to ensure that the message is conveyed comprehensively in the target language.
- **Articulation and verbal expression.** The interpreter is able to articulate clearly and adopt a pleasant verbal expression.
- **Intonation.** The interpreter is able to adapt their intonation to the target language.
- **Body language.** The interpreter is able to use appropriate body language during an assignment. They are aware of particular non-verbal expressions and, if necessary, know how to adapt their strategies.

### *Context*

- **Public service sector.** The interpreter is able to gather information on the relevant interpreting settings and to stay informed about current affairs in relevant fields of work.

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<sup>1</sup> The latter element may need to be adapted when one of the primary parties is likely to find this confusing (e.g. when interpreting for minors, people suffering from trauma, ...).

## *Ethics*

The interpreter should be aware of the key ethical principles including:

- **Confidentiality.**
  - The interpreter respects the principle of professional secrecy. They cannot share information acquired during an assignment with third parties. This principle also applies after termination of the interpreting assignment and to the interpreter's notes.
- **Neutrality and impartiality.**
  - The interpreter maintains a professional distance from both parties and positions themselves in a triadic setup. They can easily be heard by the parties and make eye contact with them.
  - The interpreter's sole task consists of interpreting the entire original message. They will, therefore, not provide any additional information, either on their own initiative or at the request of either party), unless cultural issues give rise to serious misunderstandings.
  - The interpreter will not express, directly or indirectly, their own personal views, opinions and (philosophical, religious or political) beliefs.
  - The interpreter is able to distance themselves from their own social background and experiences and does not let this influence the assignment.
  - The interpreter cannot accept an assignment in case of a conflict of interest. When a conflict of interest arises during the assignment, the interpreter informs both parties. In case of any suspicion of a conflict of interest, the assignment should be terminated immediately.
  - The interpreter does not accept gifts.
- **Accuracy.**
  - The interpreter conveys each interlocutor's message completely and without omissions into the respective other language.
  - The interpreter uses the same register and intonation as the speaker.
  - The interpreter asks for clarification in case of incomprehension.
  - When the interpreter can no longer ensure accuracy due to the length of the speech, they can signal (verbally or non-verbally) their intention to take a turn.
  - The interpreter recognizes and corrects any mistake or error they may have made and informs the parties involved.
  - If either party requests not to interpret an utterance or statement made by them, the interpreter shall remind the person concerned of their duty to interpret everything and shall inform the other party/parties of the request.
- **Transparency.**
  - The interpreter informs both parties when the interpreter asks for clarification.
  - The interpreter reports difficulties with dialects, technical terms, swear words, etc. to all parties, as soon as the difficulties arise.
  - The interpreter notifies both parties when the assignment cannot be carried out optimally.

## *Interpersonal skills*

- **Empathy.** The interpreter is able to show empathy when interpreting without getting too involved and compromising their neutrality.
- **Stress management.** The interpreter is able to deal with stress and challenging situations. They identify their own emotions and name the available options to express their feelings after a difficult conversation.

### *Professionalism*

- **Personal conduct.** The interpreter behaves professionally in all circumstances.
- **Preparation for an assignment.** The interpreter is able to enquire about the language, subject matter and circumstances of the assignment in order to prepare mentally as well as in terms of substance.
- **Punctuality.** The interpreter arrives on time at an assignment.
- **Collegiality and solidarity.** The interpreter strives to maintain a good professional relationship with their fellow interpreters.
- **Continuous professional development.** The interpreter is able to sustain their professional skills through continuous professional development.

## **2. Minimum requirements for video-mediated interpreting in PSI settings**

This part outlines minimum requirements for video-mediated interpreting (VMI), with a focus on refugee settings, as explained in the introduction.

### Terms and definitions

The term **video-mediated interpreting** is used as an umbrella term covering all configurations of interpreting transmitted via video feed. Depending on the distribution of participants, we use the following terms to describe two broad types of VMI configuration:

- a. **fully remote** — when all primary participants (parties who are taking in part in the video mediated encounter) and the interpreter are separated from each other.
- b. **hybrid** — when some primary participants are co-located and others are remote/off-site, being connected via video. The interpreter can either be co-located with any of the primary participants or be in a separate location. Some examples of a hybrid VMI configuration include the following set-ups:
  - the interpreter is co-located with the authority/the speaker of the host country's language;
  - the interpreter is co-located with the other-language speaker(s) who does/do not (or not sufficiently) speak/understand the host country's language;
  - only the interpreter is remote, and the remaining participants are co-located.

The following VMI requirements capture all configurations, as they all share elements of remoteness. Contrary to the standards for public service interpreters outlined above, which pertain exclusively to the interpreter, the minimum requirements for professional practice for VMI distinguish between those targeting all parties involved in the interaction or in organising the VMI encounter, those specifically targeting the interpreter and those to be observed by clients and interpreting service providers (agencies/organisations).

### Requirements to be observed by all parties

#### **Visual requirements**

- **Mutual visibility.** The setup should ensure mutual visibility for all participants. When multiple participants are in one location which is separate from that of the interpreter, the camera should be set so that it allows the interpreter to see an overview of the interaction.

- **Suitable lighting.** Forward-facing light and a neutral background should be used to ensure a better visibility of the speaker's features and expressions.
- **Spatial positioning and seating arrangements.** VMI should recreate as much as possible the traditional triadic positioning of participants used during in-person interpreting. Participants' seating position should allow them to see the screen easily.

### Acoustic requirements

- **Good sound quality.**
  - Each person taking part in the meeting should be in the proximity of a working microphone to ensure their voice is heard clearly by remote participants.
  - If it is not possible or practicable for all participants to wear headsets, they will need to take measures to avoid background noise and echoing which would be detrimental to the interpretation.
- **A quiet space** should be used, further limiting extraneous noises which can distract participants and particularly the interpreters.

### Equipment and working environment

- **Interpreter location and equipment responsibility**
  - When the interpreters work at the premises of a client or interpreting service provider (agency/organisation), the client or the interpreting service provider, respectively, need to ensure adequate working conditions for interpreters.
  - When the interpreters work from home, they bear the responsibility of ensuring they have the necessary equipment (a laptop or a PC, a camera, professional headsets, a microphone and cabled high-speed internet) and working conditions (including a quiet environment) for VMI.
- **Technical specifications and costs.** Any technical specifications should be communicated clearly and well in advance as well as who bears the cost of any VMI equipment when the interpreters work from home.

### Video platform and interpreting modes

- **Consecutive versus simultaneous**
  - The mode of interpreting used in VMI depends on the setting and the VMI configuration. In settings where the consecutive mode is used for in-person encounters, such as dialogue settings, it should also be used in VMI.
  - In settings where the simultaneous mode (including whispered interpreting) is normally used for in-person interpreting, the consecutive mode should be used in VMI unless the VMI platform supports the use of a separate audio channel for simultaneous interpretation.

### The interpreter's working conditions

- **Breaks.**
  - Breaks ensure the efficient management of increased fatigue and lower concentration levels generally associated with VMI. As a guideline, consider a short 10-minute break every hour. These should be announced at the start of the encounter.
  - With more challenging assignments – such as poor sound quality, multiple participants, inclusion of sight translation of documents, an emotional/sensitive encounter (e.g., giving bad news) – more breaks or extended recovery time are required.

## Communication management

- **Briefing.** Suitable arrangements should be made to conduct a briefing with the interpreter, bearing in mind that the different locations of the primary participants and interpreter can make this more difficult, requiring an online briefing.
- **Introductions and explanations.**
  - The person organising the meeting should have all participants introduce themselves, explaining their role and the purpose of the encounter.
  - The order in which participants speak should be clarified.
  - The interpreter should lay out ground rules for a smooth interpreted interaction.
  - All participants should highlight any comprehension difficulties.
- **Awareness of turn-taking challenges.** All participants should be aware that short overlaps and excessive chunking can cause confusion and have a detrimental impact on the communication.
- **Repeating key information** should be encouraged among the primary participants.
- **Observe a suitable pace,** i.e., slower than during in-person interpreting, for example, to allow sufficient time for the interpreter to take notes and monitor the screen as well.
- **Adjust interactional behaviour.** Primary participants should make visible to the remote party (e.g., the interpreter) any artefacts being manipulated e.g., documents or other objects, and they should avoid side conversations with other participants (e.g., colleagues).
- **Make special provisions for minors and vulnerable adults,** i.e., additional support / instructions from the organiser of the meeting to segment their speech appropriately.
- **Closing of the encounter.** The meeting organisers should use a combination of verbal and embodied interaction at the end of the encounter to avoid confusion and awkwardness.
- **Data protection.** The working space in VMI encounters should ensure adequate privacy and confidentiality for both the interpreter and the primary participants. All primary participants should ensure that the information shared during the encounter remains confidential and that it is not recorded and / or shared outside the encounter directly or indirectly.

## Requirements to be observed by the interpreter

### Linguistic competences

- **Strong language proficiency.** Interpreters working in VMI require strong language proficiency and to be able to switch between languages easily in order to cope with the additional cognitive effort associated with VMI.
- **Terminology.** Interpreters need strong terminology preparation skills (terminology research and management) to reduce the risks of mishearing or misunderstanding things which represent some of the specific challenges in VMI.

### Interpreting skills

- **Note-taking and screen monitoring.** Screen monitoring is essential in VMI for checking comprehension. The interpreter needs to balance the skill of notetaking strategically with screen monitoring to avoid missing non-verbal cues that are important for the interaction and backchannelling.
- **Terminology research on the fly.** The interpreter can look up terminology online (contrary to a similar in-person setting) provided that their terminology research skills have been sufficiently developed.



## Ethics

- **Integrity.** Interpreters should only accept VMI assignments that they feel they are competent to carry out and decline assignments or withdraw from them if the situation changes (e.g., if they do not have the appropriate equipment or are unsure how to use the VMI platform).
- **Transparency.** The interpreter should notify all primary participants when the assignment cannot be carried out optimally due to technical or online interaction issues (e.g., problematic turn-taking).
- **Impartiality.** If any issues of impartiality arise, for example, if the other-language speaker is trying to intervene and the other primary participants do not notice it because of the VMI situation, the interpreter should highlight their attempts to take the floor.

## Interactional skills

- **Beginning of the assignment.** In addition to greeting all participants at the beginning of the VMI encounter, interpreters should check the sound, the mutual visibility, and the suitability of the setup. They should also mention any relevant ground rules for communication management i.e., chunking.
- **Requests for clarification and repetition**
  - Interventions for clarification and repetition should be used strategically by interpreters without disrupting the communication flow with too many interventions.
  - The interpreters have the responsibility of intervening to inform participants whether the sound quality is problematic for them, impacting their ability to offer high-quality interpretation.
- **Eye-contact.** Interpreters should simulate mutual gaze by looking into the camera.
- **Non-verbal communication.** Interpreters should position themselves in front of the camera so that their gestures and notetaking are visible on the screen.
- **End of assignment.** At the end of the video call, interpreters should check whether they are being released by the organising party before the usual expressions of thanks and farewell.

## Technical skills

- **Technical literacy.** Interpreters should possess the skills to operate their workstation.
- **Familiarity with VMI platform:** The interpreter needs to have experience with the VMI platform. If this is not the case, they should test the sound and video and/or software at the beginning of the encounter or prior to that.
- **Troubleshooting**
  - The interpreter should be able to carry out basic troubleshooting (allowing pop-ups, installing updates for the software).
  - The interpreter should have a good understanding of common technical issues in video calls and should use this to mitigate common problems e.g., by advising the primary participants to speak close to the microphone and/or to adjust their audio settings.
  - The interpreter should be familiar with the procedure for using alternative means of communication to rejoin the meeting if the communication breaks down.

## Training

- **VMI training.** The interpreter needs to take VMI training and disclose relevant qualifications and/or number of VMI hours when being booked for a VMI assignment.

## Requirements to be observed by clients and interpreting service providers (agencies/organisations)

- **Using trained interpreters.**
  - The client or the interpreting service provider (agency/organisation) used by the client should book interpreters who are trained in VMI and be transparent in this regard.
  - Interpreting service providers should advise clients/end users on the importance of booking interpreters who are trained in VMI.
- **Consent and transparency.** The VMI encounter should not be recorded and/or shared outside the encounter unless the interpreter gives their express consent to this.
- **Debriefing and feedback.** A consistent debriefing process helps improve the VMI service in the long term; this should also include interpreters' views.
- **Duty of care.** The meeting organiser's duty of care towards the interpreter also extends to off-site interpreters – particularly when the assignment is of an emotional/ sensitive nature – i.e., they should facilitate access to mental health support resources for the interpreter, free of charge.

### **3. Specific considerations for working with languages of lesser diffusion in PSI settings**

Languages of lesser diffusion (LLDs), i.e., languages spoken by a relatively low number of people in a specific location, are often involved in PSI encounters within a refugee setting. They pose particular challenges to the encounter and the interpreter's task. Although the standards for public service interpreters outlined above should ideally apply to all public service interpreters in all circumstances, these need to be mitigated and complemented to account for the specificity of LLDs.

#### Assessment before training

##### **Receptive skills**

- **Reading proficiency.** Some LLDs have a largely or exclusively oral tradition, making reading skills in these languages less pertinent.

#### Professional skills to be developed during training and to be honed in further careers

##### **Interpreting techniques**

- **Note-taking.** If an LLD has no written tradition, the interpreter can only rely on the other language involved in the encounter to take notes.

##### **Delivery**

- **Context-related vocabulary.** The interpreter must demonstrate awareness of specific linguistic characteristics of their language (variety), including a lack of specific (standard) terminology in certain contexts, and should use appropriate strategies to cope with these.
- **Socio-cultural knowledge.** The interpreter should be aware of specific conventions, cues and cosmologies that may be unfamiliar to the non-LLD parties in the encounter and that could lead to misunderstanding.

##### **Neutrality and impartiality**

- **Adding information.** If misunderstanding arises between primary parties due to diverging socio-cultural knowledge, the interpreter is able to intervene strategically in the encounter to clarify this point, thereby observing the habitual principles of transparency.

- **Conflict of interest.** All regular principles of avoidance of conflicts of interests apply to LLD settings, but since LLD interpreters are likely to be part of the same (small) community as at least one of the parties, they should be advised on how and when to inform primary parties of such a (potential) conflict of interest.

### **Transparency**

- **Terminology.** The interpreter may need to inform primary parties of a lack of (correspondence of) specific terms and concepts between the languages involved in the encounter.

### **Interpersonal skills**

- **Empathy.** Since the interpreter may have ties with the community, they should be made sufficiently aware of the risk of empathy intervening in the assignment and be taught adequate coping strategies.

### **Professionalism**

- **Preparation for an assignment.** Terminological preparation may be particularly challenging for LLDs, as interpreters may have less access to terminological resources. They should be aware of this and prepare coping strategies before the encounter.