# INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ISO 13611:2014 – Interpreting — Guidelines for community interpreting

(An abridged version of ISO 13611:2014 by Tamara Mikolič Južnič)

## **Nature of community interpreting**

Community interpreting facilitates communication between users and providers of public, private, and other community services who do not share the same language (either spoken or signed) for the purpose of accessing services offered in the community. It occurs mainly in institutional (governmental and non-governmental) settings such as hospitals, doctors’ and solicitors’ offices, community agencies, social welfare, faith-based organizations, housing or employment agencies, schools, and police stations.

Community interpreting involves the transfer of signed, verbal, and non-verbal messages in real time. The language of one user group (the provider) is usually the societal language(s) of the country. The language of the end user, (i.e. the person/s seeking access to services is the non-societal language) is the language of a specific language and/or ethnic group. Community interpreting serves the latter user group to ensure their ability to communicate in order to access services. In some settings or countries, it is often the case that users of a non-societal language are vulnerable groups, and in some cases, it is not. In all cases, community interpreting ensures every person a right to communicate using his/her own language.

An interpreted communicative event takes place in an encounter of at least three participants:

1. one or more speakers of a non-societal language. For example, a refugee or a patient (whether a local or a tourist) seeking healthcare, or a parent who needs to communicate with school authorities;
2. one or more speakers of the societal language, generally the service provider. For example, a government agent, an office employee, a physician, a marriage counsellor, a social worker, or a teacher;
3. a community interpreter who facilitates the communication in either consecutive interpreting mode or simultaneous interpreting mode.

These three parties should interact for the encounter to be considered an interpreted communicative event.

## The work of community interpreters

Community interpreters engage in interactive types of bidirectional communication. Such individuals are proficient in two or more languages (spoken or signed) and so are able to facilitate interpreted communicative events in those languages. In these events, community interpreters usually work in a consecutive interpreting mode (except for those using sign language) but they can also interpret in simultaneous interpreting mode, with sound equipment or doing chuchotage (for smaller groups). Sometimes they work face-to-face and sometimes remotely using technology such as video or teleconferencing. They operate in an asymmetrical relationship between professionals and users who are in a position of need.

## End users of community interpreting services

End users of community interpreting services belong to two distinct groups. One group is formed by speakers of the societal language who are offering services (e.g. education, healthcare, insurance). In addition to the knowledge of the societal language, this group has knowledge of the subject matter (e.g. education, healthcare, insurance). The other group is generally formed by linguistic minorities, people who are not sufficiently proficient in the societal language, and who need to communicate with speakers of the societal language in order to access services.

## Interpreting service providers (ISPs)

ISPs can be:

* natural persons, i.e. community interpreters themselves providing the service, or
* legal entities, i.e. organizations, interpreting agencies.

Whether ISPs are natural persons or entities, they should only assign professionally qualified community interpreters. In all cases, ISPs should demand proof of competences required for the job at hand, as well as references. Proof of qualifications should be verified.

## **Community interpreter’s competences and qualifications**

Community interpreters should have the competence to understand and convey a message from the source to the target language (spoken or signed) in a manner that puts the non-native speaker who seeks access to a community service on the same footing as a native speaker of the societal language.

### Competences related to interpreting

Community interpreters should have the ability to convey a message from the source to the target language (be it spoken or signed) in the appropriate interpreting mode. Accurate interpreting requires the ability to assess and comprehend the original message and render it in the target language in a way that preserves the meaning and supports the same communicative function as the original message. Community interpreting ability also requires the knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the community interpreter’s own role in the interpreted communicative event, including the ability to limit that role as required, to intervene when necessary, and to support direct communication between people who do not share a common language.

A professional community interpreter should be able to do the following:

* interpret in consecutive interpreting mode and simultaneous interpreting mode, as appropriate;
* sight-translate materials written in both working languages (when applicable);
* take notes during the interpreted assignment, if necessary (e.g. consecutive interpreting mode);
* monitor his/her own performance;
* apply active listening skills;
* provide effective delivery skills;
* rely on strong memory skills;
* identify and convey the appropriate language registers (i.e. formal or informal variety of language used in a particular situation or when communicating with a particular group of people);
* anticipate when to intervene during the interaction;
* develop effective problem-solving strategies;
* develop and practise effective intervention skills, including transparency;
* respect/manage professional good practice and role boundaries of all participants in the interpreted communicative events;
* improve performance through self-training, attendance of further training courses (which should be documented), and life-long learning;
* observe applicable standards of practice and code of ethics in his/her work;
* support client autonomy (e.g. refrain from giving advice);
* use chuchotage.

### Linguistic ability

Community interpreters should demonstrate linguistic ability in their working languages based on accepted standards of language proficiency. This means the community interpreter should be able to understand and produce technical and non-technical language for a variety of speakers and listeners who vary in age, gender, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. The community interpreter should exhibit an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the linguistic varieties of his/her working languages (e.g. dialects, regional varieties, idiomatic expressions) and the required range of language registers. In addition, the community interpreter should have knowledge of subject areas and relevant terminology in both languages and display the same ways of speaking/signing in the subject areas in which he/she is working.

### Technical skills

Community interpreters should demonstrate the ability to use the equipment (such as tele- and videoconferencing technology) that can be necessary for on-site or remote interpreting, including microphone etiquette (e.g. pressing the mute button when coughing).

### Research skills

Community interpreters should demonstrate the ability to efficiently acquire the additional linguistic, terminological, and specialized knowledge necessary to interpret in specialized cases. Research skills also include expertise and experience in the use of research tools (e.g. software), and the ability to develop suitable strategies for the efficient use of the information sources available (e.g. terminology databases, parallel texts).

### Interpersonal skills

The community interpreter should:

* be polite, respectful, and tactful;
* be able to relate well with people;
* exhibit strong communication skills;
* display cross-cultural competence;
* use effective interjection skills when appropriate;
* manage and keep up the flow of communication;
* exhibit self-control and impartial behaviour in all situations.