

## Telephone interpreting

Telephone interpreters are a great resource. You could use them in addition to face-to-face interpreters, for example to assist with short appointments or discussions, or for availability at short notice. Some organisations and sponsor groups operate their service using only telephone interpreters. Groups have told us that they find telephone interpreters invaluable when providing 24/7 interpreting advice in the week following arrival of refugees.

You can decide what you think is the right combination for your circumstances.

There are a variety of companies that provide telephone interpreting services. Two that are widely used are Language Line (<https://www.language.com/uk>) and Big Word (<https://en-gb.thebigword.com/>) but there are many others available. If you have recruited your own interpreters, they might also be happy to work over the phone as well as face to face.

The advantages of telephone interpreting are:

- Cost – for short appointments it will be cheaper than face-to-face interpreting.
- Flexibility – some companies provide 24/7 interpreting.
- Short notice – you may be able to get an interpreter on the line almost immediately.

The disadvantages of using telephone interpreters are that it makes it harder for the conversation to flow naturally as they cannot pick up on any non-verbal communication, and it is harder for the refugee to develop a relationship with them. You may also find that for long appointments using a telephone interpreter could be just as, or more, expensive than paying for one to attend in person.

You may find that refugees are more comfortable with face to face interpreters, and there may be a process of negotiation about what kind of interpreters you will provide depending on the circumstances. For example, you might agree that for longer appointments you will generally use face to face interpreters where possible, but for shorter discussions, or meetings at short notice, you will work through telephone interpreters.

## Practicalities

There are some simple, practical steps you can take to get the best out of telephone interpreting:

- “Add call” function – most smartphones have the ability for you to make a three-way conference call, also known as the ‘Add Call’ function. Check your phone’s instructions, or search on the internet for details.
- Seating – set the phone to speaker mode and make sure that both you and the refugee sit close to it.
- Speak slowly and clearly – communicating over the phone is more difficult than face to face, so try to speak in a manner that is easy to translate. Explain this to the refugee as well.

You should always ensure that you are using your own, or the group’s, phone. The refugee should not be expected to cover the cost of the call themselves.