

## The Development of Quality Standards for the Qualification of Community Interpreters in Germany: A Needs Assessment

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**Abstract :** Due to an unusually high number of asylum seekers entering Germany over the course of the past few years, the need for community interpreters has increased dramatically, in order to make the communication between asylum seekers and various actors in social and governmental agencies possible. In the field of social work in particular, there are community interpreters who possess a wide spectrum of qualifications spanning from state-certified professional interpreters with graduate degrees to lay or ad-hoc interpreters with little to no formal training. To the best of our knowledge, Germany has no official national quality standards for the training of community interpreters at present, which would serve to professionalise this field as well as to assure a certain degree of quality in the training programmes offered. Given the current demand for trained community interpreters, there is a growing number of training programmes geared toward qualifying community interpreters who work with asylum seekers in Germany. These training programmes range from short one-day workshops to graduate programmes with specialisations in Community Interpreting. As part of a larger project to develop quality standards for the qualification of community interpreters working with asylum seekers in the field of social work, a needs assessment was performed in the city-state of Hamburg and the state of North Rhine Westphalia in the form of focus groups and individual interviews with relevant actors in the field in order to determine the content and practical knowledge needed for community interpreters from the perspectives of those who work in and rely on this field. More specifically, social workers, volunteers, certified language and cultural mediators, paid and volunteer community interpreters and asylum seekers were invited to take part in focus groups in both locations, and asylum seekers, training providers, researchers, linguists and other national and international experts were individually interviewed. The responses collected in these focus groups and interviews have been analysed using Mayring's concept of content analysis. In general, the responses indicate a high degree of overlap related to certain categories as well as some categories which seemed to be of particular importance to certain groups individually, while showing little to no relevance for other groups. For example, the topics of accuracy and transparency of the interpretations, as well as professionalism and ethical concerns were touched on in some form in most groups. Some group-specific topics which are the focus of experts were topics related to interpreting techniques and more concretely described theoretical and practical knowledge which should be covered in training programmes. Social workers and volunteers generally concentrated on issues regarding the role of the community interpreters and the importance of setting and clarifying professional boundaries. From the perspective of service receivers, asylum seekers tended to focus on the importance of having access to interpreters who are from their home region or country and who speak the same regiolect, dialect or variety as they do in order to prevent misunderstandings or misinterpretations which might negatively affect their asylum status. These results indicate a certain degree of consensus with trainings offered internationally for community interpreters.

**Keywords :** asylum seekers, community interpreting, needs assessment, quality standards, training

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