



Project funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 734211.



**Project reference:** 734211

**Project title:** INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON CRISIS TRANSLATION

## D2.1: Recommendations on Policies

This document is a slightly shortened version of the official INTERACT deliverable 2.1.

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Document Number	INTERACT_D2.1_30092019
Distribution Level	Public
Contractual Date of Delivery	30.09.2019
Actual Date of Delivery	25.09.2019
Contributing to the Deliverable	WP2
WP Task Responsible	UCL
EC Project Officer	Adam Walendzik

## Executive Summary

To enhance communication in multilingual crisis and disaster contexts, INTERACT - the International Network in Crisis Translation - puts forward 10 implementable and practice-based policy-based recommendations. The recommendations listed below are essential in addressing gaps in current practices, as identified by INTERACT's network members. For the sake of succinctness, the recommendations are presented here as an Executive Summary. They are further elaborated under Section 2.3 of this deliverable. Readers will find the rationale underpinning the 10 INTERACT Crisis Translation Policy Recommendations in Section 1. The Community Workshops carried out for the duration of the project also informed these recommendations.

1. Emergency management communication policies should include provision for translation and interpreting and should be regularly reviewed and revised.
2. A specific owner of the policy on translation and interpreting should be identified and assigned within organizations responsible for emergency communication policy and implementation.
3. Emergency management communication policies should be developed in consultation with relevant multilingual and multicultural communities.
4. Emergency management communication policies should cover all phases of crisis and disaster management (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery).
5. Emergency management communication policies should consider languages spoken by affected communities (including sign language), levels of literacy, and cultural appropriateness.
6. Alternative formats and channels for dissemination of translated information should be considered – not just traditional written or spoken formats.
7. Emergency management communication policies should allow for *two-way* communication between responders and affected communities.
8. Ensure training is provided for professional and volunteer translators and interpreters so that they can effectively operate in crisis and disaster settings. Also ensure training for users and managers of translation and interpreting services.
9. Establish direct lines of communication between emergency responders and professional associations of translators and interpreters for the purposes of collaboration.
10. Recruit into multilingual organizations who are responsible for aid or emergency response in such a way as to avoid reliance on international *lingua franca* and *ad hoc* or convenience translation and interpreting.

## Section 1 Introduction

This document pertains to Work Package 2 (“Crisis Translation Policy – Research”). The objectives of Work Package 2 were to:

- Identify best practices and gaps regarding translation and interpreting in crisis communication policies;
- Contribute to crisis translation policy recommendations for national, EU and international agencies.

Deliverable 2.1 of the Work Package brings forward Policy Recommendations regarding ways of organizing language translation in crisis contexts.

Practitioners and researchers adopt various perspectives to define crisis contexts, and they frequently treat crisis, disaster, and emergency as near synonyms.<sup>1</sup> Complex terminological debates surround the definitions and they are beyond the scope of this report: for ease of reading, we will refer to crisis and disaster. INTERACT members take a broad perspective on crisis. We take inspiration from leading scholars in the field of crisis communication<sup>2</sup> who propose that a crisis is a non-routine set of circumstances that violates expectations, poses a threat to a social group, and requires a response to mitigate the harm.

In our treatment of crisis and disaster, we emphasize that responding to one may require external assistance – rendering communication and coordination more significant – and that translation has a role to play when language and culture are significant elements of the communicative scene. We also recognize that crises and disasters may involve varied timelines (short, medium, and long term) and varied levels of action (individual, local, national, supranational, etc.). As such, circumstances such as a road transport accident involving a few casualties or a cross-border disease outbreak involving many fatalities could meet our definition of crisis and disaster, and they may involve crisis translation. Crisis translation is understood as the transfer of written information from one linguistic and cultural system to another in the context of an adverse event that enables affected communities and responders to be prepared for crises and disasters, improve resilience and reduce the loss of lives. Due to the transboundary nature of modern-day crises, crisis and disaster communication must be multimodal and multilingual. Multimodal and multilingual crisis and disaster communication is enabled through multichannel, inter- and intra-lingual translation. Work Package 2 focused on identifying policy gaps at national and international levels to create recommendations for how these gaps could be filled. Activities to identify

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<sup>1</sup> Even focusing only on terminological debate in English, the usage of ‘crisis’, ‘disasters’, and ‘emergencies’ varies on location of use and variety of English. As a pragmatic shorthand, the report refers to communication in and management of ‘crisis and disaster’ to ensure broader reach among English-speaking communities of practitioners, experts, and researchers (see a discussion in O’Brien, S. and Federici, F.M. 2019. Crisis translation: considering language needs in multilingual disaster settings. *Disaster Prevention Management*. 10.1108/DPM-11-2018-0373/full/html).

<sup>2</sup> See, in particular: Sellnow, Timothy L., and Matthew W. Seeger. 2013. *Theorizing Crisis Communication*. Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell.

gaps in existing policies, and where possible in their implementation, took place between June 2017 and September 2019.

Over this 26-month timeframe, it became apparent that there were major gaps and weaknesses in the provision of effective translation to prepare for and respond to crisis events and disasters with respect to policy articulation and implementation. These concerns were evident at national and international levels, in organizations of varied scales and scopes of operation within the humanitarian sector. At the end of the research activities on policy, INTERACT members concluded that lack of express policy guidance or resource support adversely affects preparedness, community engagement, response, and recovery with respect to language access service in crises or disasters. These gaps extend to multilingual crisis and disaster settings that include training, disaster management, implementation of associated technologies, and development of ethical guidelines for crisis prevention and response.

Access to information in crisis and disaster settings is a human right for all members of affected populations. INTERACT members subscribe to this position. We consider it an ethical obligation to ensure that timely, accurate, and efficient support is used to achieve two-way communication among all people involved in communication in crisis and disasters. From institutions, entities, and communities to affected populations, communication in crisis and disaster settings needs to happen in a language and format that is understood and regularly used by the crisis-affected communities.

The combined deliverables for this work package comprise an overview of findings from Community Workshops carried out over the duration of the project, recommendations arising from the overall INTERACT activities, and a journal article initiating research into language policies for crisis communication<sup>3</sup>:

- O'Brien, Sharon, Federici, Federico M., Cadwell, Patrick, Marlowe, Jay, & Gerber, Brian (2018). Language Translation During Disaster: A Comparative Analysis of Five National Approaches. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* (31): 627-636. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2018.07.006>.

For the purposes of succinctness, this document has been shortened and the details on the community workshop have been removed. These details are still available in the official deliverable 2.1, delivered to the European Commission.

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<sup>3</sup> The article is freely accessible via the institutional repository of UCL: <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/10056024/>.

## Section 2: Recommendations on Crisis Translation in Policies

INTERACT Work Package 2 included extensive review of national and international policy, framework and guideline documents. In particular, crisis or disaster response and recovery guidance, in the form of policy statements or operations plans for multiagency response to known, local risks, and language policies of international organizations were considered. As explained in Section 1, translation refers in this context to any form of linguistic and cultural transmission of information and messages in a language and format that is understood by the affected communities; translation enables access to information during a crisis and disaster, regardless of the means and channel of communication (it can be oral, as in interpreting and sign language interpreting, written, pictorial, audio, audiovisual, and so on).

The INTERACT team insists that people affected by disasters should not be discriminated against on the grounds of language. CALD communities are entitled to the same quality of information in crisis contexts as any other affected population. Access to information in a crisis is a fundamental right, because information access reduces vulnerability and enhances resilience.<sup>4</sup>

Information is aid in the humanitarian sector; the *Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response* (2018) has connected translation and interpreting to accountability to affected population (AAP) practices. Access to information can be enabled via translation. Researchers involved in producing the *Signal Code* by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (2017)<sup>5</sup> assert the centrality of information in aid, response, and humanitarian support to crisis and disaster contexts. We add that information accessibility, for many, requires translation from one language to another in modes and formats that vary depending on levels of literacy, contexts, time-constraints, and staffing issues. Translation services are fundamentally important in reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience, whilst reflecting appropriate AAP practices.

In our assessments of policies, we refer to the 4-A Standards. Originally put forward by Tomaševski, United Nations special rapporteur on the right to education, the 4-A Standards framework was used to assess the realisation of the right to education. We explain here why this framework is particularly suitable to assess policies to support language translation in crisis and disaster settings. The 4-A Standards can be summarised as follows:

- Availability—ensuring pathways to a right are available (and affordable)
- Accessibility—eliminating discrimination in relation to accessing a specific right

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<sup>4</sup> For more discussion on this topic and a description of the policies, frameworks and guidelines reviewed, see: O'Brien, Sharon, Federici, Federico M., Cadwell, Patrick, Marlowe, Jay, and Gerber, Brian. 2018. Language Translation During Disaster: A Comparative Analysis of Five National Approaches. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 31, pp. 627-636.

<sup>5</sup> See Greenwood, F., Howarth, C., Poole, D. E., Raymond, N. R., & Scarnecchia, D. P. (2017). *The Signal Code: A Human Rights Approach to Information During Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. Available at: [http://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/signalcode\\_final.pdf](http://hhi.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/publications/signalcode_final.pdf) (accessed 21 July 2019).

- Acceptability—focusing on the quality of a right and its conformity to minimum human rights standards
- Adaptability—how well a specific right responds to culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

We tailored the framework for policies referring to language access when translation and interpreting are needed in the following way:

- Availability—ensuring that two-way translated information is made available relies on policy makers recognizing that translation is an essential product and service.
- Accessibility—ensuring translation is ‘available’ means that it has to be accessible, free, delivered on multiple platforms, in multiple modes, and in all relevant languages for the affected populations.
- Acceptability—ensuring that the provision of translation is acceptable means that provisions are put in place to ensure accuracy and appropriateness of information.
- Adaptability—enabling the provision of translation to be adaptable to different settings; for example, by considering fluid language requirements, literacies, technological demands, new modes of delivery, diverse hazards and movement of peoples.

These principles underpin our policy recommendations.

## 2.1 Best Practice and Gaps in Crisis Translation Policy

Having undertaken an assessment of certain emergency operations plans and national, regional, and local policy guidance on preparedness, it is clear that the level of local awareness of the impact of language barriers on communication, accountability, and interaction with affected population depends greatly on lessons learnt from previous events.

Experience in the field underpins the recommendations provided by the New Zealand CLING network (which can also be found in the IOM’s volume *Migrants in Disaster Risk reduction: Practices of Inclusion*<sup>6</sup>).

- Develop connections and trusting relationships with CALD communities before a disaster occurs;
- Continuously work on building cultural competency within organizations before and after a disaster occurs;
- Provide information about disaster risk mitigation activities in accessible and tailored forms (such as radio, television, translated materials and interpretation services) and ensure that such multilingual messages delivered via multiple channels are an

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<sup>6</sup> See Guadagno, L., Fuhrer, M., & Twigg, J. (2017). *Migrants in Disaster Risk Reduction: Practices for Inclusion*. Geneva; Strasbourg Cedex: International Organization for Migration. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/migrants-disaster-risk-reduction-practices-inclusion> (accessed 19 July 2019).

integral part of a country's civil defence and emergency management strategy and widely disseminated across CALD communities;

- Support people from CALD communities to take part in, and contribute to, their own recovery and that of the wider community. Such contributions provide people with a sense of belonging and make them more resilient (IOM, 2017: 93).

These recommendations pertaining to language access during crises or disaster are also consistent with recognized effective practices in preparedness and disaster risk reduction more generally – they have been incorporated in the full list of recommendations provided in Section 3.3. However, INTERACT research conducted with national and international organizations as well as with local-level community groups has gone beyond these recommendations, as will be explained in the following sections.

## 2.2 Context, Motivation and Recommendations

The activities of Work Package 2 included a review of policies followed by interviews with international humanitarian sector officers to seek to establish whether the lack of awareness that seemed to dominate policies is reflected in practices. In interviews with members of international humanitarian aid organizations, it emerged that where some awareness exists, there seems to be only a partial understanding of the extensive damage that poor access to information could create to building trust and establishing multidirectional communication channels that reflect community engagement and AAP. Implementing any communication policy in crisis and disaster settings is a multi-layered task involving multiple agencies and depending on resources. It is dictated by multiple concerns for loss of life, morbidity, loss of and damage to property leading to further socio-economic problems often affecting culturally diverse, marginalised, and vulnerable communities to name but the three most obvious constraints. In short, two-way communication in a language that is understood by affected communities is unanimously recognized as a complex issue to address.<sup>7</sup>

The overarching consideration from desk-based research and interviews was that some (limited) degree of awareness is slowly growing. Lack of language access is beginning to be perceived as a potential hindrance to achieving the goals of humanitarian response and developmental programmes. In a positive assessment of the findings, it can be stated that there is a clear sense that the sector shares the view that providing information in a language and format that is understood by affected populations is complex to plan, develop, finance, deliver, and sustain.

Translation is an important component of communication and knowledge transfer, which leads to an ethical responsibility to provide language translation and interpreting services. Ethics is an undeniable component of professional translation and interpreting practice, however, crises introduce a number of extraordinary factors when considered against the provision of translation and interpreting in standard (commercial, governmental) settings, which may need to be balanced against the service provision responsibility – for a more detailed discussion of ethical considerations and obligations, see INTERACT Deliverable 6.1 “Public Report on Ethics” (<http://doras.dcu.ie/23511/>).

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<sup>7</sup> For more in-depth discussion, see INTERACT Report *The International Humanitarian Sector and Language Translation in Crisis Situations*, available at <https://tinyurl.com/y3vncun7>.

Translation has additional impacts beyond the pragmatic that need to be taken into consideration. These include ways in which translation services demonstrate *respect* for others and their cultures, especially for communities affected by crises, who are provided with “international aid”. In this context, translation needs to be seen as a two-way communication process, allowing for translation of critical information *to* but also *from* affected communities.

Translation can also be an important component of building *trust* between communities— an essential element in fostering community capacity to prepare for and respond to crises— which also adds to the ethical responsibility to provide services. Account should be taken of the fact that the act of translation does not induce trust in and of itself; much also hinges on *what* is being translated, *by whom* and in *what language*, as well as on the ways in which different people are likely to *process information* and *perceive risk* when in a crisis or a disaster context. To take account of these factors is to begin to accommodate language needs in a trust-building approach. In fact, accommodating language needs in a trusted way is necessary for increasing transparency in disaster risk reduction processes and programmes, and achieving the Grand Bargain’s aim of two-way (or multidirectional) communication for greater accountability of operational humanitarian organizations towards affected communities (AAP).

In crisis and disaster settings, the *quality* of translations may need to be balanced against other important principles and humanitarian goals. For example, in crises where translation professionals may be in short supply, or professionals may in fact be affected personally by a crisis, other people (e.g. ad hoc translators) or technology (e.g. machine translation) may need to be used even though translation quality may be affected. This solution is preferable to having no translation available. Accommodating language needs is consistently seen as a complex task, with little capacity. The issues go beyond budget or staff resources and include issues of modality, culture, politics, and ownership within organizations.

***All the recommendations that follow should be read in conjunction with INTERACT’s ethics recommendations contained in the Deliverable 6.1 “Public Report on Ethics”<sup>8</sup>; ethics is considered here at the core of any collaborative, multidirectional process of information and communication.***

### 2.3 Accessible Information: Language Policy Recommendations

Recommendations to all agencies and entities involved in emergency, crisis and disaster preparedness, response, recovery and overall risk reduction efforts.

1. Emergency management communication policies should include provision for translation and interpreting and should be regularly reviewed and revised.
  - a. Ensure that local, national, and international policy guidance and emergency operations plans intending to improve response, recovery and risk mitigation include mechanisms to provide accurate translation and interpreting services. This applies especially for minority language speakers (including braille readers and sign language users) who might not be able or

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<sup>8</sup> The Public Report on Ethics is available at <http://doras.dcu.ie/23511/>.



comfortable communicating in the main local language or in international *lingua franca*.

- b. Ensure linguistic preparedness is embedded in policies so to address the needs of those with heightened vulnerabilities (such as women, children, the elderly, disabled population, communities with mental health concerns) and that clear plans of actions to achieve this level of inclusivity are embedded in emergency planning, emergency training and all preparedness programmes.
2. A specific owner of the policy on translation should be identified and assigned within organizations responsible for emergency communication policy and implementation.
  - a. Ensure the owner of the policy sits within a clearly identified unit and is responsible for actioning, revising and training to implement the translation policy within the organization. The unit ought to have ownership of the policy and to deploy translation services as required by the organization.
  - b. Regularly revise approaches to accommodate language access needs as included in other routine updates of training, planning and doctrine revision. As in any other areas of hazards management and disaster preparedness, community needs on language access issues are not static. This means, in practice, that the right to translated information in managing crises must be a part of 'living policy and planning documents' that guide public agency actions to ensure that the potential fluidity of language requirements in a crisis or disaster can be met.
3. Emergency management communication policies should be developed in consultation with relevant multilingual and multicultural communities.
  - a. Communication practices and policies should be developed in consultation with relevant community advocates, i.e. a "whole community" approach, and should formally incorporate the right to culturally appropriate, two-way translated information.
4. Emergency management communication policies should cover all phases of crisis and disaster management (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery).
  - a. Incorporate formally the right to translated information across all phases of crisis and disaster management – mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery – by ensuring correct differentiation between written translation and oral interpretation and delineating when each is appropriate. Public sector first response and emergency management agencies should identify the functional responsibility and identify responsible parties and resources for making translation available as part of all phases of crisis/disaster management; i.e. the owner of the policy should be clear to all staff of the organization – see Recommendation 2.
5. Emergency management communication policies should consider languages spoken by affected communities (including sign language), levels of literacy, and cultural appropriateness.

- a. Producing written content only may be insufficient if members of affected communities do not have high levels of literacy. Plain or simplified language could be considered, if appropriate. Different language dialects may be spoken. Some concepts may not exist in other languages or ways of communicating concepts could be deemed culturally inappropriate. All of these issues should be considered.
- 6. Alternative formats and channels for dissemination of translated information should be considered – not just traditional written or spoken formats.
  - a. Consider the best ways of providing information in accessible and tailored formats<sup>9</sup> for the affected communities (such as radio, television, translated materials, and interpretation services) and ensure that multilingual messages are delivered via multiple, appropriate channels.
  - b. Ensure all language groups are provided suitable ways to communicate their own needs to the emergency responders, as well as to crisis and disaster managers.<sup>10</sup>
  - c. Ensure full use of national census and other forms of data regarding languages spoken by geographical area to better accommodate the language needs of each area.
  - d. Ensure CALD communities are involved in developing sustainable resources for the needs of their members if the language combinations they need are not well resourced, supported by trained professionals, or commercially viable.
- 7. Emergency management communication policies should allow for *two-way* communication between responders and affected communities.
  - a. Translating in one direction is insufficient. Two-way translated communication is essential for meeting the needs of crisis and disaster-affected communities.
- 8. Ensure training is provided for professional and volunteer translators and interpreters so that they can effectively operate in crisis and disaster settings. Also ensure training for users and managers of translation and interpreting services.
  - a. The owner of the policy should be responsible for the implementation of two-way translation and for training their crisis and disaster managers to work with translators and interpreters.
  - b. Guaranteeing acceptability of translated information might include, but is not limited to: use of professional translators and interpreters as a first port of call; training of translators and interpreters for emergencies; and ongoing

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<sup>9</sup> This recommendation draws on CLING’s recommendations as it is applicable to preventative, mitigating, and risk reduction contexts alike.

<sup>10</sup> This important recommendation includes here one of CLING’s recommendations.

ratification and training for all (including linguistic volunteers and agents who must rely on them). Likewise, given the likelihood that many communities will rely on the voluntary, non-profit sector to provide assistance, volunteer management strategies in this domain are critical.

- c. Ensure training exercises and other preparedness efforts in multilingual contexts include interpreters and translators to simulate the challenges of communicating with all communities in multiple directions when multiple languages are required.
  - d. Training for translators and interpreters should include aspects of how to deal with traumatic situations, as is common practice for other emergency responders.
  - e. Communication policies of organizations should ensure procedures and resources to accommodate language needs be cascaded through the different units and departments by establishing cross-country regular training to share best practices.
9. Establish direct lines of communication between emergency responders and professional associations of translators and interpreters for the purposes of collaboration.
- a. Ensure collaboration with professional associations of translators and interpreters to enhance quality of language support and respect codes of conduct and regulations of local professional associations of translators and interpreters.
  - b. Guarantee that when citizen translators are deployed, their use is carefully monitored and evaluated to maintain the highest possible quality of translation and interpreting services.
  - c. Develop effective ways for communication and collaboration to be promoted between professional and citizen translators, to ensure good practice and learning from professionals for those language combinations that are not commercially viable and covered by professional and/or academic training.
10. Recruit into multilingual organizations responsible for aid or emergency response in such a way as to avoid reliance on international lingua franca and ad hoc or convenience translation and interpreting.
- a. Recruitment of trained translators and interpreters is recommended for response organisations so that staff who are recruited for other positions are not imposed upon to provide ad hoc translation and interpreting services as a last minute solution.