

EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR THE EFFICIENCY OF JUSTICE (CEPEJ)

GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY INTERPRETING IN JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS:
PRINCIPLES, PRACTICE, TECHNOLOGY



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Introduction

1. Quality interpretation in judicial proceedings enables all participants to understand and be understood, regardless of the language they speak. It contributes directly to fairness, efficiency, and trust in the justice system. Interpretation is often perceived as successful when it is fluent and linguistically accurate. In practice, however, communication in judicial proceedings is frequently complex, emotionally charged, or confrontational. Original statements may be fragmented, ambiguous, or strategically formulated, and interpretation must reflect these features faithfully. Interpreters operate in an environment where precision, impartiality, and reliability are essential, and where misunderstandings may have serious legal consequences.
2. Technological developments are increasingly shaping multilingual communication. Remote and hybrid hearings, live subtitling, speech-to-text systems, and AI-assisted communication tools may expand access to interpreting. At the same time, their use requires careful consideration of clear and reliable communication, procedural fairness, transparency, and appropriate safeguards.
3. This document¹ provides practical guidance on how to ensure the quality of interpretation in judicial proceedings. It is addressed to national judicial authorities² and legal professionals involved in the organization and conduct of proceedings. The guidelines focus on conditions that support accurate interpretation, clear role definitions, effective cooperation in interpreted proceedings, and the responsible use of technology.
4. The document is grounded in existing legal and institutional frameworks, including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and other relevant Council of Europe standards and tools³ Directive 2010/64/EU on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings. It also draws on research in Interpreting Studies, practical experience, and professional ethical principles, as well as ISO standards, while maintaining a clear focus on practical application.
5. The guidelines are structured around four thematic pillars and outline twenty concrete recommendations. Together, they address:
 - the organisation and quality assurance of interpretation services (Pillar I),
 - guidance on working effectively with interpreters, including for situations where qualified interpreters are not readily available (Pillar II),
 - the use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) in interpreting (Pillar III),
 - the coordination of accessible, user-centered communication through interpreting (Pillar IV).
6. The objective is to support judicial actors in ensuring that interpretation services meet the requirements of justice and contribute to fair and effective proceedings. This includes organising proceedings in a manner that ensures reliable interpretation as a prerequisite for

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² For the purposes of this document, “judicial authorities” refer to courts, judges, prosecutors, and other judicial bodies responsible for the conduct of judicial proceedings.

³ such as CEPEJ Guidelines on videoconferencing in judicial proceedings and European ethical charter on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in judicial systems and their environment)

a fair trial, while recognising that interpreters work under the authority of the judge throughout the proceedings.

Overview of Guidelines

Pillar I: Organisation and quality assurance – Principles, guidance, and good practices

Guideline 1. Qualification requirements: Judicial authorities should establish and maintain clear minimum qualification standards for interpreters engaged in judicial proceedings. These standards should reflect the specialised nature of judicial interpreting and ensure that interpreting services meet the requirements of fairness, accuracy, and procedural integrity.

Guideline 2. Registers (or equivalent lists) and approval of interpreters: Judicial authorities should establish and maintain transparent registers or equivalent lists of qualified interpreters, and designate the authority responsible for this task, in order to support consistent, efficient, and legally sound appointment practices.

Guideline 3. Working conditions, preparation, and remuneration: Judicial authorities should ensure adequate, transparent, and predictable remuneration as well as organisational conditions that enable interpreters to prepare adequately and perform their tasks effectively in judicial proceedings.

Guideline 4. Exceptional measures where no qualified interpreter is available: Where no qualified interpreter is available within a reasonable timeframe, alternative arrangements should be used only on an exceptional basis and subject to clearly defined safeguards.

Guideline 5. Quality assurance and evaluation: Judicial authorities should introduce quality assurance mechanisms for interpreted judicial proceedings to support fairness, accountability, and consistent evaluation of interpreting quality, with the aim of ensuring communication and procedural conditions comparable to those of monolingual proceedings.

Pillar II: Working with interpreters – Principles, guidance, and good practices.

Guideline 6. Role clarity – interpreter as interpreter: Judicial authorities should ensure a shared and explicit understanding of the interpreter's professional role and communicate this clearly at the outset of proceedings.

Guideline 7. Communication formats and interpreting modes: Judicial authorities should select the appropriate interpreting mode – such as consecutive, simultaneous, or whispered interpreting – in consultation with the interpreter and according to the legal importance of the exchange and the needs of the participants.

Guideline 8. Managing turn-taking and the pace of proceedings: Judicial authorities should actively manage turn-taking – orderly exchange and sequencing of speakers and contributions – and the pace of proceedings in order to ensure that interpreted communication is complete, accurate, and transparent.

Guideline 9. Visibility, audibility, and verbal clarification: Judicial authorities should ensure that interpreters have adequate visual and auditory access to proceedings and that relevant non-verbal elements are verbally clarified where necessary for accuracy and transparency.

Guideline 10. Ambiguity and clarification on record: Judicial authorities and legal professionals should address ambiguity explicitly on the record and should not expect interpreters to silently resolve unclear or indeterminate content.

Pillar III: Technology-supported interpreting – Principles, guidance, and good practices

Guideline 11. Modalities and interpreting modes in technology-supported proceedings: Judicial authorities should select appropriate interpreting modalities and modes – including in-person, remote, hybrid, consecutive, or simultaneous interpreting – according to the communication needs, procedural context, and technological conditions of the proceedings. Guideline 12. Interpreting conditions in technology-supported settings: Judicial authorities should ensure that the technical and organisational conditions of technology-supported proceedings enable accurate, complete, and reliable interpretation. Guideline 13. Technical responsibility and minimum standards: Judicial authorities should ensure that technology-supported proceedings meet appropriate technical standards for secure communication. Guideline 14. Transparent use of AI-assisted and automated systems: Judicial authorities should ensure that AI-assisted or automated systems are deployed in a responsible, transparent, and risk-sensitive manner, and are subject to appropriate human oversight. Guideline 15. Documentation, oversight, and review: Judicial authorities should ensure appropriate documentation and oversight of technology-supported interpreted proceedings in order to support transparency, accountability, and reviewability. Pillar IV: Accessibility and user-centred interpreting – Principles, guidance, and good practices Guideline 16. Accessibility planning and vulnerability: Judicial authorities should identify accessibility, communication, and vulnerability-related needs at the earliest possible stage and ensure that appropriate measures are coordinated and implemented in a manner that supports comprehension, effective participation, and procedural fairness. Guideline 17. Accessible language support and intralingual interpreting: Judicial authorities should ensure that accessibility measures in judicial proceedings include the appropriate use of Easy Language or Plain Language to support comprehension and effective participation, including qualified reformulation or interpreting within the same language where appropriate. Guideline 18. Sign language interpreting and International Sign: Judicial authorities should recognise national sign languages as full and independent languages and ensure conditions that support accurate and transparent interpretation in judicial proceedings. Guideline 19. Speech-to-text interpreting for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals: Judicial authorities should ensure that speech-to-text support can be requested in advance, properly coordinated, and supported by appropriate technical and procedural conditions. Guideline 20. Lingua franca communication and live subtitling: Judicial authorities should take into account that participants in judicial proceedings may communicate through a lingua franca, possess differing levels of language proficiency, or require additional communication support measures.

Pillar I: Organisation and quality assurance – Principles, guidance, and good practices

7. This Pillar sets out practical recommendations for Member States's judicial authorities on how interpretation services in judicial proceedings should be organised, financed, and monitored. Its objective is to safeguard the quality of interpretation as an essential component of the right to a fair trial under Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights and as a prerequisite for effective access to justice.
8. From an institutional perspective, quality in interpreting is not achieved solely through individual performance. It is the outcome of organisational frameworks, clear qualification standards, appropriate working conditions, and institutional responsibility. Interpretation services must therefore be organised in a way that supports the functioning of justice and meets the procedural, linguistic, cognitive, and temporal demands of judicial proceedings.
9. Quality interpreting is often perceived by listeners as fluent, stylistically appropriate, and linguistically accurate, conveying the impression of faithfully and authentically reflecting the original speech. In practice, however, original statements often fall short of these ideals. Speakers may hesitate, reformulate, contradict themselves, rely on gesture instead of words, or communicate strategically. This creates a structural tension: interpreters must balance fidelity to the source statement – including its imperfections – with audience expectations for coherence. Institutional arrangements must enable interpreters to preserve evidentiary features (pauses, hesitations, false starts) without pressure to “smooth out” content.

Guideline 1: Qualification requirements

Judicial authorities should establish and maintain clear minimum qualification standards for interpreters engaged in judicial proceedings. These standards should reflect the highly specialised nature of interpreting and ensure that interpreting services meet the requirements of fairness, accuracy, and procedural integrity.

10. Legal interpreting goes far beyond general bilingual proficiency. It requires a solid understanding of legal procedures and institutional roles, command of legal terminology, and the ability to operate under significant cognitive and emotional pressure. Interpreters must be capable of accurately rendering incomplete, ambiguous, hesitant, or emotionally charged statements while maintaining impartiality and professional distance.
11. As a general benchmark, legal interpreters should have completed recognised interpreter training,⁴ preferably at university level, including specialisation in legal or judicial interpreting where such programmes exist. Training should encompass linguistic competence, legal discourse and terminology, professional ethics, clearly defined role boundaries, and the interactions during interpreted proceedings, including remote and hybrid formats.⁵

⁴ See ISO 20228:2019, *Interpreting services – Legal interpreting – Requirements*. See also ISO 18841:2018, *Interpreting services – General requirements and recommendations*.

⁵ Numerous national professional associations have adopted codes of ethics, many of which are reflected in or aligned with the Code of Professional Ethics of the European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association (EULITA), covering core principles such as impartiality, independence, confidentiality, and clearly defined role boundaries.

12. Where it is not possible to ensure the availability of interpreters with full academic qualifications, Member States should define alternative qualification routes. These may include certified short programmes, formal examinations, or supervised practice. Such pathways should be accompanied by an explicit acknowledgement of their limitations and appropriate additional safeguards to protect procedural rights.

Good practices:

- **Structured qualification criteria:** Member States define minimum qualification requirements, including language competence, legal knowledge, and professional ethics, and make these criteria publicly accessible.
- **Verification prior to appointment:** Judicial authorities verify the interpreter's qualifications and language combination before assignment and clarify the qualification basis in exceptional cases.
- **Proportionate safeguards where needed:** Where interpreters are appointed through alternative qualification pathways, hearings are structured to mitigate risk (e.g. moderated pace, segmented questioning, documentation of arrangements).

Guideline 2: Registers (or equivalent lists) and approval of interpreters

Judicial authorities should establish and maintain transparent registers or equivalent lists of qualified interpreters, and designate the authority responsible for this task, in order to support consistent, efficient, and legally sound appointment practices.

13. Registers enable judicial authorities to identify suitable interpreters and provide institutional assurance that the minimum qualification standards have been met. They also enhance transparency and traceability within judicial proceedings and reduce the risk of ad hoc or inconsistent interpreter selection.
14. Registers should be administered by a competent public authority or by a designated body operating under public oversight. Admission should be based on clear, objective, and verifiable criteria, including qualification, professional reliability, and adherence to ethical standards.
15. Member States should ensure that register systems are organised in a manner that guarantees their consistency, transparency, and effective oversight. Centralised or coordinated approaches at national or regional level are generally preferable, as they facilitate quality control, consistency of standards, and efficient administration, while allowing for adaptations to specific institutional structures.
16. Where interpreters are engaged through agencies or external service providers, judicial authorities remain responsible for verifying that the appointed interpreter meets the applicable requirements.
17. Across Member States, shared principles regarding interpreter registration can be observed.⁶ These common elements facilitate cross-border cooperation where domestic availability is limited.

⁶ In several German-speaking and French-speaking jurisdictions, for example, registration, certification, or sworn status is linked to proof of language competence, legal knowledge, professional reliability, and ethical suitability.

Good practices:

- **Publicly supervised registers:** Registers are maintained by a competent authority and regularly updated and include verified qualification information.
- **Documented appointment decisions:** Judicial authorities record whether a registered interpreter was appointed and, where applicable, the reasons for appointing a non-registered interpreter.
- **Safeguarded exceptional appointments:** In cases of non-registered appointments, judicial authorities verify language competence and independence, apply proportionate procedural safeguards, and document the arrangements in the case file. This may include a structured suitability assessment addressing the interpreter's language competence, interpreting experience, understanding of professional duties, ability to communicate clearly in the language of the proceedings, and any potential conflicts of interest. Such assessment may include short oral exchanges (including with the parties), explanation of basic procedural concepts, and observation during the hearing as to whether interpreted communication appears coherent and effective.

Guideline 3: Working conditions, preparation, and remuneration

Judicial authorities should ensure adequate, transparent, and predictable remuneration as well as organisational conditions that enable interpreters to prepare adequately and perform their tasks effectively.

18. Interpretation does not begin in the courtroom. Where possible, interpreters should be appointed sufficiently in advance and provided with basic procedural information and key materials relevant to the case. This enables terminological preparation, anticipation of hearing structure, and contributes to smoother proceedings by reducing misunderstandings and interruptions. Such arrangements reduce cognitive load, support quality, and contribute to procedural efficiency.
19. Working conditions during hearings also have a direct impact on accuracy of interpretation and concentration. Appropriate visibility and audibility, suitable seating or positioning, ergonomics, and regular breaks support sustained performance, particularly in lengthy or complex proceedings. Where feasible, interpreters should be able to indicate a seating position that allows access to all speakers and relevant non-verbal cues. In extended hearings, scheduled breaks or team interpreting arrangements should be provided to mitigate fatigue-related risks.
20. From a quality perspective, remuneration is closely linked to interpreter performance and availability. Adequate compensation supports the participation of qualified interpreters, allows for necessary preparation, and reduces external pressures that may compromise independence or professional judgment. Remuneration schemes should therefore take into account not only actual interpreting time but also preparation, waiting time, travel, workload intensity, and procedural complexity.

Good practices:

- **Timely appointment and transparent remuneration:** Interpreters are appointed sufficiently in advance and remunerated under transparent schemes that cover not only interpreting time

but also preparation, waiting time, workload intensity, and, where hearings are adjourned or cancelled at short notice, appropriate minimum compensation arrangements.

- **Advance access to information:** Where possible, interpreters receive relevant procedural information and key materials in advance to support terminological preparation and procedural coherence.
- **Working conditions that safeguard quality:** appropriate positioning, visibility, audibility, lighting, and – where relevant – suitable camera framing is ensured so that interpreters can fully perceive and participate in the interaction. The spatial and technical configuration of proceedings should ensure that spoken, signed, and other relevant ~~communicative~~ contributions remain equally accessible to all participants.

Guideline 4: Exceptional measures where no qualified interpreter is available

Where no qualified interpreter is available within a reasonable timeframe, alternative arrangements should be used only on an exceptional basis and subject to clearly defined safeguards.

21. Judicial authorities may encounter situations – particularly involving rare, minority, or newly emerging languages – in which no suitable interpreter can be identified through official registers. In such cases, exceptional measures may be necessary. These may include remote interpreting, cross-border appointment of authorised interpreters, temporary appointment of interpreters outside official registers, or recruitment of interpreters via academic institutions or specialised professional networks.
22. Such measures broaden linguistic access and may prevent undue procedural delay. At the same time, they require explicit verification of suitability and the application of compensatory safeguards proportionate to the level of risk involved, including, where applicable, oath-taking or a formal declaration. The exceptional nature of the appointment, the steps taken to verify competence and independence, and the safeguards applied should be documented to ensure transparency and reviewability.⁷

Good practices:

- **Structured verification:** Judicial authorities verify language competence, independence, and role awareness before confirming exceptional appointments and record the reasons for deviation from standard procedures.

⁷ Practice example – cross-border appointment:

In proceedings conducted in Vienna, no qualified interpreter for Somali is available within a reasonable timeframe. After consulting the domestic register, judicial authority identifies an authorised court interpreter based in Berlin and appoints them for remote interpreting.

Prior to the hearing, judicial authority verifies qualification status, language combination, and independence, informs the parties of the remote and cross-border arrangement, ensures technical reliability and structured turn-taking, and documents the reasons for the exceptional appointment and safeguards applied in the case file.

Practice example – lay interpreter:

In a time-sensitive hearing involving Tigré, no qualified interpreter can be identified through national or cross-border mechanisms. The judicial authority appoints a bilingual community member on an exceptional basis. The presiding authority records the exceptional nature of the appointment, verifies independence, and provides clear instructions regarding the interpreter's limited role. Questioning is conducted in short, segmented turns at a moderated pace and – where legally permissible – the interview is audio-visually recorded. The arrangements and safeguards are documented in the case file.

- **Proportionate safeguards:** Exceptional arrangements are accompanied by moderated pacing, segmented questioning, and, where legally permissible, audio-visual recording.
- **Documented reviewability:** The qualification basis, safeguards applied, and reasons for exceptional appointment are documented in the case file to support transparency and reviewability.

Relay interpreting as exceptional modality:

23. Relay interpreting is used when no interpreter is available for a required direct language combination. In such cases, one interpreter first interprets into a pivot language – usually a widely spoken language such as English – from which a second interpreter renders the message into the target language.
24. Relay interpreting broadens linguistic coverage and makes it possible to include speakers of rare languages in legal processes. However, it also involves significant risks: each additional step increases the likelihood of errors and potential shifts in meaning, as well as time delays. Moreover, relay interpreting raises ethical concerns regarding shared responsibility, as multiple interpreters are involved in the communication chain. This method is primarily found in proceedings involving rare language combinations and should be a measure of last resort.⁸

Good practices:

- **Preparation of interpreters:** Both interpreters are given access to the case file, indictment and relevant terminology. A shared glossary is prepared in advance.
 - **Coordination during the hearing:** Both interpreters are seated so they can maintain direct visual contact and clarify issues briefly where necessary.
- Shared responsibility:** The pivot interpreter is responsible for the accurate rendering into the pivot language; the second interpreter ensures faithful interpretation from the pivot language to the language in which the proceedings are conducted.

Guideline 5: Quality assurance and evaluation

Judicial authorities should introduce quality assurance mechanisms for interpreted judicial proceedings to support fairness, accountability, and consistent evaluation of interpreting quality, with the aim of ensuring communication and procedural conditions comparable to those of monolingual proceedings.

25. Interpretation is by its nature ephemeral. Unlike written records, it leaves no inherent trace unless supported by institutional quality assurance measures. Where legally permissible, audio-visual recording of proceedings provides an important basis for appellate review, quality monitoring, and the protection of both parties and interpreters. This is particularly relevant in situations involving exceptional arrangements, such as remote interpreting, relay interpreting, or the appointment of non-registered or ad hoc interpreters. Quality assurance

⁸ Example: A criminal trial in German involves a defendant who speaks only Kyrgyz. No interpreter is available for the Kyrgyz German combination. Judicial authority opts for relay interpreting using Russian as the pivot language.

Relay solution:

Interpreter A: Kyrgyz → Russian (pivot)

Interpreter B: Russian → German (for the court)

In the reverse direction: German → Russian → Kyrgyz

should include structured and transparent procedures for evaluating interpreters' performance, carried out either by the authority responsible for maintaining interpreter registers or by an independent, designated body with appropriate expertise. Such evaluation should be based on clearly defined criteria, including accuracy, completeness, role adherence, and interactional competence, and may draw on multiple sources. The allocation of responsibility should be clearly defined to ensure credibility of interpretation and avoid conflicts of interest.

26. Proportionate feedback and complaint-handling procedures may further support quality assurance. These mechanisms should be accessible, clearly defined, and focused on identifying systemic issues rather than attributing individual blame. Judicial authorities should establish appropriate mechanisms for seeking and taking into account feedback from users as an important source of information on the quality and effectiveness of interpretation. Such procedures should allow fostering improvements of the interpretation services and for ex post assessment where concerns are raised, without interfering with the conduct of proceedings. Where recordings are used for this purpose, care should be taken to ensure that both the original speech and the interpreted output are captured.

27. System-level quality assurance should enable the aggregation of findings across cases in order to identify recurring issues, inform training needs, and support continuous improvement of interpreting services.

Good practices:

- **Configuration-specific documentation:** Judicial authorities document the spatial configuration, language combination (including use of a lingua franca), interpreter status, and interpreting modality.
- **Recording for reviewability:** Where legally permissible, proceedings involving remote or lingua franca communication may be recorded to preserve both original speech and interpreted output.⁹
- **Technology-sensitive review mechanisms:** Review procedures take into account the potential impact of remote settings and lingua franca communication on comprehension, pacing, and interactional clarity.

Pillar II: Working with interpreters – Principles, guidance, and good practices

28. This Pillar addresses the interactions between different players in the conduct of proceedings involving interpretation, with a focus on role clarity, interactional practices, and communication management. Judicial settings are inherently asymmetrical, and language functions as an instrument of authority. Ensuring user-centred communication in interpreted

⁹ Example: In family law proceedings concerning parental responsibility, one parent participates remotely and communicates in English as a lingua franca, which is not their first language.

A qualified interpreter is appointed to interpret between English and the language of service. The hearing is audio-visually recorded. The case file documents the language combination, the interpreter's qualification status, the remote modality, and any technical safeguards applied.

The recording captures both the parent's original statements in the lingua franca and the interpreted rendition. This enables potential review, including appellate review where applicable, of whether meaning, nuance, hesitation, or emotional expression were accurately conveyed, particularly where credibility or the best interests of the child are at issue, without presuming interpretive error.

proceedings therefore requires communication to be conducted in a manner that is clear, fair, and capable of review.

29. In interpreted proceedings, strict role clarity is essential. Interpreters are responsible for rendering spoken or signed communication accurately and impartially. They do not advise parties, explain legal consequences, mediate between participants, or advocate on behalf of any person involved. Where role boundaries are unclear, risks arise, including unintended bias, private side conversations, unequal access to information, and reduced procedural transparency.

Guideline 6: Role clarity – interpreter as interpreter

Judicial authorities should ensure a shared and explicit understanding of the interpreter's professional role and communicate this clearly at the outset of proceedings.

30. Clear definition of the interpreter role at the beginning of proceedings supports fairness and efficiency. It establishes expectations regarding turn-taking (meaning the orderly exchange and sequencing of speakers and contributions), ensures that all relevant speech is interpreted, and reduces the likelihood of informal exchanges that bypass the court or other parties. Explicit role clarification also protects interpreters from inappropriate demands and reinforces their professional independence.
31. Judicial authorities should therefore introduce the interpreter as part of the formal opening of the hearing, explain that all communication will be interpreted, and instruct participants to address the court or authority directly rather than the interpreter. Interpreters should be explicitly authorised to request clarification, repetition, or a moderated pace where necessary to ensure accurate interpretation.
32. Where proceedings are sensitive or involve vulnerable participants, recording that role clarification has taken place may support transparency and potential later review. Judicial authorities should also remain attentive to situations in which interpreters originate from small or close-knit language communities. Social proximity, perceived loyalty expectations, or concerns regarding confidentiality may affect trust in the proceedings. Judicial authorities should assess both actual and perceived risks to independence and procedural integrity.

Guideline 7: Communication formats and interpreting modes

Judicial authorities should select the appropriate interpreting mode – such as consecutive, simultaneous, or whispered interpreting – in consultation with the interpreter and according to the legal importance of the exchange and the needs of the participants.

33. The choice of interpreting mode directly affects accuracy, completeness, efficiency, and fairness. Different communication formats place different demands on interpreters. Monologic speech, such as submissions or statements, differs fundamentally from dialogic interaction, such as witness examination or questioning of parties.

34. In practice, dialogic interaction is often interpreted consecutively. However, simultaneous interpreting – whether in booths or with portable equipment (“whispering sets”¹⁰) – may in some situations better preserve the flow and immediacy of communication. It can help the judicial authority communicate more directly with the person who does not speak the main language and better understand both verbal and non-verbal communication.

35. This may be particularly beneficial in witness examinations and other situations where uninterrupted narrative and continuous interaction are important.¹¹

Guideline 8: Managing turn-taking and the pace of proceedings

Judicial authorities should actively manage turn-taking – meaning the orderly exchange and sequencing of speakers and contributions – and the pace of proceedings in order to ensure that interpreted communication is complete, accurate, and transparent.

36. Interpreted proceedings place specific demands on all participants. Unlike monolingual proceedings, interpreted communication requires clear coordination so that all contributions can be fully interpreted and understood by all participants.

37. Coordination, clear turn-taking, and manageable speech segments are a shared responsibility of judicial authorities, legal professionals, and interpreters. They are therefore an integral part of professionally conducted interpreted proceedings.

38. Particular care is required in emotionally charged or adversarial exchanges, where interruptions, overlapping speech, side conversations, or rapid questioning are more likely to occur. Such conditions may impair accuracy and completeness regardless of interpreter competence.

39. The presiding authority should therefore enforce a “one speaker at a time” principle and structure questioning in a manner that enables accurate interpretation. Interpreters should also be explicitly permitted to intervene where necessary to request repetition, clarification, or a slower pace.

Guideline 9: Visibility, audibility, and verbal clarification

Judicial authorities should ensure that interpreters have adequate visual and auditory access to proceedings and that relevant non-verbal elements are verbally clarified where necessary for accuracy and transparency.

¹⁰ Mobile whispering systems are cost-effective, portable interpreting solutions. They are easy to use and an ideal option for courts seeking a quick and economical way to provide simultaneous interpreting without relying on expensive fixed equipment.

¹¹ Example: In an asylum hearing, judicial authority decides in advance to use simultaneous interpreting, allowing extended submissions to be delivered without interruption and helping to maintain procedural efficiency. The applicant is invited to give a full account of their experiences. Simultaneous interpreting is provided via portable equipment, consisting of a transmitter and microphones for the interpreter and wireless headsets for the participants. This allows the applicant to speak continuously while the interpreted rendition is delivered in parallel via headsets.

The judge and other participants remain visually engaged with the applicant, following both the narrative and the interpreted rendition in real time. This supports the perception of non-verbal cues and helps establish trust and rapport. Clarifications and follow-up questions are addressed after the uninterrupted narrative phase, supporting the accuracy and completeness of the account.

Comparable principles apply in remote settings, provided that audio-visual conditions ensure simultaneous access to speech and non-verbal cues and allow for continuous, uninterrupted delivery of the narrative.

40. Court communication is multimodal, meaning that spoken language is often accompanied by gestures, facial expressions, gaze, posture, or intonation that may influence meaning or emphasis. Interpreters must therefore be able to see and hear participants clearly in order to interpret accurately and request clarification where needed.
41. Courtroom layouts and remote or hybrid hearing set-ups should provide clear sightlines and reliable audio quality. Poor visibility or sound may increase the risk of misunderstanding.
42. Where non-verbal elements are relevant to the proceedings – such as pointing or indicating persons or locations – judicial authorities should ensure that these are expressed verbally and included in the record.¹²

Guideline 10: Ambiguity and clarification on record

Judicial authorities and legal professionals should address ambiguity explicitly on the record and should not expect interpreters to resolve unclear or indeterminate content.

43. Ambiguity – meaning that a statement may be unclear or open to more than one interpretation – is a common feature of spoken language. It may result from vague references, incomplete statements, unclear pronouns, or culturally dependent expressions. Interpreters cannot resolve such ambiguity without risking assumptions or altering meaning.
44. Where ambiguity arises, clarification by the original speaker is therefore essential. This helps preserve accuracy, fairness, and the reliability of the record. Interpreters should not be expected to “repair” unclear statements on their own.
45. Judicial authorities should intervene where necessary, for example by asking speakers to clarify references, timelines, or unclear expressions before proceedings continue. Managing ambiguity through explicit clarification supports transparency and helps avoid later disputes about what was intended or understood.

Pillar III: Technology-supported interpreting – Principles, guidance, and good practices

46. This Pillar addresses the use of technology in interpreted judicial proceedings, including remote, hybrid, and other technology-supported forms of communication, as well as AI-assisted systems.
47. The use of technology does not alter the fundamental requirements of fair proceedings. Judicial authorities remain responsible for ensuring reliable communication, confidentiality, accessibility, transparency, and interpreting quality, regardless of the technological or spatial configuration of participants.

¹² Example: During testimony conducted with interpretation, a witness states, “It happened right there,” while pointing toward a location on a photograph.

The presiding judge intervenes and asks the witness to specify verbally what they are referring to. The witness then states, “It happened at the entrance to the parking area.”

The interpreter renders the clarified statement. The verbal specification, rather than the gesture alone, becomes part of the record, thereby supporting evidentiary clarity and potential later review.

48. Technology may support interpreted communication in different ways. Some tools assist professional interpreters, for example by supporting terminology management, preparation, or coordination. Other systems aim to automate parts of multilingual communication through speech recognition, machine translation, or AI-assisted interpreting functions.
49. The use of technology in judicial settings should always be guided by procedural fairness, clear and reliable communication, and the effective protection of rights.¹³ Technological solutions should support meaningful participation, accurate communication, and institutional accountability, while helping to ensure communication conditions comparable to those of professionally interpreted in-person proceedings, particularly where interpreting is AI assisted or automated.

Guideline 11: Modalities and interpreting modes in technology-supported proceedings

Judicial authorities should select appropriate interpreting modalities and modes – including in-person, remote, hybrid, consecutive, or simultaneous interpreting – according to the communicative needs, procedural context, and technological conditions of the proceedings.

50. Interpreted communication depends on reliable access to verbal and non-verbal information. Regardless of whether proceedings take place in person, remotely, or in hybrid form, interpreters should be able to hear and see participants clearly in order to interpret accurately and completely.
51. The choice of modality should support effective participation without compromising interpreting quality. Where technology-mediated interpreting is used, judicial authorities should ensure stable, secure, and appropriate technical conditions for all participants.
52. Remote or hybrid participation may require additional coordination measures, including clear turn-taking, structured pacing, and procedures for addressing technical or communication difficulties.
53. In proceedings involving complex evidence, sensitive questioning, or credibility assessment, judicial authorities should give particular consideration to whether the selected modality provides adequate conditions for accurate and reliable communication.

Guideline 12: Interpreting conditions in technology-supported settings

Judicial authorities should ensure that the technical and organisational conditions of technology-supported proceedings enable accurate, complete, and reliable interpretation.

54. Interpreting quality depends not only on professional competence but also on adequate working conditions. Interpreters should therefore have reliable audio and visual access, appropriate opportunities for concentration and coordination, and conditions that reduce fatigue and communication breakdowns.

¹³ See CEPEJ [Guidelines on videoconferencing in judicial proceedings](#), par. 31 “Specific arrangements should be taken to ensure that the interpretation of communication between the defendant and their legal representative does not undermine its confidentiality”.

55. Technology-supported interpreting may take different forms, including simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. The selected modality and technical set-up should correspond to the communicative demands and complexity of the proceedings.

56. In longer or intensive proceedings, appropriate breaks, continuity of assignment, or team arrangements should be considered to support sustained interpreting quality.

Guideline 13: Technical responsibility and minimum standards

Judicial authorities should ensure that technology-supported proceedings meet appropriate technical standards for secure communication.

57. Where institutional infrastructure is used, judicial authorities are responsible for providing adequate technical conditions, communicating minimum technical requirements in advance, and ensuring access to technical support. Where interpreters work remotely or from external locations, they should ensure that their technical environment meets appropriate professional standards.

58. Proceedings should be paused where technical conditions substantially impair interpretation or effective participation. Significant technical disruptions and corrective measures should be documented.

Guideline 14: Transparent use of AI-assisted and automated systems

Judicial authorities should ensure that AI-assisted or automated systems are deployed in a responsible, transparent, and risk-sensitive manner, and are subject to appropriate human oversight.

59. AI-assisted or automated systems may increasingly support multilingual communication in judicial and institutional contexts. Their use in judicial proceedings should remain aligned with the requirements of quality, accuracy, completeness, procedural fairness, and effective participation.

60. Where such systems are used, judicial authorities should ensure appropriate human oversight, procedural safeguards, and mechanisms for verification or correction where necessary.¹⁴

61. Particular caution is required in spoken and interactive communication, where meaning may depend on context, ambiguity, speaker intention, interactions, or culturally dependent forms of expression.

Guideline 15: Documentation, oversight, and review

Judicial authorities should ensure appropriate documentation and oversight of technology-supported interpreted proceedings in order to support transparency, accountability, and reviewability.

¹⁴ In any case, their application should be in line with the CEPEJ's European Ethical Charter on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Judicial Systems and their environment and the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and human rights, democracy and the rule of law (CETS 225).

62. Where interpretation is technologically mediated, relevant aspects of the proceedings should be documented, including the interpreting modality used, the general technological setting of the proceeding.
63. Technology-supported interpreting practices, including the use of AI-assisted systems where applicable, should be subject to periodic review in order to support institutional learning, quality assurance, and the continued protection of procedural fairness and effective participation.

Pillar IV: Accessibility and user-centered interpreting – Principles, guidance, and good practices

64. Accessible justice requires that judicial proceedings accommodate disability-related and communication needs alongside linguistic diversity. Accessible communication measures include, inter alia, plain or easy language,¹⁵ sign language interpreting, speech-to-text services and live subtitling. These measures support participation, comprehension and procedural fairness while contributing to the clarity and reliability of interpreted communication.
65. In addition, judicial authorities should remain attentive to situations in which vulnerability, dependency, or social proximity within small or close-knit language communities may affect communicative dynamics, interpreter independence, or perceived impartiality. In such contexts, additional safeguards may be required to preserve evidentiary integrity and procedural trust.

Guideline 16: Accessibility planning and vulnerability

Judicial authorities should identify accessibility, communication and vulnerability-related needs at the earliest possible stage and ensure that appropriate measures are coordinated and implemented in a manner that supports comprehension, effective participation, and procedural fairness.

66. Proceedings involving vulnerable persons require heightened attentiveness. Vulnerability may arise in cases involving children, victims of violence or trafficking, traumatised individuals, persons with cognitive or psychosocial disabilities, or persons in situations of dependency or heightened stress.
67. Vulnerable speakers may use fragmented, hesitant, non-linear, or emotionally charged speech. Pauses, silence, or apparent inconsistency may reflect stress rather than evasiveness. These features must be preserved in interpretation rather than reformulated.
68. In proceedings involving heightened vulnerability or sensitive subject matter, the appointment of professionally trained and experienced interpreters is of particular importance. The use of lay or ad hoc interpreters in such contexts should be avoided wherever possible and, if unavoidable, accompanied by enhanced safeguards and explicit procedural guidance.

¹⁵ See CEPEJ Guidelines on the Quality of the Jurisdictional Debate in Civil and Administrative Matters, especially the guideline on the clarity of the legal language.

69. The interpreter's role remains unchanged: to render what is said faithfully and transparently, without simplifying, advising, or independently resolving ambiguity. Clarification must occur procedurally and be attributed to the speaker.

Good practices:

- **Early accessibility assessment:** Judicial authorities establish procedures to identify accessibility and vulnerability-related needs at the earliest stage of proceedings and document the measures selected.
- **Priority for qualified interpreters in sensitive cases:** In proceedings involving vulnerable persons or sensitive subject matter, judicial authorities prioritise professionally trained and experienced interpreters.
- **Safeguards for interpreter independence:** Where interpreters originate from small or close-knit language communities, judicial authorities assess potential risks to actual or perceived independence and apply proportionate safeguards, including transparent disclosure and documentation.
- **Structured conduct of proceedings:** Questioning is segmented, pacing moderated, and clarification placed explicitly on the record to preserve evidentiary integrity where speech is fragmented or emotionally charged.

Guideline 17: Accessible language support and intralingual interpreting

Judicial authorities should ensure that accessibility measures in judicial proceedings include the appropriate use of Easy Language or Plain Language to support comprehension and effective participation, including qualified reformulation or interpreting within the same language where appropriate.

70. Easy Language is a structured accessibility format primarily intended for persons with cognitive disabilities or very limited literacy. It follows specific linguistic rules and requires appropriate training. In oral proceedings, it may take the form of intralingual interpreting, meaning interpretation within the same language through simplified reformulation. The interpreter's role and the supportive nature of such communication should therefore be clearly defined.
71. Easy Language supports orientation and understanding but must remain clearly distinguishable from legal discourse. Because it relies on strong simplification, it may reduce nuance or legal precision if used without safeguards. It is therefore more suitable for explaining procedural steps, rights, and practical information, than for evidentiary questioning, legal reasoning, or binding judicial decisions unless additional safeguards are in place.
72. Plain Language, by contrast, improves clarity while remaining within the legal register. Its use in oral proceedings may facilitate interpreted communication without reducing legal precision. Reformulating legal discourse into Plain Language may likewise constitute a form of intralingual interpreting requiring appropriate competence and clearly defined role boundaries.

73. In several European jurisdictions, accessible communication in justice systems is increasingly linked to disability-rights frameworks, including Article 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on access to justice.

Guideline 18: Sign language interpreting and International Sign

Judicial authorities should recognise national sign languages as full and independent languages and ensure conditions that support accurate and transparent interpretation in judicial proceedings.

74. Sign languages possess their own grammar, syntax, and pragmatic structures. Meaning is conveyed not only through manual signs but also through facial expression, gaze, and spatial structuring. Visual accessibility is therefore a prerequisite for accuracy and completeness.
75. Where legal concepts lack established sign equivalents, clarification should occur on the record. Brief neutral explanation by the presiding authority may support accurate rendering without altering the legal meaning.¹⁶
76. International Sign may be used in cross-border proceedings only on an exceptional basis and with full transparency regarding its limitations. International Sign is not a fully standardised language and does not provide the same degree of lexical and legal precision as national sign languages. Whenever possible, qualified interpreters in the relevant national sign language should be appointed.
77. If International Sign is used due to practical constraints, its limitations should be explained on the record, and proceedings should be structured with moderated pacing and explicit clarification of legal concepts.

Guideline 19: Speech-to-text interpreting for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals

Judicial authorities should ensure that speech-to-text interpreting is requested in advance, properly coordinated, and supported by appropriate technical and procedural conditions.

78. Speech-to-text interpreting renders spoken language into written text in real time, either through rapid keyboard-based stenography or through respeaking combined with speech-recognition software. In both modalities, the interpreter relies on specialised software and high-quality audio input in order to generate an accurate real-time transcript. It enables deaf or hard-of-hearing participants to follow proceedings and participate effectively.
79. Because speech-to-text interpreting involves high cognitive load and depends on audio quality and technical stability, judicial authorities should ensure clear sound transmission, minimal background noise, and appropriate equipment. Structured turn-taking and moderated pace are essential to maintain accuracy and readability.

¹⁶ Example: During a criminal hearing involving a deaf defendant, a qualified national sign language interpreter is appointed and positioned within clear sightlines of both the bench and counsel. When the legal concept of “probation” arises and no fixed sign equivalent exists, the presiding judge provides a brief neutral clarification on the record before questioning continues. The interpreter renders both the clarification and the subsequent exchange. Visual framing and positioning ensure that all signed, and spoken contributions are fully accessible and reviewable.

80. In complex or lengthy hearings, team arrangements and scheduled breaks may be necessary to mitigate fatigue-related risks. Interpreters should be entitled to signal overload, technical disruption, or the need for clarification without this being treated as procedural disruption.

81. Speech-to-text interpreting serves an accessibility function and does not replace sign language interpreting where sign language is the participant's primary language.¹⁷

Guideline 20: Lingua franca communication and live subtitling

Judicial authorities should take into account that participants in judicial proceedings may communicate through a lingua franca, possess differing levels of language proficiency, or require additional communication support measures.

82. The use of a shared lingua franca does not necessarily eliminate the need for interpreting or other language support. Live subtitling may support comprehension and participation, particularly where participants have differing levels of language proficiency or accent-related comprehension difficulties.¹⁸

83. Depending on the purpose of the proceedings, written support may prioritise closer reflection of spoken wording or greater readability and overall comprehension. Such measures should support effective participation and reliable communication while maintaining legal clarity and procedural rights.

¹⁷ Example: In a civil hearing involving a hard-of-hearing party, a speech-to-text interpreter is appointed in advance. The judicial authority ensures clear audio transmission and provides a dedicated screen for the participant to follow the real-time text. The presiding judge reminds participants to speak one at a time and at a moderate pace. When audio quality briefly deteriorates, proceedings are paused until clarity is restored. These measures support accurate real-time transcription and effective participation while preserving the authoritative record of the proceedings.

¹⁸ Example: in international commercial proceedings conducted in English as a lingua franca.