



## FIELD GUIDE TO HUMANITARIAN INTERPRETING & CULTURAL MEDIATION

- **Interpreters and Cultural Mediators: Key responsibilities, differences and similarities.**
- *Humanitarian Interpreting Do's and Don'ts*
- *Humanitarian Mediation Do's and Don'ts*
- *Working with interpreters & cultural mediators in a humanitarian setting - Best Practice*
- *Humanitarian Principles in Practice*
- *Resources*

# INTERPRETERS AND CULTURAL MEDIATORS: KEY RESPONSIBILITIES, DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Interpreter and cultural mediator are different jobs with different skill sets. Not all interpreters will be able to provide cultural mediation, and not all cultural mediators will have professional interpreting skills. When planning to call on one or the other, the humanitarian professional should be clear about what support s/he needs.

## Interpreter

An **interpreter** verbally translates spoken material from one language (source language) to another language (target language). S/he is present physically or interprets remotely, on the phone for example. This can take three main forms: simultaneous interpreting, performed generally from an interpreting booth in a conference environment; consecutive interpreting, where the speaker leaves pauses for the interpreter to relay the speech one section at a time; and bilateral interpreting, the most common in humanitarian field operations, where the interpreter relays both (or all) sides of a conversation between speakers of different languages, working both into and out of their main language.

## Cultural Mediator

A **cultural mediator** is a person who facilitates mutual understanding between a person or a group of people, the migrant/refugee population for example, and a caregiver, a doctor for example, by interpreting, taking into account cultural elements. S/he can give advice to both parties regarding appropriate cultural behaviors.

# INTERPRETERS AND CULTURAL MEDIATORS: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

	I	CM
Bidirectional between source and target language	✓	✓ Can be a bit less fluent
Convey information as accurately as possible, while being faithful to the source	✓	✓
Convey only the main message	✗	✓
Acting as a bridge between cultures	✓	✓
Provide cultural advice and context if and when asked	✗ Unless absolutely necessary for comprehension	✓
Liaise with communities, collect information and feed it back to relevant parties	✗	Depends on job description
Use of glossaries and other resources	✓	✓

# INTERPRETERS AND CULTURAL MEDIATORS: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES - CONTINUED

	I	CM
Verbally translate written information	✗	✗
Verbally translate spoken information	✓	✓
Facilitate communication between two parties	✓	✓
Cultural competence in source and target culture	✓	✓
Provide additional support besides conveying information	✗	✓
Remain impartial and neutral in any situation	✓	✓
Adapt language to target audience	✓	✓
Be sensitive & aware of the target group's situation	✓	✓

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This chapter is part of a field guide developed under Translators without Borders' Words of Relief project, in partnership with Save the Children.

This publication has been financed by the European Union, through the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO).

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