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Legal translators/interpreters

If you need to understand and be understood during a hearing held in another Member State or if you need a legal translation of a contract or other legal document, you may wish to find an interpreter or a legal translator.

Introduction

With the increase in mobility and migration within the European Union, there is also a commensurate increase in the number of relationships of all kinds (be they commercial, legal, academic or personal) between citizens of different nationalities, cultures and with different languages. This in turn leads to a wide variety of situations demanding language translation and interpretation services. Since many of these situations must be either sanctioned or witnessed by the authorities (frequently by courts or other legal institutions), it is quite common to require official translations of documents originally written in another language.

The purposes of an official translation are to certify facts in a legal or administrative process/court case; to have legal facts originating in a foreign country recognised and to apply the source law to foreign citizens (Private International Law).

Official translation services are organised differently in the Member States of the European Union with very different professional frameworks (heterogeneous systems and practices). For instance, in civil law countries such as Spain or Greece the profession of sworn translator is subject to different access rules and performed under different working conditions regarding statutes, fee payment or certification.

What is a legal translator?

A translator produces a written document by translating a text from one language into another language. A **legal translator** must master the basic concepts and terminology of not just law, but also the area to which it is being applied. Legal translation is at the heart of multilingual communication as it enables individuals, companies, legal and government agencies to communicate across different languages and cultures within and across state borders. Legal translation requires knowledge of specialist terminology and knowledge of the linguistic conventions that are used in related documents. Being part of the legal team and by having access to legal experts, the legal translator will enable your full understanding of any particular case and the required legal terminology. His/her understanding of the legal system or systems and the legal processes involved will ensure that the legal translator can assist you in your legal actions.

Professional standards concerning linguistic competence, translation skills, and knowledge of systems, processes, terminology and linguistic conventions which apply in particular cases will be very important when you are looking for a legal translator.

What is a legal interpreter?

An interpreter provides an oral language service, using various modes to interpret from one language into another language (simultaneous, consecutive, or whispered interpretation). **Legal interpreters** are specialists who work primarily with lawyers on legal cases such as trials, depositions, hearings, mediations, arbitrations, client meetings, etc. These experts will help you to communicate with other parties when you are involved in cross-border proceedings.

Court translator/interpreter

Court translators/interpreters are authorised to translate official documents (marriage certificates, school certificates, university diplomas, court submissions, judgments, etc.), as well as to interpret in court (e.g. when parties or witnesses give evidence), at police stations (during interviews, after an arrest) or before administrative authorities (such as during customs inspections). Official court translators/interpreters are authorized to affix an official stamp to their translations to certify the translation.

Court translators/interpreters should typically have a university education in their working language(s) and have mastered various translating and interpreting skills, although requirements vary from one Member State to another.

Most EU Member States have a system to select and appoint court translators/interpreters. Usually, a sworn translator is also qualified to work as a court interpreter. Different countries use different official designations to refer to court translators/interpreters.

How can I find translators/interpreters?

Finding a legal translator or an interpreter is currently possible by accessing national databases of translators and/or interpreters. However, such databases do not exist in all Member States. Occasionally, the websites of Ministries of Justice or higher regional courts will have a link to official or semi-official registers of qualified translators/interpreters.

In criminal matters, Member States have been required under [Directive 2010/64/EU](#) to endeavour to establish such a register by 27 October 2013, the deadline set for the transposition of the Directive into national law. Under this Directive, Member States have to put in place a procedure or mechanism to ascertain whether suspected or accused persons need the assistance of an interpreter and of a translator, and it is for the Member States to provide suspects or accused with interpretation without delay. Translation should be provided for documents which are essential to safeguard the exercise of the right of defence and, exceptionally, an oral translation or an oral summary of those essential documents may be provided on condition that the fairness of the proceedings is not prejudiced. Member States shall meet the costs of interpretation and translation, irrespective of the outcome of the proceedings.

To obtain more detailed information, for instance on:

- the body hosting the relevant national database,
- the rules applying for recourse to translators and interpreters,
- geographical areas of responsibility of translators and interpreters,
- training/qualifications of translators and interpreters,
- costs,
- insurance systems and existence of complaints procedures,

please select one of the flags listed on the right hand side.

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