



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

November 2024

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INTRODUCTION

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is the component within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) responsible for efficiently and fairly adjudicating requests for immigration benefits, promoting citizenship, and ensuring the integrity of the nation's lawful immigration system. As a federal agency with a global reach, USCIS is committed to communicating with people from all over the world, including persons who are limited English proficient (LEP).

Executive Order (EO) 13166 requires each federal agency to “examine the services it provides and develop and implement a system by which [persons who are LEP] can meaningfully access those services consistent with, and without unduly burdening, the fundamental mission of the agency...” (65 FR 50,121). The Department of Justice’s (DOJ’s) Civil Rights Division issued guidance that defined persons who are LEP as “individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English...” (67 FR 41-459). USCIS drafted this plan in accordance with the [DHS Language Access Plan](#), which requires each component to draft its own plan.

In accordance with the [DHS Language Access Plan](#), meaningful access is the provision of language assistance services that results in accurate, timely, and effective communication at no cost to the person who is LEP. For persons who are LEP, meaningful access denotes access that is not significantly restricted, delayed, or inferior as compared to programs or activities provided to persons who are English proficient.

In accordance with the [DHS Equity Action Plan and Update](#), USCIS is committed to ensuring that members of underserved communities do not face systemic barriers in accessing benefits and opportunities available pursuant to federal policies and programs. Specifically, we work to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities for persons who are LEP by strengthening our language access programs.

USCIS is additionally committed to responding to surges in immigration flows and will take concerted steps to augment our language capacity in the event of a sudden change in demographics of the LEP population served or encountered.



USCIS POLICY STATEMENT

The following policy applies to all USCIS employees who interact with the general public, whether in person or by electronic or telephonic means:

USCIS follows the DHS-wide language access policy in the [***DHS Language Access Plan***](#) and is committed to providing meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency to its services, resources, activities, and programs, consistent with, and without unduly burdening, the agency's fundamental mission. USCIS will incorporate language access considerations in its routine strategic and business planning, identify and translate materials into the most frequently encountered languages, provide interpretive support or guidance where appropriate, and educate its personnel about language access responsibilities and how to use available language access resources.

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN MISSION STATEMENT

The USCIS Language Access Plan establishes goals and guidelines to ensure that persons who are LEP have meaningful access to our services and information. The plan summarizes agency efforts to comply with EO 13166 and follow the guidance in DHS's Language Access Plan.

USCIS regularly interacts with individuals in languages other than English through translated materials, multilingual information sessions, the USCIS Contact Center's toll-free line, telephonic interviews, and in-person appointments in our offices. USCIS also routinely produces educational and outreach materials in multiple languages and publishes them in the [***Multilingual Resource Center***](#) on the public website, [***uscis.gov***](https://uscis.gov). The USCIS.gov website is available in both English and Spanish.

USCIS also maintains an active Language Access Working Group (LAWG). The USCIS LAWG works to implement our Language Access Plan, ensuring that persons who are LEP have meaningful access to immigration benefit services in a manner consistent with the USCIS mission. The USCIS LAWG consists of leaders and representatives from across the agency and meets regularly in group and subgroup settings.



USCIS LANGUAGE ACCESS WORKING GROUP AND PARTNERS

USCIS Language Access

USCIS provides access to information regarding immigration benefits in the United States. In line with the work of DHS, USCIS seeks to communicate effectively with the public, including persons who are LEP, across our many missions and functions. The USCIS LAWG focuses on advancing these efforts.

USCIS LAWG and Disability Access

The USCIS LAWG, composed of employees throughout USCIS, works to monitor agency progress on implementing the goals and expectations set forth in the USCIS Language Access Plan. The USCIS LAWG and its subgroups work collaboratively to establish consistency in implementing the plan across the USCIS components in public information, programs, and benefits.

The USCIS LAWG has established subgroups to enhance the agency's translation strategy, in-language services, and technology efforts. The translation strategy subgroup focuses on:

- ★ web content,
- ★ printed materials,
- ★ press releases,
- ★ applicant service tools,
- ★ glossaries, and
- ★ the prioritization of translation requests.

The in-language services subgroup works on:

- ★ the provision of interpreters during certain immigration benefits interviews,
- ★ multilingual engagements, and
- ★ human resources initiatives.



Lastly, the technology subgroup works on facilitating a responsive design and content strategy for applicant services through live and self-help channels. This includes:

- ★ the Contact Center,
- ★ web services,
- ★ social media, and
- ★ accommodations.

Public awareness and advocacy for persons who are LEP are incorporated into various platforms and tools. The voice enabled Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, the online virtual assistant Emma, Live Chat, and Contact Center communications are also available in Spanish. USCIS also provides accommodations for deaf and hard of hearing users for language access purposes by presenting simultaneous transcripts of online chats or a TTY line with relay interpretation services. Additionally, each of these features is Section 508 compliant.

USCIS is committed to providing language access to [*individuals with disabilities*](#), which may impact language accessibility, and to persons who are LEP, by formulating innovative policies and technologies to deliver public information, programs, and benefits in various languages. In accordance with the [*DHS Language Access Plan*](#), USCIS follows federal [*Section 508 accessibility*](#) and [*plain language guidelines*](#) when developing materials that are intended for the public.

Training and seminars among USCIS offices and DHS component partners are held on a frequent basis to share advanced techniques, resources, and information on promoting language access across the federal government.

Collaboration with the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties on Language Access and Indigenous Languages

USCIS is committed to working in close collaboration with the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) to maintain, enhance, and expand language access. USCIS continues to work with CRCL to provide meaningful language access to persons who are LEP. CRCL leads the DHS LAWG, of which USCIS is an active participant.

USCIS has also worked closely with CRCL to develop the [*DHS Indigenous Languages Plan*](#). The DHS Indigenous Languages Plan is a vehicle for strengthening language services for Indigenous migrants who are encountered and served in DHS programs, activities, and operations, as migration levels in the United States from Guatemala, Mexico, and other countries with large Indigenous populations have increased significantly.



Language Services Section (LSS)

The USCIS LSS provides expert language interpretation, translation, and transcription services to USCIS, DHS Headquarters, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The interpretations and translations provided by LSS language specialists encompass complex immigration and naturalization cases.

LSS was formed in the late 1970s to help persons who are LEP access immigration information and services. USCIS meets its mission objectives by extending services to a diverse and multilingual stakeholder base. LSS has grown from an ad hoc group of interpreters who provided language support services to the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Office in the New York District to a full-fledged section providing services nationwide in over 50 languages.

Language Specialists undergo a language evaluation through a third-party professional testing entity. The evaluation consists of a live video interpreting assessment and a translation evaluation of a legal text to and from the foreign language. Language Specialists also undergo extensive on-

the-job training on immigration policies, procedures, and terminology and other homeland security related issues.

LSS assists CRCL with interpretation and translation reviews on a regular basis. Language Specialists provide simultaneous and/or consecutive interpretations support during in-language engagements hosted by CRCL for stakeholders and LEP communities. LSS also provides in-person interpretation support to CRCL for the [Case Management Pilot Program](#) (CMPP) in Spanish and Chinese. LSS also plays a key role within DHS on combating human trafficking with its translation, transcription, and interpretation support of the [Blue Campaign](#) and ICE-Homeland Security Investigations efforts.

LSS also provides training to Immigration Services Officers on working with interpreters during interviews. The training covers working with an applicant or with USCIS provided interpreters. Additionally, LSS provides interpreters to Field Offices throughout the country, if necessary and when available.

USCIS EFFICIENCY VIA LANGUAGE ACCESS

According to a demographic assessment by the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 21 percent of the U.S. population speaks a language other than English. Persons who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English can be LEP. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that [at least 1,000 languages are spoken](#) in U.S. homes.



USCIS provides persons who are LEP with access to USCIS-developed online tools and resources, including a [Multilingual Resource Center](#). To reduce the number of calls and appointments the public needs to make with our agency, USCIS provides access to information in multiple languages. When people understand the evidence and eligibility requirements for the benefit(s) they are applying for, they fill out applications correctly, which in turn reduces the need to reject improperly filed applications, issue Requests for Evidence, or deny benefits due to missing information.

These online resources have promoted efficiencies, streamlined operations, improved the speed for sharing information, reduced costs, and reduced the printing of emails and documents.

CURRENT EFFORTS TO PROVIDE LANGUAGE ACCESS

USCIS strives to meet its obligation to provide persons who are LEP with meaningful access to its services. USCIS continues to find new ways to meet the needs of persons who are LEP by providing public information sessions hosted in other languages, translating materials, leveraging digital tools, and conducting self-assessments of language access efforts.

Recent USCIS initiatives to improve language access include:

- ★ Strengthening the existing USCIS Language Access Working Group so that every USCIS program office and directorate is actively involved;
- ★ Continuously soliciting recommendations for upcoming language access initiatives;
- ★ Extensively increasing the number of translations of public information and expanding the languages available from 25 to 37 languages on the USCIS [Multilingual Resource Center](#);
- ★ Having the [Multi-Language Naturalization Process Presentations](#) available in a playable format via YouTube for the public in 13 top LEP languages, plus American Sign Language;
- ★ Significantly expanding the amount of in-language engagements with the public;
- ★ Adding emails and text messaging with translations as a tool for direct outreach for some of our humanitarian applications/petitions;
- ★ Increasing the budget for translating public information;
- ★ Providing “Interpreter-Assisted Interviews Training” for Immigration Services Officers;
- ★ Expanding the staff of the USCIS Language Services Section; and
- ★ Increasing resources for interpretation related contracts.



Multilingual Citizenship Outreach Toolkits

USCIS has led an effort to create multilingual toolkits to support community relations specialists (CRSs) and other field office personnel who regularly host information sessions about U.S. citizenship and naturalization.

The citizenship outreach toolkits are currently available in the 13 top LEP languages: Arabic, Burmese, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, English, Farsi, Haitian Creole, Korean, Kurdish, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. USCIS continuously consults with USCIS CRSs, who are active in the field, to determine which additional languages would be helpful to offer in the future.

The citizenship outreach toolkit consists of the following resources:

- ★ “Naturalization Process” presentation with audio (in all 13 languages),
- ★ “Naturalization Process” presentation,
- ★ Naturalization interview skit transcript,
- ★ Engagement invitation in color and black and white, and
- ★ Translated naturalization educational materials.

A CRS or any other USCIS employee, regardless of language ability, is able to deliver a citizenship presentation in any of the above listed languages to meet the needs of the participating group. USCIS worked with a professional, digital acting company to provide voice overs, in-language, for these toolkits in a playable format. The voice overs, which are recorded speech in other languages, serve as a unique tool to aid and to enhance our ability to provide multilingual support.

The multilingual citizenship outreach toolkits are posted on the DHS intranet site under the [USCIS Connect page](#).

USCIS has received significantly positive feedback from CRSs throughout the United States who have used the toolkits. USCIS routinely asks CRS regional leads for input after presentations and asks senior leadership to incorporate information about the toolkits into their meetings with staff.

We have also posted online [interactive videos regarding the naturalization process on YouTube](#). These presentations are available in the 13 top LEP languages, plus American Sign Language, and the public may now access them at any time.

These resources help us to communicate with our stakeholders in their first languages instead of relying on interpreters. In terms of plain language, we ensured that the English version of the presentation was written in a way that could be easily understood before we worked on



translating it into 12 additional top LEP languages. These videos are available for viewing on YouTube and have closed captioning, in-language.

Viewers can either listen to or read along with the presentations to have maximum accessibility. These videos are not just available in English and Spanish, but also in 11 additional languages Arabic, Burmese, Chinese - Simplified, Chinese - Traditional, Haitian Creole, Farsi, Korean, Kurdish, Somali, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

USCIS LAWG Connect Page

The USCIS LAWG has designed a [language access site](#) on USCIS Connect, the agency's intranet site, as an online tool for DHS employees to find information regarding USCIS language access efforts. This creative, engaging, and collaborative site serves as a repository designed to aid all DHS employees with their working knowledge and promotion of language access.

USCIS Multilingual Resources Flyer

USCIS strives to provide persons who are LEP with meaningful access to immigration information in the language they understand. Accordingly, the USCIS LAWG created a flyer highlighting several of our multilingual and online resources.

The USCIS multilingual resources flyer features USCIS written resources that are available in languages other than English. CRSs, field office personnel, and employees hosting information sessions may distribute these flyers to individuals who are interested in our resources.

This flyer emphasizes that USCIS offers immigration benefits information in the following 25 languages, as well as other languages: Amharic, Arabic, Armenian, Carolinian, Chamorro, Chinese, French, German, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Ilocano, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Nepali, Palauan, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Urdu, and Vietnamese. USCIS regularly considers which additional languages may be helpful for translation and does these translations whenever feasible.

The USCIS multilingual resources flyer lists the following USCIS multilingual resources:

- ★ Naturalization resources, such as eligibility requirements and test preparation materials in other languages at the Citizenship Resource Center: <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/find-study-materials-and-resources/citizenship-multilingual-resources>.
- ★ Digital Multilingual Resources Page materials at [uscis.gov/tools/multilingual-resource-center](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/multilingual-resource-center) in over 37 languages.



- ★ The public websites, uscis.gov and e-verify.gov, where individuals can access information and check case status in both English and Spanish.
- ★ The Emma virtual assistant tool in English and Spanish: <https://www.uscis.gov/tools/meet-emma-our-virtual-assistant>.

More USCIS multilingual resources are available at uscis.gov/tools/multilingual-resource-center.

Citizenship Resources in Other Languages

The USCIS Office of Citizenship (OoC) is a public education, training, and outreach office responsible for developing educational products and resources to welcome immigrants and promote the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

OoC provides immigrants with information regarding citizenship and naturalization eligibility requirements in multiple languages. All citizenship related resources available in other languages can be accessed through the USCIS Multilingual Resource Center and can be found in the Citizenship Resource Center through the [Citizenship Multilingual Resources filter page](#).

In September 2022, OoC translated the [M-1051 Ten Steps to Naturalization](#), which is a brochure containing a concise overview of steps involved in the process of naturalization. The brochure is now available in seven additional languages: Arabic, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

In September 2022, OoC also completed a multi-year effort to provide the publication [M-1186 USCIS Welcomes Refugees and Asylees](#), a brochure which provides information and resources to assist asylees and refugees get settled in the United States and started on the path to citizenship. The brochure is available in English, Amharic, Arabic, Burmese, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Dari, French, Haitian Creole, Kibembe, Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, Rohingya, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya, and Ukrainian.

OoC recently produced a new publication, U.S. Landmarks and Symbols Coloring Book. This is an English/Spanish publication that became available as of September 2024. The coloring book is a publication designed for inter-generational teaching and studying for the naturalization test. The office will also translate the following existing publications into Dari and Pashto: [M-1122, Preparing for the Naturalization Test: A Pocket Study Guide](#), [M-1051, 10 Steps to Naturalization: Understanding the Process of Becoming a U.S. Citizen](#), and [M-638, Learn About the United States: Quick Civics Lessons for the Naturalization Test](#). All of these publications are designed to help lawful permanent residents learn about and study for the naturalization test.



Citizenship and Digital Literacy

Digital literacy, which is the ability to communicate, navigate, and conduct research using technology, is an essential component to supporting language access for persons who are LEP. USCIS is committed to collaborating with internal and external partners to expand digital literacy efforts. In Fiscal Year 2025, OoC plans to promote education on protecting personal information online, understanding rights and responsibilities, and providing instructions on how to fill in online forms.

Additional initiatives in Fiscal Year 2025 and 2026 include:

- ★ Adding digital literacy to the general National Citizenship Education curriculum;
- ★ Working in tandem with the U.S. Department of Education to highlight its digital literacy initiatives;
- ★ Working with vendors to encourage them to add digital literacy to their citizenship education textbooks and products; and
- ★ Working with universities and colleges to encourage them to include digital literacy into their Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) certification and degree programs.

Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants

This comprehensive guide is currently available in 14 languages and provides practical information to help immigrants settle into everyday life in the United States. It also provides basic civics information that introduces the U.S. system of government. The guide is now available in the following fourteen languages: Arabic, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, English, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Urdu, and Vietnamese. OoC is in the process of updating this publication and will provide translations at that time.

Additional Language Access Resources

USCIS offers several additional language access resources for persons who are LEP, including USCIS Contact Center bilingual service support in English and Spanish, multilingual issue-based outreach, multilingual media in English and Spanish, and multilingual resources and fact sheets. In the last few years, USCIS has expanded the [Multilingual Resource Center](#) from 25 to over 37 languages and plans to expand the number of languages for translated materials.



Bilingual Services

The USCIS Contact Center provides nationwide live assistance to people inquiring from within the United States about immigration benefits and services. Individuals are immediately informed that all levels of call support are available in Spanish when they call the Contact Center by phone through our toll-free number. There is also an international number available for use by those outside the United States.

Spanish Language Website

The USCIS Spanish-language website is available at uscis.gov/espanol where the content mirrors the majority of the USCIS English website. To serve persons who are LEP, a dedicated Spanish Language Content Team provides Spanish language translations for the website and for USCIS social media platforms.

The USCIS Spanish-language website contains more than 4,025 pages of content that reached approximately 7,319,847 users for fiscal year 2023. Web user averaged about 12,272,841 million sessions for fiscal year 2023 on the Spanish websites. Approximately 80 percent of users who access the Spanish-language website use a mobile device, 319percent use a desktop device, and 1 percent use a tablet.

The five most frequently used webpages in Fiscal Year 2023 were:

- ★ Main Landing Page,
- ★ Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans,
- ★ Case Status Online
- ★ Search, and Forms

Multilingual Issue-Based Outreach at the Local and National Levels

USCIS regularly hosts multilingual information sessions throughout the United States to allow the persons who are LEP to engage with the agency on a variety of issues in person and by teleconference, email, social media, and live streaming video. USCIS has also hosted engagements in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Arabic, Haitian Creole, Dari, Russian, Ukrainian, Wolof, Chaldean, and Mam, among other languages.

USCIS additionally provides meaningful access to information for individuals with disabilities. USCIS provides information in alternative formats, including large print and Braille for



individuals who are blind and/or have low vision. USCIS has hosted engagements with American Sign Language Interpreters and has provided live transcription services during virtual webinars.

In fiscal years 2022 through 2024, USCIS received the following recommendations from stakeholder engagement events, which the agency is taking into consideration for future outreach:

- ★ Provide more in-language print resources;
- ★ Provide assistance by phone, text, or email in-language;
- ★ Translate form and form instructions, particularly for Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, and for other forms related to humanitarian programs;
- ★ Provide additional in-language local and national engagements; and
- ★ Provide online tools, such as change of address requests, in other languages.

Based on feedback USCIS received over time from engagement events, USCIS has translated certain web pages on uscis.gov into the following languages: Arabic, Haitian Creole, Nepali, and Spanish.

Multilingual Media Outreach

USCIS regularly disseminates materials to non-English media outlets and circulates translated material, such as press releases and fact sheets, to Spanish-language media outlets. USCIS regularly uses social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, to send out translated messages in Spanish and in other languages, as needed.

Multilingual Resources and Fact Sheets

USCIS regularly translates informational brochures into other languages. The [Multilingual Resource Center](#) centralizes program-specific materials available in different languages. In the last few years, USCIS has expanded the [Multilingual Resource Center](#) from 25 to over 37 languages and plans to expand the number of languages for translated materials.

Translation of Updated Form Instructions

When requested or needed, in accordance with the [DHS Language Access Plan](#), USCIS will consider translating the most commonly filed forms and form instructions into languages other than English. USCIS is also actively identifying the top five forms and form instructions related to humanitarian programs to prioritize for translation into several languages in Fiscal Year 2025 for information purposes only.



Assessing Bilingual and Multilingual Staff for Language Services

In accordance with the [DHS Language Access Plan](#), USCIS will work to ensure that, if bilingual staff are asked to provide interpretation or translation services, those staff members are qualified to do so. USCIS will provide for an assessment of language ability for oral and/or written proficiencies, training on interpreter ethics and standards, and clear policies that delineate appropriate use of bilingual staff that will help to ensure the quality of language services and the integrity of DHS/USCIS programs and services delivery. While doing such assessment, USCIS will also have to take into consideration related time, cost, efficiency, accuracy, and consistency.

LSS will be assisting the Contact Center with proficiency testing and training for staff that interacts with the public in another language. The training will include an overview of Spanish immigration terminology, different word choices for commonly used terminology, how to explain the immigration process in Spanish, and talking points for new immigration policies. We plan to prioritize this work in Fiscal Year 2025.

Translations for Outreach and Education Documents

USCIS maintains a contract with a translation company that has certified translators to provide services in multiple languages, as needed. This company supports USCIS components that request translated brochures, educational materials, or other documents. USCIS continues to assess which additional documents should be translated based on feedback from surveys, internal assessments, and input from agency components. The agency conducts data calls with USCIS personnel in the field (specifically CRSs) by routinely participating in meetings, recording feedback received from meetings, and recording data to track the languages requested for translation of USCIS materials and the type of materials needed for translation into languages other than English.

USCIS continues to translate its public-facing materials. USCIS maintains an extensive library of translated documents in over 37 languages within the online [Multilingual Resource Center](#). [The Multi-Language Naturalization Process Presentations](#) are also available in 12 languages, in addition to English and American Sign Language, as well.

USCIS gathers feedback on translated materials and translated webpages through the LAWG subgroups to tailor our strategic priorities for language access. USCIS plans to conduct periodic reviews of our in-language outreach and education documents by providing persons who are LEP with the opportunity to provide feedback on translated materials used at naturalization presentations.



Language Access in USCIS Asylum Division Interviews

The USCIS Asylum Division is responsible for adjudicating affirmative applications for asylum filed on Form I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal, as well as applications for asylum under the Asylum Merits Interview process pursuant to the Asylum Processing Interim Final Rule ([*Federal Register: Procedures for Credible Fear Screening and Consideration of Asylum, Withholding of Removal, and CAT Protection Claims by Asylum Officers*](#)). The Asylum Division also adjudicates requests for Suspension of Deportation or Special Rule Cancellation of Removal, pursuant to Section 203 of Public Law 105-100 (Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA)). In addition, the Asylum Division conducts credible fear, reasonable fear, and Safe Third Country Agreement screenings.

The Asylum Division complies with USCIS' policies to provide disability accommodations for the public by contracting to provide sign language and deaf interpreters, as needed, at no expense to the public. The Asylum Division also provides relay interpreters for rare or indigenous languages. Often, these interpreters require advance scheduling to ensure availability. Additionally, the Asylum Division is exploring options for providing more support with regard to language services for other vulnerable populations.

Generally, NACARA applicants unable to proceed with the interview in English must provide their own interpreters at their scheduled interviews.

The Asylum Division may provide telephonic interpreters for asylum interviews for unaccompanied children (UCs) if requested, and for Asylum Merits Interviews. The Asylum Division provides telephonic interpreters for credible fear, reasonable fear, and Safe Third Country Agreement threshold screening interviews¹ and Asylum Division procedures mandate that the government provide interpreters to individuals undergoing each of these processes, including when the noncitizens receive an orientation, when they are interviewed for the relevant protection screening determination, and when they are issued a decision or determination.

The Asylum Division has contracted with several interpretation services companies to provide monitoring and interpretation services. The contract interpreters are vetted by the contracting company to ensure that they are qualified and not biased against a person's race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.²

¹ See 8 CFR §§ 208.9(g)(2), 208.30(d)(5), 208.30(e)(6), 208.31(c); 6 U.S.C. § 279(g)(2) (definition of unaccompanied child).

² As required by Section 603(a) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, Pub. L. 105-292, 112 Stat. 2787 (Oct. 27, 1998), as amended.



Additionally, the Asylum Division endeavors to have the maximum number of vetted interpreters on our contracts in all languages to increase interpreter readiness.³

In instances in which asylum officers cannot conduct an asylum interview with the interpreter provided by an applicant because the interpreter is prohibited from serving as an interpreter, or the interpreter is incompetent or has abused their role, asylum officers may use an interpreter contracted by USCIS to provide direct interpretation during the interview to avoid having to reschedule the interview, thus delaying the adjudication process.

Similarly, while 8 CFR § 208.9(g)(1) requires asylum applicants unable to proceed with the interview in English to provide their own interpreter, asylum office directors, in their discretion, considering extraordinary circumstances,⁴ may allow an asylum officer who is certified in the language the asylum applicant speaks and understands to conduct the interview in that language, if the applicant agrees.

Legal administrative specialists, who are properly certified, may serve decisions using a language other than English. Language certification for Asylum staff is on a voluntary basis. Asylum staff who volunteer to become language certified, as described above, must pass a speaking proficiency test conducted by the U.S. Department of State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI). Asylum staff that are eligible to take FSI's exam must self-identify as fluent in the language in which they intend to become certified and then earn a score of 3 (general professional proficiency) or higher. Asylum staff eligibility parameters, include:

- ★ Current position must be asylum officer (including senior asylum officer) or legal administrative specialist;
- ★ Employees must have supervisory approval before engaging with the foreign language certification process, and
- ★ Employees must take the speaking self-assessment.

To note, in the refugee operations context, the only refugee officers who are required to use a second language are those hired as protection screening officers, who are required to speak either Spanish or Haitian Creole. The International and Refugee Affairs Division conducts these language tests during the applicant's interview for the position. They consist of reading a passage in Spanish and translating it orally into English, reading a passage in English and translating it orally into Spanish, and translating a written passage from Spanish

³ Currently the Asylum Division has 3,783 interpreters cleared to work on the interpreter contracts. This number fluctuates, as some contracts come to an end and others begin.

⁴ Extraordinary circumstances may include, but are not limited to, the disqualification of the applicant-provided interpreter.



to English. Spanish language tests are generally conducted by the protection screening officer supervisors. Alternatively, we waive the language testing requirement for those who have previously obtained Spanish language certification from the U.S. Department of State.

Affirmative Asylum Applications

Generally, asylum applicants and witnesses must provide their own interpreter who is at least 18 years of age and fluent in English and a language spoken by the applicant. The interpreter may be a family member, friend, or other person associated with the person who is LEP but cannot be the applicant's current attorney or accredited representative, a representative or employee of the applicant's country of nationality or last habitual residence, an individual with a pending asylum application for which they have not been interviewed, or a witness testifying on behalf of the applicant.

To note, the USCIS Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate's officer training courses include a review of instructive materials on interviewing and working with an interpreter.

On September 23, 2020, USCIS published a temporary final rule requiring certain asylum applicants to use a USCIS-contracted telephonic interpreter at their affirmative asylum interview to keep the USCIS workforce and applicants safe during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The temporary final rule was extended several times until September 12, 2023, after which USCIS returned to the requirement that applicants who are unable to proceed with an affirmative asylum interview in English must provide their own interpreters.

The Asylum Division uses a telephonic interpretation service to monitor asylum interviews to ensure the quality and integrity of the interpretation. If the monitor alerts the officer that the interpreter is not competent to interpret accurately, or if the interpreter has abused their role, the officer may use a telephonic interpreter to complete the interview or may reschedule the interview and require the applicant to bring a competent interpreter to their next appointment.

For asylum applications subject to the ABC settlement agreement, the regulations and policies in effect on October 1, 1990, must be followed. Applicants may choose anyone of any age who is competent to serve as an interpreter, except their attorney or accredited representative of record, or a witness testifying on their behalf. There are no other restrictions.



NACARA 203 Applications

NACARA applicants who are unable to proceed with the interview in English must provide a competent interpreter, at no expense to the government, who is fluent in English and a language in which they are fluent.

For applicants who have submitted both Form I-589, *Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal*, and Form I-881, *Application for Suspension of Deportation or Special Rule Cancellation of Removal (Pursuant to Section 203 of Public Law 105-100 (NACARA))*:

- ★ The following individuals may not serve as the applicant's interpreter (8 CFR § 240.67(b)(3)):
 - An individual who is under 18 years of age;
 - The applicant's attorney or representative of record;
 - A witness testifying on the applicant's behalf; or
 - A representative or employee of the applicant's country of nationality, or if stateless, country of last habitual residence.

For applicants who have submitted Form I-881 only:

- ★ The following individuals may not serve as the applicant's interpreter (8 CFR § 240.67(b)(3)):
 - An individual who is under 18 years of age;
 - The applicant's attorney or representative of record; or
 - A witness testifying on the applicant's behalf.

Many NACARA appointment, procedural, and decision notices are available in English and Spanish.

Screening Processes: Credible Fear, Reasonable Fear, and Safe Third Country Agreement

Currently, the credible fear orientation document (informing the noncitizens of their rights and what to expect during the screening process) is available in 17 languages: English, Arabic, Armenian, Bengali, Dari, French, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Mandarin, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, Uzbek and Wolof. The reasonable fear orientation document is available in English, Haitian-Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish. The Safe Third-Country Agreement orientation document is available in 9 languages: English, French, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Romanian, Spanish, and Bengali.



USCIS has encountered challenges in finding competent linguists to interpret in Indigenous languages of Latin America during screening interviews. USCIS is working with the DHS LAWG to find better ways to communicate with this population in a consistent manner. The following are the African and Latin American Indigenous languages we have encountered most frequently during Fiscal Year 2024:

African

- ★ Amharic
- ★ Arabic
- ★ Bambara
- ★ Fulani
- ★ Kinyarwanda
- ★ Acholi
- ★ Krio
- ★ Mandinka
- ★ Maninka
- ★ Pulaar
- ★ Somali
- ★ Soninke
- ★ Swahili
- ★ Wolof

Latin American

- ★ Akateko
- ★ Kekchi
- ★ Bambara
- ★ Mam
- ★ Misquito/Miskito
- ★ Mixtec
- ★ Mixteco
- ★ Q'eqchi'
- ★ Quechua
- ★ Quiche
- ★ Quiche-Achi
- ★ Quichua
- ★ Quichua-Canar Highland
- ★ Quichua, Salasca Highland

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and ICE officers who make credible fear, reasonable fear, and Safe Third Country referrals to USCIS are required to provide the orientation document to the noncitizens who are being referred to USCIS. If available in the noncitizen's language, translated materials are provided or the information is communicated orally, using an interpreter in a language that the noncitizen understands. Asylum officers ask during the interview if the noncitizen understood the orientation document. If the noncitizen did not understand it, then the asylum officer asks the interpreter to read a verbatim summary of the information in the orientation document to the noncitizen in a language the noncitizen understands.

In March 2021, USCIS and ICE agreed on a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to ensure that ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations personnel inform the Asylum Division as soon as possible when there is a need for a communication disability accommodation – including, but



not limited to individuals who are non-verbal or who may need a sign language interpreter – when referring an individual for a credible fear or a reasonable fear screening.

In July 2022, the Acting Chief of the Asylum Division issued a memo to asylum personnel, “Language Access in Credible Fear Screenings,” implementing changes in response to Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government (January 20, 2021). The memorandum addresses circumstances of noncitizens who speak certain Indigenous languages and other less commonly spoken languages who may face challenges with the credible fear process when USCIS does not have interpreters readily available to facilitate communication in the noncitizen’s preferred language during a credible fear interview. The memo includes specific instructions and factors for asylum officers to consider, including when to issue a Form I-862, Notice to Appear (NTA), without making a credible fear determination. Essentially, the overarching goal is to ensure that the noncitizen has a meaningful access to the process and compliance with the regulatory requirements.

Language Access at USCIS Domestic Field Offices

USCIS domestic field offices handle scheduled interviews for benefit applications. The Field Operations Directorate follows the guidance established in [*The Role and Use of Interpreters in Domestic Field Office Interviews, PM-602-0125.1 \(Jan.17, 2017\)*](#). USCIS is in the process of updating the USCIS Policy Manual to incorporate PM-602-0125.1 and to clarify, in accordance with DHS guidance and the DHS Language Access Plan, that minors may not serve as interpreters during USCIS-conducted interviews, except in rare circumstances.⁵ In this context, USCIS defines a minor as anyone under the age of 18 years old.

The Field Operations Directorate (FOD) updated the Consolidated Handbook of Adjudicative Procedures (CHAP) on March 19, 2024, to reflect the new guidance regarding the non-use of minors as interpreters.

Applicants who are eligible to have an interpreter present at a USCIS-conducted interview should arrange to have an interpreter who is fluent, unbiased, and competent accompany them to the interview. If an applicant appears for an interview without a qualified interpreter, USCIS may offer interpreter services if a USCIS-provided interpreter is readily available or permit the applicant to reschedule the interview for the opportunity to return with an interpreter of their choice.

⁵ Minors between the ages of 14 and 17 years may serve as interpreters only in rare circumstances and only if a qualified adult interpreter cannot be found. Examples of rare circumstances include those involving the life and safety of the applicant, or where the applicant is imminently at risk of aging out or otherwise losing eligibility for the immigration benefit.



USCIS staff who are bilingual may conduct interviews in the language in which they are fluent, provided the applicant agrees. Bilingual FOD staff self-certify that they are fluent before conducting interviews in a language other than English. Further, they document that the interview was conducted in a language other than English. In Fiscal Year 2025, USCIS will start to evaluate potential methods for testing or validating the language skills of bilingual staff who may be conducting interviews.

In limited circumstances, FOD recruits bilingual applicants to serve as Immigration Service Officers (ISOs). Fluency in Spanish is used as a selective placement factor for these targeted recruitments. During this process, ISO level 1 candidates undergo an interview conducted in Spanish. This interview assesses their linguistic abilities, as a selective placement factor.

Additionally, FOD has solicited volunteers who are bilingual to serve on details to support special projects, such as Operation Allies Welcome (OAW). With this detail, FOD allowed employees to self-certify their language proficiency.

Language Access and the Verification Division

The Verification Division (VER) of the Immigration Records and Identity Services Directorate (IRIS) has established a translation contract to support its significant outreach and educational efforts, particularly for the E-Verify Program, Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, and related policies. This contract mandates the translation of various communication materials, including website content, marketing materials, program/user guides, FAQs, training manuals, the M-274, Handbook for Employers, the Form I-9, and customer support correspondence. These translated documents are disseminated through media and the Internet and are used during educational or outreach efforts, catering primarily to U.S. employers and employees.

The primary audience includes U.S. employers mandated to verify employee eligibility through the Form I-9 and E-Verify, as well as employees who must be informed about their rights under the E-Verify Program. To effectively reach these audiences, the Division translates content into Spanish, primarily for employers, and extends its outreach to employees by providing translations in 14 additional languages, including Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, French, Korean, and more. VER leverages a team of USCIS in-house language experts from LSS and the Office of Public Affairs to ensure the quality of translations provided by the contractor. These experts routinely assess translation needs through internal assessments and direct input from requests.

VER has a library of translated documents on its websites (I-9 Central, E-Verify, and SAVE) and has recently translated public-facing materials like the Referral Date Confirmation, DHS



Further Action Notice, and others. Additionally, the contract will soon be updated from 15 languages to 19 languages, further supporting our mission to provide accessible services to diverse populations.

By ensuring that materials are available in multiple languages and by continuously updating strategies based on policies and targeted audiences, VER remains committed to enhancing language access and to ensuring effective communication with all stakeholders involved in the E-Verify, Form I-9, and SAVE process.

Language Access for USCIS Customers Who are Deaf

USCIS provides sign language interpreters for customers who need those services for USCIS appointments, in accordance with requirements. In 2021, USCIS created a [YouTube video in American Sign Language on how to apply for naturalization](#), which currently has 110,000 views. USCIS has recently awarded a contract to a vendor who is interpreting USCIS website content into sign language. Specifically, the content is being interpreted by a Certified Deaf Interpreter to assist customers who are not fluent in American Sign Language. The videos will be posted on the USCIS YouTube channel in Fiscal Year 2025 upon their completion.

Below are links to the USCIS webpages that are being interpreted:

★ [Refugees and Asylum](#)

★ [Asylum](#)

★ [Affirmative Asylum Process](#)

★ [Refugees](#)

★ [I-730](#)

★ [I-765](#)

★ [EAD](#)

USCIS additionally provides meaningful access when there is a need for a communication disability accommodation (or modification) by providing a sign language interpreter for a USCIS appointment or USCIS-sponsored event or use of Pocket Talker, a type of Assistive Listening Device (ALD), during USCIS appointments, including interviews.



CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information in English and Spanish, call the USCIS Contact Center at 1-800-375-5283.

For individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, call 1-800-767-1833 (TTY) or email us at public.engagement@uscis.dhs.gov.

You can file complaints about language access in USCIS programs and activities with DHS CRCL. For more information about filing complaints with CRCL, go to <https://www.dhs.gov/file-civil-rights-complaint> (Make a Civil Rights Complaint | Homeland Security (dhs.gov)). Complaints may be filed in any language.

USE

This plan is intended only to improve the internal management of USCIS's language access program. It does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law, or equity by a party against the United States, its agencies, its officers or employees, or any person.



APPENDIX – KEY TERMS

Bilingual Persons: Persons who are bilingual are fluent in two languages and are able to conduct the business of the workplace in either of those languages. This is to be distinguished from *proficiency* in more than one language. An individual who is proficient in a language may, for example, be able to greet an individual who is LEP in their language, but not conduct agency business in that language. Interpretation and translation require the interpreter to be bilingual, and also require additional specific skills.

Interpretation and translation: Interpretation involves *oral* communication whereas translation involves *written* communication. Interpretation involves the immediate communication of meaning from one language into another. An interpreter conveys meaning orally, as a result, interpretation requires skills different from those needed for translation. Interpreting is a complex task that combines several abilities beyond language competence in order to enable delivery of an effective professional interpretation in a given setting. From the standpoint of the user, a successful interpretation is one that faithfully and accurately conveys the meaning of the source language orally, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context of the source message, without omissions, additions, or embellishments on the part of the interpreter. Professional interpreters are subject to specific codes of conduct and should be trained in interpretive skills, ethics, and subject-matter language. Translation also involves specific skills, experience, and training and may require official certification depending on the context and need of the Component. If bilingual staff are asked to interpret or translate, they should be qualified to do so. Assessment of language ability, training on interpreter ethics and standards, and clear policies that delineate appropriate use of bilingual staff will help ensure the quality of language services and the integrity of DHS programs and services delivery.

Meaningful Access: Meaningful access is the provision of language assistance services that results in accurate, timely, and effective communication at no cost to the person who is LEP. For individuals who are LEP, meaningful access denotes access that is not significantly restricted, delayed, or inferior as compared to programs or activities provided to English proficient individuals.

Persons who are Limited English Proficient: Persons who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. Individuals who are LEP may be competent in English for certain types of communication (e.g., speaking or understanding), but have limited proficiency in English in other areas (e.g., reading or writing). LEP designations are also context-specific; an individual may possess sufficient English language skills to function in one setting, but these skills may be insufficient in other settings.



Vital Document: A vital document is a document that contains information that is critical for obtaining any aid, benefit, or services or is required by law. Vital documents can include: applications; consent and other forms that require signatures; complaint forms; notices of rights; notices on the availability of free language assistance; and letters or notices that require a response from the beneficiary, customer, or noncitizen.

