
Fjölmenningarsetur

Multicultural Information Centre

Multicultural and Information Center's language policy

Purpose

People who work for and look to the Multicultural Information Center (MCC) are of many nationalities and speak many languages. The agency is responsible to adequately guide and assist the customer, in certain cases it is specifically important that instructions and information must be in a language that the person can reasonably be expected to understand. Icelandic or English cannot satisfy these conditions in all cases. MCC is also responsible for providing advice to institutions, companies and municipalities on methods related to the dissemination of information to people with diverse backgrounds, while promoting the active participation of immigrants in society. It is important that the activities and methods used for information sharing and communication by the employees at MCC set a good example of intercultural language appropriate use.

To eliminate uncertainty about language use, and make the organization's working methods more professional, reliable, and efficient, it is therefore necessary to establish a policy regarding when texts used by the organization's employees in their work should be translated or interpreted and when not.

According to article 8. [Act on the status of the Icelandic language and Icelandic sign language](#) 61/2011 *Government official language. Icelandic is the language of the Alþingi, the courts, the government, both state and local governments, schools at all school levels and other institutions that are responsible for construction projects and provide public services.*

English is however the language most people who seek services at MCC seem to understand or attempt to communicate through. English is also the easiest language to translate with the help of translation programs, and therefore the most likely that customers will be able to use such services if they choose.

Translations are mostly a purchased service, and therefore it is not possible to translate all the text that the organization works with. However, it is clear that time, energy and money can be saved if as many people as possible immediately understand the text that the organization sends out.

By translating standard letters, promotional material and various common answers for advice, a certain efficiency in service is achieved. The same text can be translated once instead of the staff helping with the translation from Icelandic to English every time there is a request.

Legal basis for policy on language use

- [Lög um málefni innflytjenda \(law on immigrant affairs\)](#)

The objective of the law on immigrant affairs issues no. 116/2012 is to promote a society where everyone can be an active participant regardless of nationality and origin. The role of the Multicultural

Center is defined in the law, but it is i.a. to provide advice to the government and local authorities in relation to immigration issues.

- Article 3 The role of the Multicultural Center.

- The projects of the Cultural Center include:

- a. provide advice and information to the government, institutions, companies, associations and individuals in relation to immigration issues

- b. advise local authorities in welcoming immigrants who move to the municipality

- c. compile and share information about the rights and obligations of immigrants d. monitor the development of immigration issues in society, including information gathering, analysis and dissemination of information

Below you will find the main legal principles on which the policy is based. The Parliamentary Ombudsman issued an opinion on 13 July 2020 (Case no. 9938/2018) which contains a summary of both registered and unregistered rules on language use in Icelandic administration.

- [8. gr. laga um stöðu íslenskrar tungu og íslensks táknmáls](#)

Icelandic is the language of the Alþingi, the courts, the government, both state and local governments, schools at all school levels and other institutions that are responsible for construction projects and provide public services.

In the comments in the report on this provision, it says, among other things:

"If an exception to the principle is to be made, there must be a special authority for it in the law. When there is a need for a text to be published in a language other than Icelandic, it must be done with a translation of the original Icelandic text. In many areas, especially in the administration, communication must take place on other issues, and here we can mention the communication between the Icelandic authorities and the authorities of individual foreign countries and communication with international organizations and organizations, oral communication between the government and the citizens, e.g. in fields related to foreigners living here."

- [Norræni Tungumálasáttmálinn](#)

The Nordic Language Convention applies to oral and written communication between citizens and the government. Citizens of the Nordic countries should be able to use their own language when communicating with the government as needed. The languages in question are in addition to Icelandic: Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, Faroese, Greenlandic and Sami. The agreement applies to oral and written communications. The government must provide an interpreter or document translator to the litigant free of charge.

If both parties understand e.g. English, on the other hand, the government is almost obliged to use an interpreter.

Instructions must be in writing and/or available on visual or audio media and in a language that the applicant can reasonably be expected to understand. In the case of an unaccompanied child, instructions must be in accordance with the child's age and development.

- [Law on equal treatment outside the labor market.](#)

A multicultural center sees ethnic origin and language skills as intertwined issues. The Multicultural Center is responsible for ensuring access to information and services for people of many ethnic origins and thus many languages. Our responsibility can be interpreted in following and preserving the rights defined in the law on equal treatment, regardless of race and national origin and having a certain value in the use of languages. Especially the following paragraph:

2. gr. Objective

The aim of this law is to combat discrimination and establish and maintain equal treatment of individuals regardless of race and ethnic origin in all areas of society, outside the labor market, cf. law on equal treatment in the labor market.

9. gr. Prohibition against discrimination in relation to trade in goods and services

Discrimination of any kind on the basis of race or national origin in relation to access to or delivery of goods is prohibited. The same applies to services and access to services and also to housing that is available to the public. However, this provision does not apply to transactions in the field of private and family life.

Objectives of the Multicultural Information Center's policy on language use

- To ensure adequate access for immigrants in Iceland to information and services provided by the Multicultural Information Center, regardless of origin or language skills.
- To ensure that employees of diverse backgrounds working at the Multicultural Information Center of foreign origin or with a mother tongue other than Icelandic, experience a safe space to adapt to the Icelandic language.
- To be a model for other organizations, companies, associations and/or public bodies regarding the use of interpreters and translation services both in practice and in consultancy.
- To ensure that the employees of the Multicultural Information Center have the opportunity to use any language skills in other languages alongside Icelandic in their work.

All standard texts prepared by the institute must be in a minimum of English and Icelandic. Text that the organization sends out and presents on the organization's website must be in English whenever possible without undue effort and cost.

All of the organization's communications, both written and verbal, are conducted in such a way that they are easily understood by the recipient and it is not difficult for the person to respond to them. All written texts of the organization should be in clear, good English and Icelandic, which can be easily translated into other languages without the risk of misunderstanding.

According to the MCC's Equality Policy, "*..must take care of gender integration in its activities. In particular, care must be taken to ensure that gender, religion, race, ethnicity, economic status, sexual orientation in other respects are not discriminated against when creating information for promotional material made by the organization*".

Employees at MCC of foreign origin with a mother tongue other than Icelandic shall have the opportunity to attend Icelandic lessons as part of lifelong learning and professional development programs, during working hours when necessary. Methods must also be sought to ensure that

employees who are learning Icelandic or improving their Icelandic skills receive appropriate support and encouragement from colleagues who speak Icelandic.

Procedure

1. Data related to operations and various standard answers and letters

All original text of documents, policies, reports, communications, etc. regarding the operation of the Multicultural Center must be in Icelandic and be in as good and simple a language as possible. The above-mentioned documents published on the website of the Multicultural Center should be published in at least Icelandic, English, and Polish.

Most standard answers for advice or clarification/instructions on the process of other institutions and/or services to a municipality must be available in Icelandic, English, and Polish. If an employee is working with a standard text that is to be translated, he must, in consultation with his immediate superior, either translate the text himself or send it for translation.

Data related to the handling, communication and processing of cases between institutions and partners on behalf of the Icelandic government and/or municipalities, e.g. forms, references, requests for additional data or explanations and information sheets must be available in Icelandic. (this includes data and communications related to reimbursements to municipalities for financial assistance to foreign nationals, coordinated reception of refugees, actions related to the implementation plan on immigration issues, comment on parliamentary issues or other issues from the authorities, memos or formal letters to the authorities and other projects that MCC is mandated by the government.) Data related to these same formal documents regarding customers who speak a language other than Icelandic must have access to them must be either translated into their mother language or through the use of a translator explained to them.

2. Digital information sharing and promotional materials

All information that appears on the MCC website and promotional material must be in Icelandic, English and Polish at least, and methods must also be sought to publish the material in as many languages as possible. The website must use English and Icelandic equally as the main language to communicate information, where a translation application can be activated to increase accessibility in as many languages as possible.

Also, every effort should be made to publish content that is easy to understand without the need for translation, for example with visuals (with explanatory pictures) and/or applications that use spoken words in multiple languages or text.

Promotional material produced by MCC must be translated into as many languages as possible. Special consideration should be given to the promotional materials related to the dissemination of information to refugees or those who are in a particularly vulnerable situation and need detailed information as much as possible.

3. Spoken language and use of interpreting services

Employees of MCC who speak, read and write more languages than Icelandic are encouraged to use those languages in their work when creating content for the dissemination of information on our website, in communication with customers and international contacts due to cooperation or communication with organizations abroad.

MCC employees must use interpretation services when they deem it necessary to ensure effective communication with customers. Employees order interpretation services defined in the [government procurement contract](#) (Ríkiskaup), unless the language is not available from the parties defined in the government procurement framework agreements.

4. Translations according to legal obligation

MCC complies with the laws and regulations that apply to language use and the institution's activities, including obligations on the basis of Nordic cooperation. Instructions, letters and decisions, as well as communications with the organization's applicants/customers are translated when the law requires it beyond what is stated in Articles 1 - 3.

5. Translations beyond legal obligation

Instructions, letters, and information as well as other communications that fall outside the rules in Articles 1 - 4. shall be translated into English and Polish at least if this can be done without significant effort and expense on the part of the institution.

6. Responsibility for work rules

These work rules must be reviewed regularly. Responsibility for implementation, review and improvement rests with the director in consultation with the employees of the Multicultural Centre, and if there is a need for changes to the rules within a certain time frame.