

From the Action Plan to Reduce Rough Sleeping Among Central and Eastern Europeans in London comes...

HOW TO: Help your clients communicate

What is this guide for?

This guide is for those working with homeless people from Central and Eastern Europe (A8 and A2 countries) to enable them to help their clients communicate.

Why use this guide?

This guide is based on the principle that clients should be encouraged and supported to learn English to enable them to live and work successfully and independently in the UK. However it also gives information on translation and interpretation services for emergencies and the short-term. You should use this guide to help you think about how you can assist your Central and Eastern European clients to communicate both in emergencies and in the long-term.

How do I do it?

1. Basic information

You should first of all ensure that clients are aware of what your service offers and that at least basic information that they may need is available to them in a language they understand. This means identifying communication barriers and taking reasonable steps to remove these. It could include having information about your service translated into different languages, or having staff learn basic phrases in those languages so that they are able to provide a welcoming reception to clients. Make sure that translated information that is frequently needed, such as on living and working in the UK, is available. You do not need to translate everything yourself, as there are many publications already available with information that has been translated. For a list of publications visit:

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/issues/EU10s/resources>.

2. Translation and interpretation

Where clients need more assistance than you can provide through translated materials but they are unable to communicate in English, you will need to have access to interpreters. This should always be viewed as a short-term, emergency response to an individual, and you should be advising and encouraging your clients to begin to learn and practise speaking English as soon as possible.



There are a number of ways you can access interpreting services:

- Speak to your local authority to see if it already has a service that you may be able to use
- Approach an independent interpreter; consulate websites have details of recommended providers - for a list of consulate websites see <http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/issues/EU10s/policyandinfo/issues/EU10s/consulinfo.pdf>
- Use language line (www.languageline.co.uk), a telephone based interpreting service that has special rates for voluntary organisations.

However you should be aware that each of these options will require resources. An alternative approach is to use volunteer translators/interpreters. You could do this either for one-off sessions, for example to conduct focus groups to help you better understand the needs of your clients, or to have a regular bank of volunteers who can respond to emergencies. For further information on this see *HOW TO: Recruit volunteers who speak Central and Eastern European languages* (available at <http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/issues/EU10s>). Similarly, you could include language skills as a desirable feature in new job descriptions for paid staff.

3. Language classes

As part of all your services you should be encouraging your clients to improve their English in order to have a greater chance of success in living independently in the UK. Many English classes are available and you should support your clients to identify one that is appropriate to their needs in terms of the level of English it requires learners to have already, the location, and the times it runs.

In the first instance, you should visit the English language pages at Directgov here: http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/ImprovingYourSkills/DG_10037499. This will allow you to search for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes taking place in your area. It also provides links to online resources to help with learning English, such as the BBC Learning English and British Council pages. You should encourage your clients to engage with this mainstream provision wherever possible rather than relying on homelessness services.

Where you are unable to find a suitable class here, you can also try contacting other voluntary sector organisations to see if they run classes and to check availability of places. Crisis Skylight offers ESOL classes at different levels to homeless people; visit <http://www.crisis.org.uk/page.builder/esol-class.html> for more information.

If you are still unable to find a suitable class for your clients, you can arrange to run some classes yourself. In doing so, you will need to consider:

- a) The level at which the classes will be run - some clients may need very basic conversational English, while others may require more advanced accredited ESOL tuition
- b) Who will deliver the classes - you could contact your local college and work in partnership with them to develop ESOL classes, or for more informal learning volunteers may be appropriate
- c) The times of your classes - those who are working may be unable to attend during the day
- d) What incentives you are able to offer - this is important to keep clients engaged and you should be clear about the incentives and benefits and promote them as



visibly as possible. These might include accreditation, payment of expenses, food and social benefits.

Top tips to help your clients communicate

1. Don't think you have to translate everything yourself - find out what is available already
2. Encourage your clients to learn English for themselves as much as possible
3. Have translated basic information readily available at your service
4. Know where to access interpreters and translators in an emergency
5. Where you need interpreters frequently, try recruiting volunteers or staff with language skills
6. Support your clients to access mainstream local ESOL classes where possible.

What are you doing?

We hope that you have found this information useful. If you are supporting A8 and A2 nationals to communicate please tell us your experiences by emailing Joanne.Crellen@homelesslink.org.uk.

