

Training and certification of social interpreters and translators in Flanders

AGENTSCHAP
INTEGRATIE &
INBURGERING



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1.

For whom is this document intended?

This document is intended for professionals who wish to learn more about the training and certification of social interpreters and translators in Flanders.

- What type of quality standards do social interpreters or translators need to meet?
- What does the training look like?
- What is tested during the certification exam?
- What is the value of the certificate?

These are the types of questions that this document will provide an answer to.

This document also exists in French and Dutch.

2.

Who are we?

It is the Agency for Integration and Civic Integration 's role to enhance the development of social interpreting and translation in Flanders.

- We deliver guidance and support in the domain of social interpreting and translation.
- We are recognised as the training and testing centre for social interpreters and translators in Flanders.
- We are a centre of expertise for social interpreting and translating.

3.

History and current situation

Belgium is a **federal state with three official languages:**

1. About sixty percent of the population speaks Dutch. Dutch is the official language in Flanders and one of the two official languages in the Brussels-Capital Region.
2. Forty percent speaks French. French is the official language in Wallonia and one of the two official languages in the Brussels-Capital Region.
3. Less than one percent of Belgians lives in Eupen-Malmedy and speaks German.

Belgium's cultural and linguistic diversity gave rise to a complex political system comprising three communities (the Flemish, French and German speaking communities) and three regions (the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels Capital region).

The communities are in charge of the civic integration programme for migrants.

As a result, the Flemish community organises social interpreting and translation services in Flanders.

A short history of social interpreting and translation

• **Second half of the 20th century:**

- As more and more migrants arrive, the need for language assistance increases. At first, informal interpreters are called upon. Informal interpreters are fellow countrymen or family members who are emergent Dutch speakers.
- Apart from interpreting and translation in courts and asylum procedures, language assistance is soon required in the field of social services as well. As a result, the term 'social interpreting and translation' is coined.

• **The end of the 20th century:** The first social interpreting and translating agencies are created in order to professionalise and structuralise the services of both social interpreters and translators. The agencies receive and delegate assignments to their network of social interpreters and translators.

• **2004:** The Flemish government creates a central training and testing centre for social interpreters and translators. Its mission is to further professionalise interpreting and translation services by training and testing social interpreters and translators.

• **2009:** The Flemish Civic Integration Decree outlines the sector of social interpreting and translation in Flanders. It requires that caregivers and service providers use both certified interpreters and translators when available.

• **2015:** Both the social interpreting and translation agencies and the training and testing centre become part of the new Flemish Agency for Civic Integration.

4.

Social interpreting and translation today

What, for whom and why?

The Flemish Civic Integration Decree defines social interpreting and translation as follows:

- “*Social interpreting is an instrument which enables users to communicate orally with clients who speak different languages by completely and accurately converting a message from a source language into a target language*”.
- “*Social translating is an instrument which enables users to communicate in writing with clients who speak different languages by rendering a written message completely and accurately from a source language into a target language.*”

The term ‘users’ refers to service providers and public administrations. In effect, social interpreting and translation occur after instruction by a service provider, public body, caregiver or civil servant.

There are two **main objectives**:

- To provide each citizen, including citizens with limited Dutch proficiency, access to social and public services.
- To enable each citizen, including citizens with limited Dutch proficiency, to exercise his rights and fulfill his duties.

Flemish service providers and government administrations from the following fields may call on social interpreters and translators:

- public services
- employment services
- health care
- mental health care
- education
- well-being
- social housing
- civic integration
- shelter of asylum seekers

Clearly both social interpreting and translation are well-defined activities. The following activities, however, are neither considered social interpreting nor social translation:

- cultural mediation
- interpreting and translation in a court of law,
- interpreting and translation in asylum procedures
- interpreting and translation in conferences.

Social interpreting

Work setting of social interpreters

Social interpreters interpret conversations between caregivers or civil servants and their clients.

This is mostly done in the consecutive mode. Only on rare occasions social interpreting is done simultaneously.

Social interpreting occurs in various forms:

- Phone and video remote interpreting
- Face-to-face interpreting
- Interpreting for groups

Deontology of social interpreters

Social interpreters are bound by a **code of ethics**.

The interpreter introduces himself to all involved parties at the beginning of each assignment. He also explains the general ethical principles he must adhere to.

These are the **general ethical principles** included in the code of ethics for social interpreters:

Confidentiality

Interpreters maintain confidentiality at all times and do not disclose information they receive during or as a result of assignments. Interpreters are in any case bound by their duty to observe confidentiality and in some cases also by professional secrecy.

Neutrality

Interpreters remain neutral (impartial) and objective before, during and after assignments.

Completeness

Interpreters render what is being said completely and accurately without omitting, adding or altering information.

Transparency

Interpreters provide insight into all they do or say to the involved parties. For instance, interpreters will notify all parties when reacting to a question that is directed at the interpreter himself, referring to the code of ethics or requesting clarification from either party.

Professional Conduct

Interpreters conduct themselves professionally at all times and treat all parties with respect. Interpreters inform the parties of their role as interpreters and take responsibility for providing quality service.

Social Translation

Work setting of social translators

Social translators translate:

- **informative documents:** texts drawn up in Dutch by public bodies or social services intended for their clients or target audience with limited proficiency in Dutch.
- **official documents:** legal documents for government institutions or services; this type of official translations usually requires legalisation by a court of law.

Deontology of social translators

Social translators are bound by a **code of ethics**.

These are the **general ethical principles** included in the code of ethics for social translators:

Confidentiality

Translators maintain confidentiality at all times and do not disclose information they receive during or as a result of assignments. Translators are in any case bound by their duty to observe confidentiality and in some cases also by professional secrecy.

Neutrality

Translators remain neutral (impartial) and objective when they are assigned a translation.

Completeness

Translators render what is being said completely and accurately without omitting, adding or altering information.

Transparency

Translators clearly mark any translator notes or clarifications in their translation. Translators report to the social translation agency when encountering difficulties with specific terminology (including puns).

Professional conduct

Translators are committed to providing quality service, respect the terms of agreement and conduct themselves professionally when dealing with the translation agency.

5.

Training and Certification

Candidates have **two possibilities** to become a certified social interpreter or translator.

1. *Candidates who have not acquired the necessary competences* (they have not taken any related courses or have little or no experience as a social interpreter or translator): these candidates should enrol in the **training programme**. Basic training courses in social interpreting and translation are offered. Candidates will take the certification exam after completing the course.
2. *Candidates who have previously acquired the necessary competences or skills*: they do not necessarily benefit from extra training. Consequently, these candidates are allowed to take the certification exam without additional training.

Below you will find more information on the training programmes and certification exams for social interpreters and translators.

Training programmes social interpreting and translation

The training programme for social interpreters and translators consists of three components:

1. **Language test Dutch**
2. **Information session**
3. **Basic training course**

Language Test

Candidates are required to pass a language test before being allowed to participate in the training programme. Candidates must meet the requirements of the **B2-level** in Dutch according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Exemptions are granted in some cases.

Information Session

After passing the exam, candidates participate in **an information session** for the duration of one day. During this session, candidates learn about the profession (competences, regulations), its future opportunities (job stability, remuneration) and how to obtain the certificate. Candidates will decide whether they are interested in pursuing a career in social interpreting or translation and which programme is better suited for them based on this information.

Basic Training Course

Basic Training Course Social Interpreting

Candidates proceed to the **basic training course social interpreting**.

The training centre organises the training course in cooperation with the Flemish University Faculties of Interpreting. Both trainers employed by the centre (experienced certified social interpreters) and by the faculties teach classes during the basic training programme.

The basic training programme includes 130 hours of classes and consists of **two modules** of respectively 49 and 81 hours. During the final three hours of the first module all candidates take a test. Only those who pass the test may proceed to the second module. Each year the training centre organizes ten modules 1 and three modules 2.

During the course there is no language instruction, which means it is not a language course. All classes are taught in Dutch. The aim is to teach technical skills that are essential to interpretation. If possible, each candidate is paired up with a language partner (a candidate with a shared target language other than Dutch) so that they may give each other feedback through peer review.

The content of the training is entirely based on the four key competences of social interpreting. Those four competences are determined by the “Standard”, a function profile in which the Flemish government sums up all the competences, success criteria, knowledge requirements and even a number of evaluation guidelines.

During module 1 candidates are instructed in basic skills: interpreting techniques, note-taking, deontology, paraphrasing and terminology.

During module 2 candidates improve upon their skills through practical exercises and role plays. Moreover, they expand their knowledge of the non-profit sector. Throughout the training candidates are also prepared for the certification exam. They take part in a practice session during which the exam procedure is elaborated on and candidates practise with realistic testing materials.

Basic Training Course Social Translation

Candidates proceed to the **basic training course social translation**.

The training centre organises the training course twice a year in cooperation with the Flemish faculties for Master of Arts in Translation. It employs both its own trainers and faculty staff to teach the classes.

The training takes up 70 hours in total. It is divided into two modules:

- A module of 28 hours (traditional classroom learning)
- A module of 42 hours (12 hours of classroom and 30 hours of distance learning).

During the course there is no language instruction, which means it is not a language course. All classes are taught in Dutch. The aim is to teach the necessary translation skills. If possible, each candidate is paired up with a language partner (a candidate with a shared target language other than Dutch) so that they may give each other feedback through peer review.

The content of the training is entirely based on the four key competences of social translation. Those four competences are determined by the “Standard”, a function profile in which the Flemish government sums up all the competences, criteria for success, knowledge requirements and even a number of evaluation guidelines.

During module 1 candidates are instructed in basic skills: translation science, translation process, deontology, translation technology and terminology.

During module 2 candidates improve upon their skills by carrying out translation assignments combined with coaching, self evaluation and peer review. Moreover, they expand their knowledge of the non-profit sector. Throughout the training candidates are also continually prepared for the certification exam. Additionally, they take part in a practice session during which the exam procedure is elaborated on and candidates practise with realistic testing materials.

Exams for social interpreting and translation

Test centre social interpreting and translation

The test centre for social interpreting and translation has been organising certification exams in different language combinations since 2004. It gives priority to languages that are in demand with the interpreting and translation agencies. The test centre has the capacity to organise one hundred and sixty interpreting and eighty translation exams per year.

The average success rate for certification exams for interpreters is 30 percent. The average success rate for certification exams for translators is a little lower at 26 percent.

After taking their exams, candidates may review them and receive feedback and further advice at the test centre.

Candidate interpreters also have the possibility to receive advice before taking the exam regarding their potential to pass during a personal interview at the centre.

Certification exam social interpreting

What does the exam assess?

The certification exam assesses whether a candidate possesses the key competences and knowledge requirements as described in the “Standard”.

A social interpreter possesses the following key competences:

1. process oral messages
2. reproduce oral messages
3. comply with the code of ethics
4. resolve ethical conflicts

A social interpreter has acquired the B2-level in understanding and speaking both Dutch and an additional language according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages¹.

¹ For more information go to http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1_en.asp

Who are the jurors?

There are three to four jury members.

There are always **two jurors** assessing the candidate's level of **Dutch, knowledge of the code of ethics and interpreting techniques**.

One of these two jurors also sits as the chairman and is in charge of watching over the test procedure.

Either **one or two jurors** assess the level in the **additional language**. In the case of common languages two jurors are required. This is the case for Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian, Danish, German, English, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Standard Arabic, Standard Chinese and Turkish. In the case of less common languages there is only one juror assessing the additional language.

How do we test?

A certification exam consists of four components: a language test Dutch, a language test in the second language and two role plays.

Language test Dutch/Second Language

During the language test the jurors assess whether the candidate's language skills both in Dutch and the additional language meet the standards of the B2-level of the CEFR regarding listening comprehension and speech production.

The candidate listens to an **audio recording** about a social topic. The candidate needs to answer six questions about the content of the recording. The questions are aimed at testing the candidate's **listening comprehension skills**.

Next the candidate's **speaking skills** are evaluated: he is asked to **describe** a series of **pictures** depicting a typical scene from the non-profit sector.

The candidate passes the language test if he passes both parts.

Role plays

A role play is a simulation of a real interpreting situation in the non-profit sector in Flanders. A Dutch speaking care provider/user speaks to a client with limited Dutch proficiency in a relevant social setting. The candidate plays the part of the interpreter.

Either a certified social interpreter (in the case of less common languages) or the additional language juror (when two jurors assess the additional language or certified social interpreters were not available) plays the part of the client with limited Dutch proficiency.

Description of role plays

- Role plays depict a relevant theme from the non-profit sector where social interpreters are active.
- Each role play lasts about **15 minutes**.
- Role plays contain a number of terminology problems. The jury evaluates how the candidate translates **general vocabulary, specific terms, acronyms and idiomatic expressions**.
- The jury evaluates whether the candidate has knowledge of and applies the ethical principles.

- Both the care provider/user and client confront the interpreter with ethical conflicts that the candidate is expected to handle.
- Role plays contain a 2-minute long message that the candidate is expected to interpret in the consecutive mode.

In summary, role plays **test all four of the key competences** and re-evaluate **the B2-level in both languages**.

While candidates are allowed to take notes during role plays, they are not allowed to use resources such as terminology lists or dictionaries.

Candidates pass when they prove they possess the four key competences and meet the B2-level in both languages.

End result

If a candidate passes all four of the exam components and successfully finishes the test within the time limit of 90 minutes, he **passes** the certification exam. He will then receive the **certificate of social interpreter**.

The certificate is awarded for a specific language combination, namely the combination of Dutch and an additional language. Candidates can obtain the certificate in different combinations of Dutch and an additional language.

Each certified social interpreter may choose to be registered in the **Flemish Register for social interpreters**. All of the interpreting agencies have access to this register. On October 15th 2014, the Flemish Register for social interpreters included 382 certificates.

If a candidate does not pass either one of the four exam components he fails the exam.

Candidates are allowed to **take the exam over**. They can be exempt from certain components. Each candidate is allowed to take two certification exams per year in the same language combination.

All of the exam components are recorded digitally. The role plays are also recorded on video. Hence, candidates who wish to retake the exam have the possibility to view their test recordings and be advised by a test centre employee.

Certification exam social translation

What does the exam assess?

The certification exam assesses whether a candidate possesses the key competences and knowledge requirements as described in the competence profile social translator.

A social translator possesses the following **key competences**:

- process written messages
- reproduce written messages
- comply with the code of ethics
- work with the internet and relevant software

A social translator has acquired the C1-level in reading and writing in Dutch or another language (depending on the target language) according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages².

² For more information go to http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1_en.asp

How do we test?

A certification exam consists of three components: **a translation test, a reading comprehension test and a knowledge test on the code of ethics.**

Translation test

The translation test assesses three competences:

- reproduce written messages
- comply with the code of ethics
- work with the internet and relevant software

The candidate translates three to four documents. The source materials are authentic and relevant since they are actually used and translated in the non-profit sector.

The candidate takes the exam using a computer. He is allowed to use all types of resources such as dictionaries, terminology lists or the internet. He is not allowed, however, to use his mobile phone, e-mail or social networks.

If a candidate succeeds at transferring the source materials correctly, accurately and completely into the chosen target language within 120 minutes, he passes the translation test.

Reading comprehension test

The reading comprehension test assesses whether the candidate is able to **process written messages.**

The candidate reads a text in the source language and answers 10 multiple choice questions. The text is an authentic document that deals with a social topic and reads at the C1-level according to the European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The use of resources is not allowed during this component.

Knowledge test code of ethics

The knowledge test assesses whether the candidate is able to conduct himself according to the code of ethics of social translation.

The candidate solves two case studies and motivates his answers in writing in Dutch.

The candidate is allowed to consult the code of ethics and working agreement of social translators during this component.

If the candidate applies the code of ethics correctly and respects the working agreement he passes the knowledge test.

Who are the jurors?

Each exam component is assessed separately by one or two jurors. The jurors are selected based on their expertise linked to each exam component. They judge the candidate's performance independently from one another.

Language test

The language test is assessed by two jurors in the case of common languages. In the case of less common languages the language test is assessed by a single juror.

The language test assessment procedure has **two phases**:

1. First reading: **language skills** assessment by jurors who are native or near-native speakers in the **target language**.

The assessors evaluate whether the translation meets the requirements of the C1-level according to the CEFR.

2. Second reading: **translation skills** assessment by jurors who are native or near-native speakers both in **the source and target languages**.

The assessors evaluate whether the translation is a complete, accurate and correct version of the source text.

The candidate successfully completes the translation test if all of the jurors judge independently after the first and the second readings that the candidate passes the test.

Reading comprehension test and knowledge test code of ethics

A test centre employee corrects the reading comprehension and knowledge tests.

The success rate is 70% for each component.

End result

A candidate **passes** the certification exam if he completes the three exam components successfully. He then receives **the certificate of social translator**.

Each certificate is issued for translation in one specific direction. It always involves the combination of Dutch and an additional language. Candidates may receive certificates for translation in both directions and in different language combinations.

Each certified social translator may choose to be registered in the **Flemish Register for social translators**. All of the translation agencies have access to this register. On October 15th 2014, the Flemish Register for social translators included 131 certificates.

If a candidate does not pass either one of the three exam components he **fails** the exam.

Candidates are allowed to **take the exam over**. They can be **exempt** from certain components. Each candidate is entitled to three certification exams in the same direction of the same language combination.

If a candidate wishes to retake the exam, he has the possibility to look through his **file and scoring rubrics** while receiving advice on how to prepare adequately for the next examination.

Complaints Committee

In the event a candidate should disagree with the jury's assessment of his performance during a social interpreting or translation exam, it is possible to request a re-evaluation. He should address his re-evaluation request to the complaints committee and clearly state and motivate his reasons.

If the committee accepts his complaint, his exam recordings will be re-evaluated by the committee or an independent jury who will pass a new judgment autonomously.

Professional Development

Certified social interpreters should undertake professional development to continue to progress. Therefore, the training centre offers professional development opportunities to social interpreters. The training centre collaborates with professors from the Flemish Faculties of Interpreting and Translation and health care and civic integration experts. The courses are free of charge.

Certified social interpreters may choose between the following courses:

1. Long consecutive
2. Whispered interpreting
3. General health care
4. Mental health care
5. Civic integration
6. Coping
7. Voice training

Contact us

Would you like to know more? Contact us via **info@sociaaltolkenenvertalen.be**

Colophon

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