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Mapping the situation of community interpreting in the Czech Republic / Mapeo de la situación de la interpretación en los servicios públicos en la República Checa

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Abstract: In this article, we delve into the current community interpreting situation in the Czech Republic, focusing on several aspects directly linked to this topic. Our primary objective is to analyze the community interpreting market, particularly in relation to the absence of qualification requirements for community interpreters. As a result of this state of affairs, four groups of interpreters provide these services: professional interpreters, non-professional interpreters, intercultural workers and ad hoc interpreters who work privately, through NGOs, or as contractors of state institutions. We examine the training options and certification processes available in the Czech Republic and address the new challenges that have arisen with the outbreak of the migration crisis in 2022, including short-term and long-term responses. The roles of NGOs and academia in shaping the profile of community interpreters in the Czech Republic are also explored, given that there is no official registration of this profession with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Our study combines descriptive and empirical approaches, presenting up-to-date data on training for community interpreters, specifically within the project under the National Restoration Plan funded by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, we present the findings of our research

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conducted in collaboration with NGOs that aimed to map the current situation of community interpreting services they provide. The Institute of Translation Studies at Charles University closely cooperates with various stakeholders in the field of community interpreting, which enables us to provide an adequate overview of the current situation in this area.

Keywords: Community interpreting; Intercultural work; Professionalization of interpreting; NGO

Resumen: Este artículo se adentra en la situación actual de la interpretación comunitaria en la República Checa, prestando especial atención a varios aspectos relacionados directamente con este tema. El objetivo principal es analizar el mercado de la interpretación comunitaria, principalmente en relación con la ausencia de requisitos de cualificación para los intérpretes comunitarios. El resultado de esta situación es que hay cuatro grupos de intérpretes prestando activamente estos servicios: intérpretes profesionales, intérpretes no profesionales, trabajadores interculturales e intérpretes ad hoc que trabajan de forma privada, a través de ONG o como contratistas de instituciones estatales. En este trabajo examinamos las opciones de formación disponibles y los procesos de certificación en la República Checa, además de abordar los nuevos retos que han surgido con el estallido de la crisis migratoria en 2022, incluidas las respuestas a corto y largo plazo. También se exploran las funciones de las ONG y el mundo académico en la configuración del perfil de los intérpretes comunitarios en la República Checa, dado que no existe un registro oficial de esta profesión en el Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. Nuestro estudio combina enfoques descriptivos y empíricos, presentando datos actualizados sobre la formación de intérpretes comunitarios, concretamente dentro del proyecto del Plan Nacional de Restauración financiado por el Ministerio de Educación. Además, presentamos los resultados de nuestra investigación realizada en colaboración con varias ONG, al objeto de trazar un mapa actual de los servicios de interpretación comunitaria que prestan. El Instituto de Estudios de Traducción de la Universidad Carolina colabora estrechamente con diversas partes interesadas en el campo de la interpretación comunitaria, lo que nos permite ofrecer una visión adecuada de la situación actual en este ámbito de estudio.

Palabras clave: Interpretación comunitaria; Trabajo intercultural; Profesionalización de la interpretación, ONG

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1. Introduction and background

Before the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989, strict political restrictions limited immigration to the country, allowing only individuals from certain countries to settle there. It was only after the fall of communism and the subsequent opening of the labor market that a wave of immigration to Czechoslovakia began. This influx created a growing demand for community interpreting services, which thrived in the 1990s and beyond. On January 1, 1993, Czechoslovakia underwent a peaceful dissolution, resulting in the establishment of

the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. This division also influenced translation and interpreting activities, including training programs, which became aligned with the respective national languages.

In this article, we provide an overview of the community interpreting market in the Czech Republic, shedding light on its historical development, existing strengths and weaknesses, and potential avenues for advancement. By analyzing the current state of affairs and identifying areas for improvement, we seek to lay the groundwork for future initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality and professionalism of community interpreting services.

The teaching of community interpreting in the Czech Republic has a relatively brief history. It was not until 2000 that the Institute of Translation Studies (Ústav *translatologie*, hereafter referred to as ÚTRL) at Charles University initiated a dialogue between interpreting and translation agencies and ÚTRL staff to address the specific aspects of interpreting for asylum seekers, as well as the potential for interpreting services between Czech and underrepresented languages. This initiative resulted in the publication of the first Czech article on this subject (Čeňková, 2001) and presentations on community interpreting at specialized translation and interpreting conferences hosted by Czech universities. The term *komunitní tlumočení* (community/public service interpreting) was first used in 2001 during a conference in the Czech Republic.

In the 2002-2003 academic year, ÚTRL decided to incorporate Community Interpreting (CI) into the scope of its research endeavors. Subsequently, students were afforded the opportunity to undertake coursework and write diploma theses on this subject matter. Within a year, the department witnessed the defense of the first master's thesis focused on interpreting in institutions catering to asylum seekers, authored by Lucie Nakládalová (2005) and entitled *Komunitní tlumočení v azylových zařízeních České republiky* (Community Interpreting in Asylums in the Czech Republic). From 2006 to 2008, several additional course papers were dedicated to the study of CI, culminating in the successful defense of the second master's thesis, authored by Jana Gutvirthová (2008) and titled *Komunitní tlumočnická a jeho role v azylovém zařízení s čínsky hovořícími migranty* (The role of the interpreter in asylum procedures involving Chinese-speaking migrants), which focused on community interpreting for Chinese-speaking asylum seekers.

Subsequently, during the 2007-2008 academic year, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic awarded a grant to develop a lifelong learning course in community interpreting. This initiative was presented at an international round table organized by the Czech Union of Interpreters and Translators (JTP) in November 2008, which was dedicated solely to CI. Several esteemed experts in the field, including Franz Pöchhacker, Helge Niska, and Greta Vanhassel, took part in the event alongside representatives from Czech public institutions.

The preparation of the course materials led to the development of two additional diploma theses. The first of these, defended in 2008 by Dita Kotašová, titled *Komunitní tlumočení pro státní správu ve styku s cizinci* (Community interpreting for public service bodies dealing with foreign nationals) focused on community interpreting for public authorities. The second thesis, defended in 2010 by Jiřina Holcupová, explored the role of community interpreters from the perspective of users' expectations. Entitled *Role komunitního tlumočnicka z hlediska očekávání účastníků tlumočnické komunikační situace* (The role of community interpreters from the point of view of users' expectations), this thesis was grounded in a thorough empirical analysis of the state of community interpreting in the Czech Republic and served as one of the outcomes of the aforementioned project.

Since 2009, the course has been standardly offered to the general public¹ with a solid knowledge of relevant languages, depending on the audience, as a requalification course within a lifelong learning program, providing specialized training to individuals interested in pursuing a career in CI. This comprehensive course comprises 90 hours of direct instruction and an additional 40 hours of e-learning. Its inaugural session was launched in the 2010-2011 academic year, with 11 participants.

In June 2010, a seminar focusing on migrants in the Czech Republic was held at the headquarters of the European Commission representation in Prague. Among the various topics discussed during the seminar, particular attention was given to the rights of migrants to interpretation services. This event provided a valuable platform for several Czech non-governmental organizations (NGOs), representatives from the Ministry of Interior, as well as translators and interpreters with experience in providing interpretation for migrants and asylum seekers.

For two consecutive years, during the summers of 2010 and 2011, a group of 10 students enrolled in the Master's program consistently offered interpreting services for the Organization for Aid to Refugees (OPU: *Organizace pro pomoc uprchlíkům*), an NGO dedicated to assisting refugees.

2. Community interpreting courses

Between 2012 and 2015, an intensive full-term course on community interpreting was conducted for *META, o.p.s.*, another Czech non-governmental organization (NGO). This initiative marked the initiation of a long-standing partnership between ÚTRL and several Czech NGOs, including *META, o.p.s.*, *InBáze, z.s.*, *Integrační centrum Praha* (Integration Centre Prague), *SIMI*, *OPU*, *Slovo 21*, and others. The primary objective of this collaboration was to provide training for community interpreters and intercultural workers (see below) in a diverse multilingual and bilingual setting.

Since 2012, ÚTRL has consistently offered courses of varying length, seminars, and interpreter-training workshops tailored to the particular needs and specifications of diverse non-profit organizations and civic associations. Our emphasis is on training their intercultural workers and interpreters, the majority of whom are themselves foreign nationals. Moreover, a significant number of the aforementioned non-profit organizations frequently enlist our students to provide interpreting services as part of their compulsory interpreting practice, an integral component of the specialization accredited by ÚTRL.

Acknowledging the increasing need for community interpreting services, two new elective subjects were incorporated into the curriculum of the Interpreting Master's program at Charles University in 2012: *Community Interpreting* and *Bilateral Interpreting*. These courses are offered biennially and are designed to offer advanced training to students aspiring to pursue careers in community interpreting. Spanning four semesters, each subject includes two academic hours per week, incorporating both theoretical lectures and practical training sessions.

In addition to practical training and theoretical studies in interpreting, students also engage in research on community interpreting. While not students' favorite topic, several robust diploma theses on community interpreting have been effectively defended at our Institute, laying the groundwork for further exploration in this domain (Čeňková *et al.*, 2019). Notable

¹ www.lingua.ff.cuni.cz

examples include examinations of the role and status of community interpreters, interpreting practices in Labor Offices, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, public administration offices, refugee centers, and more (see the list of defended theses in the *References* section).

3. Legislation on community interpreting

Despite all these educational efforts, to date community interpreting services have been predominantly provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and to the best of our knowledge, there is currently no professional institution that brings together community interpreters. Additionally, no state institutions bear responsibility for monitoring, regulating and certifying the work of community interpreters or offering training programs.

In our assessment, this situation is attributed to several factors. One of the most significant is the absence of a designated occupation termed *community interpreter* within the Czech classification of occupations². While occupations such as *translator*, *interpreter*, *court translator*, *court interpreter*, and *intercultural worker* are recognized, the specific designation of *community interpreter* is lacking. Furthermore, the Czech market for translators and interpreters lacks stringent requirements for training, qualification, and education, even for regular (i.e., non-court) translators and interpreters. No specific qualifications are required to obtain a trade license for providing interpreting and translation services as a self-employed individual. Consequently, the translation and interpreting market in the Czech Republic cannot be considered fully professionalized.

In contrast, future court translators and interpreters must undergo a rigorous and lengthy process of training and approval. Notably, this requirement was only implemented in 2021 following the approval of new legislation; before this, the requirements were much less stringent. The new regulations are more comprehensive, and prospective court translators and interpreters must pass an examination to demonstrate their knowledge of the Act and other relevant decrees. The administration of the court interpreting and translation agenda has also shifted from regional courts to the Ministry of Justice of the Czech Republic, which now has exclusive oversight³. This change is intended to enhance the professional standards and oversight of court translators and interpreters.

Therefore, we can conclude that a professional community interpreting market does not truly exist (Knap-Dlouhá *et al.*, 2020; see also Mikkelson, 2004, and Antonini *et al.*, 2017, for similar observations in other countries). Anyone who possesses a trade license in interpreting or translation, or who works for an NGO in any capacity related to interpreting, can claim to be a professional, regardless of their education or training in this field. In the Czech Republic, it is common for individuals accompanying clients, acquaintances, or relatives to present themselves as interpreters. This designation often reflects the role they play in a particular communicative situation but does not necessarily imply any level of professional quality. Unlike professions such as law, medicine, or teaching, community interpreting is not perceived as a formal profession but rather as a situational role that can be performed by almost anyone with some knowledge of two languages (Hertog, 2010). We hope to see a shift in this perception, driven by the collaborative efforts of academia, NGOs, and professional organizations of interpreters and translators, which will lead to a significant change in this regard (JTP 2014; ČSN ISO, 2015).

² <https://www.nsp.cz/hledat?type=workUnit&q=tlumočn%C3%ADk>

³ <https://www.ceska-justice.cz/nazory/nova-uprava-soudniho-tlumocnictvi/>, <https://advokatnidenik.cz/2021/10/06/co-prinasi-uzivatelum-novy-zakon-o-soudnich-tlumocnicich-a-soudnich-prekladatelich/>

4. Qualification requirements for the Czech community interpreters

In contrast to the situation with court translators and interpreters, the Czech Republic, like several other European countries, has virtually no qualification requirements for community interpreters. This means that, theoretically, anyone can declare themselves a community interpreter and offer their services. In practice, many interpreters who provide community interpreting services are certified intercultural workers (Pokorn and Nikolič Južnič, 2020). The profession of intercultural worker is relatively new and combines aspects of social work, interpreting, and mediation. An intercultural worker provides assistance (including interpreting) during interactions between migrants and public institutions, and supports the integration of migrants and migrant communities into local society. Training for the role of intercultural worker is provided through a requalification education program (see also Valero-Garcés, 2014) accredited by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. This program enables participants to obtain the intercultural worker professional qualification according to the National Register of Qualifications. The program consists of 250 academic hours, including 40 hours of practical training through an internship. Of the remaining 210 hours, 20 are dedicated to interpreting training (covering ethics, theoretical aspects, note-taking, consecutive interpreting with and without note-taking, whispered interpreting, and sight translation), and 20 hours focus on practical interpreting within specific language pairs (with six language pairs⁴ offered). This course is provided by the Czech NGO InBáze in cooperation with ÚTRL.

In April 2022, in response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees, a shortened version of this course tailored to Ukrainian and Russian languages was offered to the general public. This abbreviated course comprised 150 hours of training, including 50 hours dedicated to so called language mediation, which involved theoretical and practical community interpreting training, and aimed to prepare new intercultural workers quickly.

5. Role of NGOs in providing community interpreting services

The system of providing community interpreting services is structured in such a way that migrants who meet specific requirements can access a range of services for free through local NGOs. Each NGO specializing in assisting migrants with practical tasks in the Czech Republic focuses on specific areas of social support, such as education, healthcare, or migration law. These NGOs receive funding from various sources, primarily ministerial grants, allowing them to cater to the needs of specific migrant groups, such as Ukrainian refugees or migrants from non-EU countries legally residing in the Czech Republic, within a given project's timeframe. It is noteworthy that the *Integrační centrum Praha* (Integration Centre Prague) also works with child migrants, necessitating additional soft skills within CI competencies.

The projects operate within a fixed budget, which determines the maximum number of employees, including community interpreters. To gain insights into the utilization of community interpreting services in these NGOs, we conducted interviews with representatives from three major organizations: the Integration Centre Prague,⁵ Inbáze,⁶ and the Agency for Migration and Adaptation AMIGA.⁷ These three organizations are among the most prominent migrant-focused non-governmental entities in the Czech Republic. All three actively engage community

⁴ The Czech language and one of the following languages: English, Arabic, Russian, Mongolian, Vietnamese, or Chinese.

⁵ <https://icpraha.com/en/>

⁶ <https://inbaze.cz/en/>

⁷ <https://amiga-migrant.cz/en/home-style-2/>

interpreters and intercultural workers. One interview was conducted in person, while the other two over the phone. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews employed a standardized set of questions, focusing on the integration of community interpreting services into their respective agendas and exploring the following topics: a general overview of the interpreters hired by NGOs (e.g., nationality, training, inhouse vs. freelance status, workload, and remuneration), organizational approaches and policies regarding interpreters (e.g. selection process, professional requirements, motivation, and support), potential interest in cooperation with academia for additional training, and the existing internal guidelines or ethical codes, if any. Given the small number of respondents, we opted to not use coding and just summarized the answers in a concise and structured manner.

First and foremost, it is notable that these organizations typically prefer to employ interpreters as staff members, often on a part-time basis, and rarely enter into hourly employment agreements. Freelance contracts are seldom utilized. Additionally, it is noteworthy that in all three organizations, in-house interpreters receive nearly identical salaries, although this is not pre-negotiated. The level of compensation is slightly below the average wage in 2024, but still solidly placed in the range of wages in the NGO sector.

The selection process varies among organizations, but all tend to favor hiring certified intercultural workers as they serve as a guarantee of high-quality services. However, due to the limited number of certified intercultural workers available, NGOs often need to recruit interpreters from outside this pool. Interestingly, representatives of these NGOs commonly refer to all their staff as intercultural workers, irrespective of whether they have obtained certification. When hiring individuals from outside the pool of certified intercultural workers, each organization pays attention to slightly different criteria: some prioritize professionals with expertise in linguistics or the relevant field (such as law, medicine, or social work), while others rely more on network referrals and personal experience within the system.

All three organizations employ ongoing training methods in the realm of community interpreting and intercultural work. They maintain close collaboration with ÚTRL, periodically offering training sessions for their staff through ÚTRL. Additionally, Inbáze has developed an e-learning course in intercultural work, which is available for purchase by anyone interested in the field. CI is one of the topics covered within the course modules, with this section prepared by an active professional interpreter and ÚTRL graduate. While Inbáze staff members receive complimentary access to this course, other organizations and individuals have the option to purchase it. The course is priced at a minimum of CZK 3,500 (approximately EUR 140), which provides 2-month access.⁸

In addition, Inbáze has published extensive glossaries for intercultural workers, which are freely accessible online in English, Ukrainian, Russian, and other languages (Bejček and Vlastníková, 2022a, 2022b).⁹ These glossaries serve as a robust foundation for the preparation of all community interpreters, as they include both terms and definitions, thereby aiding in the standardization of terminology across the entire field.

⁸ <https://inbaze.thinkific.com/courses/ikp>

⁹ https://inbaze.cz/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/cesko_ukrajinsky-slovník-pro-interkulturni-praci.pdf
- Ukrainian-Czech
https://inbaze.cz/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/cesko_anglicky-slovník-pro-interkulturni-praci.pdf
English-Czech
https://inbaze.cz/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/cesko_rusky-slovník-pro-interkulturni-praci.pdf
Russian-Czech

Moreover, Inbáze holds qualification exams for intercultural workers who already have experience in the field and have received in-house training at their NGO but lack an official certificate. One of the modules in these exams specifically assesses the candidates' practical CI competencies.

The NGOs enforce a code of ethics for their staff, which specifically prohibits providing paid services outside the organization. Interestingly, there is a tendency among clients from certain communities to mistrust the quality of unpaid services. However, instead of seeking professional interpreter services, they often rely on the questionable expertise of intermediaries within their migrant community who have lived longer in the Czech Republic and claim to know *how things work here*. The quality of these intermediaries' interpreting is questionable, and moreover, the quality of the consultations they provide is also uncertain. Furthermore, they bear minimal or no responsibility if something goes wrong. These intermediaries typically charge a fee, which is usually less than that of professional interpreters, but they never work for free (from a client's perspective), unlike NGO community interpreters.

As previously mentioned, NGO community interpreters typically work as staff members, although they occasionally take hourly-based jobs. It is worth noting that their hourly rate is roughly one-fourth of what professional interpreters charge when calculated on an hourly basis. To motivate interpreters, NGOs usually include preparation and travel time in these calculations. However, these cases have recently become very rare, and NGOs are increasingly shifting towards a fully in-house service provision model.

All NGOs highlight the heavy workload placed on their interpreters and intercultural workers, which can lead to burnout. Consequently, the career span of a community interpreter in an NGO is typically quite short, usually lasting only a few years. Many interpreters eventually leave or switch to different roles within the organization. The NGO representatives acknowledged that, due to limited funds, they tend to prioritize refining communication skills and psychological well-being over ongoing interpreting skills development.

Another noteworthy NGO in this context is Slovo 21, which has been entrusted by the Ministry of Interior with organizing adaptation integration courses for migrants, as mandated by current legislation. While these courses primarily involve classic consecutive interpreting settings, they also incorporate various elements of community interpreting. Slovo 21 maintains close cooperation with ÚTRL to ensure high standards of services through interpreter training, supervision and certification, and development of methodological and terminological materials. Participants are required to pay for the course, and interpreters receive a standard fee that aligns closely with remuneration levels in the professional market and varies depending on the language pair.

6. Teaching community interpreting to NGOs and the general public¹⁰

In this section, we focus on the above-mentioned training sessions for NGO staff and outline the key distinctions between the training processes in university settings (see Molchan and Čeňková, 2023) and non-university environments. While role-play remains central in both contexts, modifications are necessary for the non-university audience, most of whom lack a background in interpreter training.

¹⁰ All the presented data are based on the personal experience of the authors of this article as trainers in these courses since 2010, as well as active conference interpreters.

For the NGO course, we always employ two instructors, preferably native speakers of the relevant languages who are also professional interpreters. These instructors prepare scripts or improvise based on key points of a scenario and act as clients during role-play exercises. Typically, the course is structured as an intensive two-day session, and we do not expect participants to engage in any preparation beforehand. Unlike university students, NGO course participants often have practical experience with the topics discussed, as many of them are migrants who have navigated these procedures themselves and are familiar with the associated environments and challenges.

Our participants typically lack note-taking skills entirely, or have very limited proficiency in this area, and we actively encourage them to master at least basic note-taking techniques. They also lack fundamental interpreter skills, such as anticipation, summarization, and identifying the core of an utterance. Consequently, our objective is not to train fully-fledged interpreters but to mitigate the most critical mistakes and provide as many practical strategies and tips as possible within a very limited timeframe.

It is crucial to stress from the outset of the course that mere participation does not confer professional interpreter status, nor does it guarantee competitiveness in the market without additional comprehensive training.

7. Types of community interpreters in a migration crisis and beyond¹¹

Based on the situation that emerged in the Czech Republic following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the influx of refugees (Čeňková, 2023a, 2023b, Kostková, 2024), we have identified four groups of interpreters who began serving as community interpreters so that the high volume of clients could be managed. We acknowledge that this classification may not be universally applicable and is specifically tailored to the refugee context. However, it provides a comprehensive overview of distinct groups of interpreters that could be engaged in community language work if the need arises.

1) Professional interpreters (By professional interpreters, we mean either graduates of higher education programs in interpreting studies or professional linguists with extensive interpreting experience. These interpreters primarily focus on standard interpreting tasks (consecutive interpreting and/or simultaneous interpreting) and also incorporate community interpreting activities into their work schedules).

Professional interpreters bring a high level of professionalism and superior quality of interpreting to the table. Their comprehensive understanding of the ethical aspects of interpreting, coupled with extensive experience working with a diverse client base in various contexts, makes them adept at managing their work under stressful conditions. They are well-prepared for events, ensuring smooth and efficient service delivery.

Unfortunately, the number of professional interpreters available is insufficient to meet the needs arising from a migration crisis. Furthermore, their levels of motivation can vary, which impacts their availability and commitment. Additionally, professional interpreters often cannot provide their services on a sustained basis over the long term.

In an ideal scenario, the demand for interpreters should be predominantly met by professionals. However, a crisis of the magnitude of a military invasion and a subsequent

¹¹ All the presented data are based on the personal experience of the authors of this article as active conference interpreters who volunteered at KACPU and as trainers of the crash courses described below.

refugee influx precludes the availability of a sufficient number of qualified interpreters to even partially meet market demand. Thus, while professional interpreters are invaluable, the scale of a migration crisis necessitates the involvement of additional groups to adequately address interpreting needs.

2) Students of interpreting/translation and philological faculties

Students of interpreting/translation and philological faculties are a crucial resource in the field of community interpreting, especially during times of crisis. These students possess strong interpreting/linguistic skills and have a good understanding of the ethical aspects involved in interpreting. Their high proficiency in both languages enables them to effectively bridge communication gaps. Additionally, they have a significant need for interpreting practice, making them eager to apply their skills in real-world situations. However, these students are far fewer in number than professional interpreters,¹² which limits their availability to meet the high demand for interpreting services during a migration crisis.

Another aspect to consider is their motivation levels. Initially, students are highly motivated and are generally less concerned about remuneration. However, due to their academic commitments, they are often unable to dedicate substantial time and effort to community interpreting. Therefore, it is uncertain how many would be willing to work as community interpreters on a long-term basis, especially without pay.

3) NGO interpreters

NGO interpreters play a pivotal role in community interpreting, particularly during humanitarian crises. They bring several significant advantages to the table. Firstly, they exhibit high levels of motivation, driven by a commitment to support vulnerable populations. Secondly, their experience working with refugees provides them with practical insights and understanding of the challenges faced by their clients. Thirdly, many NGO interpreters have personal experience as NGO clients, which enhances their empathy and ability to connect with those they assist.

However, in some instances, NGO interpreters may have insufficient knowledge of the specific ethical aspects of interpreting, as opposed to broader community and intercultural work. This gap in knowledge can impact the quality and appropriateness of their interpreting services. Additionally, there are cases where NGO interpreters have a weak command of foreign languages, which can hinder effective communication. Furthermore, their high motivation and empathetic nature make them susceptible to burnout, as the emotional toll of their work can be significant.

Despite these challenges, NGO interpreters remain an essential component of the community interpreting landscape, offering invaluable support through their dedication and firsthand experience with refugee issues. To maximize their effectiveness, ongoing training and support are crucial to address their knowledge gaps and mitigate the risk of burnout.

This category of interpreters has responded most cohesively to the crisis and been particularly burdened with work. In some respects, of all three categories, they were the most suitable type of interpreters, especially in areas such as crisis intervention and psychological

¹² For the number of students admitted to the MA university program in interpreting at Charles University in 2024, see <https://www.ff.cuni.cz/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Odborne-pozadavky-NM-2025-26.pdf>.

support during a migration crisis caused by war. However, the number of NGO interpreters is wholly insufficient to meet the demand, and they are highly susceptible to severe burnout due to their self-perception as a helping profession.

4) Non-professional interpreters, ad hoc interpreters

Non-professional and ad hoc interpreters offer valuable support in community interpreting, particularly during times of crisis. One of their primary advantages is their high level of motivation, driven by a desire to help and make a difference. Non-professionals volunteer eagerly and sincerely offer their assistance wherever needed. In certain areas, their services are irreplaceable and extremely valuable. Additionally, there is a large pool of volunteers available, as evidenced by organizations like the Regional Assistance Centers for Aid to Ukraine (hereafter referred to as *KACPU*), which have a total of 1,800 volunteers. This extensive volunteer base provides a significant resource that can be mobilized quickly to meet urgent needs.

However, this group is extremely diverse and lacks transparency, as it is composed of individuals with various backgrounds. The quality of interpreting provided by non-professional and ad hoc interpreters is often questionable, as they typically lack formal training and experience. This can lead to inaccuracies and miscommunications that may have serious consequences. Moreover, their proficiency in foreign languages is frequently unreliable, which further compromises the effectiveness of their interpreting services. Therefore, coordinators must exercise considerable discretion in selecting appropriate candidates for each role, as most individuals in this group struggle to accurately assess their own language and interpreting skills and often lack self-reflection in this regard.

All four groups were involved in providing community interpreting services to varying degrees in 2022. Without their enthusiasm and commitment, it would not have been possible to navigate the necessary procedures for admitting over 500,000 Ukrainian refugees into the country¹³.

It is worth noting that after the initial months of the migration crisis, it became clear to all parties involved that relying on unpaid interpreters was not sustainable. Consequently, a standard hourly fee was introduced at *KACPU*. Although this fee was not high (CZK 125/hour, or EUR 5/hour in Prague, and, paradoxically, up to CZK 200/hour, or EUR 8/hour outside of the capital city), it provided additional motivation for interpreters to remain and continue their work. However, the maximum number of paid hours was capped at 80 per month, and the agreement had to be signed at the head office of the Czech Red Cross in Prague. Therefore, many interpreters either did not sign the agreement for logistical reasons and worked for free, or they exceeded the 80-hour limit and worked the extra hours without pay.

8. Interpreting courses within the National Restoration Plan

ÚTRL responded promptly to the migration crisis by organizing three half-day crash courses on CI. These courses were held on two separate occasions: two courses were held on March 18, 2022, and one course on April 21, 2022. A total of 100 participants attended these courses, with 75 participants in the Czech-Russian courses and 25 participants in the Czech-Ukrainian course. Predominantly, the participants were students of the Faculty of Arts at Charles University.

¹³ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

The training sessions were specifically tailored to address the needs of volunteer interpreters at KACPU, focusing on three main topics. Participants were introduced to the Code of Ethics and the role of an interpreter. Through role-playing exercises, real-life situations encountered by interpreters at KACPU were simulated, enabling discussions on recommended strategies and potential solutions.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that crash courses offer only a temporary solution and are not sustainable in the long term. Recognizing this need, ÚTRL and the Department of East European Studies at Charles University collaboratively submitted a grant application for a project providing comprehensive training for community interpreters proficient in Ukrainian, Russian, and Czech¹⁴, as well as conference interpreters specializing in the Ukrainian-Czech language pair. Following approval in June, the project received grant funding in July and commenced. The project was scheduled to run for two years, from July 2022 to May 2024, with the objective of establishing a proficient professional interpreter team capable of operating effectively in crisis situations. Key partners include the Union of Interpreters and Translators (JTP), Association of Conference Interpreters (ASKOT), Chamber of Court Interpreters (KSTČR), Slovo 21, Inbáze, and the Integration Center Prague. These partners contribute as lecturers, consultants, and course participants, playing a crucial role in raising awareness about the upcoming course offerings in the Czech educational market.

The inaugural pilot courses in conference interpreting Ukrainian and Czech were conducted in January 2023 and in February 2024, while the first pilot community interpreting course took place in September 2023, comprising a total of 30 hours of training plus 15 hours of self-study. A total of 24 participants took part, with 12 participants in each language pair (Czech-Ukrainian and Czech-Russian). The participants included representatives from Slovo 21, the Integration Center and the Refugee Facilities Administration of the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, as well as students and graduates of philological faculties specializing in Ukrainian and Russian from various cities such as Brno, Olomouc, and Prague. The 30-hour training program consisted of 5 hours of theoretical training for all participants (introduction to community interpreting) and 25 hours of practical training divided into two language groups. Each group was led by two trainers who conducted role-play scenarios in specific thematic areas and provided feedback to the participants.

In addition to the training sessions, the course offers supplementary materials, including an audio database for interpreting, methodological resources such as training videos, thematic glossaries, dialogue scripts for practicing specific topics, and discussions on the ethical aspects of community interpreting and the nuances of interpreting for Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking clients. These materials encompass approximately 40 thematic modules, each featuring concise descriptions and scenarios of typical situations to facilitate interpreter training (Molchan *et al.*, 2024). Trilingual glossaries are also provided for each thematic section.

Furthermore, we created a Czech-Russian training video (approximately 1 hour in length) illustrating community interpreting. The video features examples of high-quality interpreting without commentary, high-quality interpreting with commentary, and poor-quality interpreting with commentary. Assuming that Ukrainian-speaking participants in the course have at least a passive understanding of Russian, we chose not to replicate this didactic material in Ukrainian.

¹⁴ Transformation for Universities at Charles University (registration No: NPO_UK_MSMT-16602/2022); <https://cczv.cuni.cz/CCZV-664.html>, <https://cczv.cuni.cz/CCZV-666.html>, <https://cczv.cuni.cz/CCZV-667.html>

Additionally, we have developed concise presentations accompanied by audio narration for the initial theoretical section of the pilot course. Each presentation spans approximately 15-20 minutes and covers topics such as Introduction to Note-taking, Introduction to Sight Translation, Role of the Community Interpreter, Code of Ethics, Preparation for an Interpreting Assignment, Stress Management, and Psycho-hygiene, etc. These materials are hosted on a dedicated online platform integrated into the project. We also provide an extensive bibliography covering various aspects of community and conference interpreting. To facilitate access to resources, we have created a thematic portal containing all essential information about the courses.¹⁵ This platform also includes links to government websites where interpreters can download the latest versions of relevant forms and instructions on how to complete the forms.

The full program is set to commence in autumn 2024, encompassing a total of 75 hours of direct learning and self-study. Upon successfully completing the course, participants will receive 5 credits (ECTS) within the micro-credential programs. The culmination of the course entails passing a final exam, which involves role-play interpreting utilizing techniques such as consecutive interpreting, whispered interpreting, and sight translation.

Considering the anticipated rise in demand for interpreting services between Ukrainian and Czech, as well as Russian and Czech, we have full confidence that our newly developed micro-credential courses will establish solid groundwork for training both non-professional interpreters and advancing the professional development of interpreters proficient in Czech and Ukrainian or Russian.

9. Conclusion

In this article, we aimed to present an overview of the community interpreting market in the Czech Republic, highlighting its background, strengths, weaknesses, and potential opportunities. As academics and professional interpreters, our goal is to facilitate the professionalization of the interpreting market in the Czech Republic, particularly in community interpreting services, to ensure the provision of high-quality interpreting services across all sectors of the local community. We hope that our endeavors in developing community interpreting courses will yield positive results and contribute to making the Czech interpreting market more efficient and effective.

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¹⁵ <https://utrl.ff.cuni.cz/cs/veda-a-vyzkum/tlumocnicke-kurzy-s-mikrocertifikaci/>

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