

The Rt Hon the Lord Harper PC
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

Dear Lord Harper,

24th October 2025

BORDER SECURITY, ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION BILL: HOUSE OF LORDS COMMITTEE

I am writing further to the debate in the Lords Committee on Monday 13th October (Official Report 13 October Column 66) to provide further details in relation to the provision of translation and interpretation services.

Language service needs and spend are assessed to ensure that these services offer good value for money for taxpayers, whilst maintaining high standards of service delivery. The Government's Immigration White Paper sets out plans for new English Language requirements across a range of routes and makes clear our belief that the ability to speak English is critical for anyone wishing to integrate successfully into our communities. It enables individuals to participate fully in their communities, access employment opportunities and engage with public services, thereby fostering social cohesion and economic contribution.

However, as I said during the debate, it is recognised that there are circumstances in which the immediate need is not integration, but protection. There are individuals for whom translation and interpretation services are essential to enable them to navigate the immigration system and access relevant support services in the UK.

Under Paragraph 339ND of the Immigration Rules, the Home Secretary is required to provide an interpreter at public expense, when necessary, particularly during substantive asylum interviews. This ensures that applicants can fully present their case, in line with legal and human rights obligations.

The Home Office does not provide forms used in the asylum process (e.g. Statement of Evidence Form for UASC cases) nor issue immigration paperwork (e.g. Reasons For Refusal Letter) in anything other than English. This is the case for immigration paperwork across the Home Office.

If necessary, claimants can utilise legal representatives who can complete the questionnaire or explain the contents of correspondence on their behalf. Claimants also have access to Migrant Help who are contractually obligated to deliver services in a language the asylum seeker can understand.

All asylum seekers have access to Migrant Help 24/7 and their telephony service has interpreter services available in 210 of 214 languages. Migrant Help also has a webchat function, which will soon include translation options.

In relation to Immigration Detention, Detention Services Order DSO 02/2022 sets out the provisions including interpretation service and translation devices available for individuals held in immigration detention and the circumstances in which it should be used. The text of this Order can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/interpretation-services-and-use-of-translation-devices>.

During the arrivals and induction process, a primary and secondary language assessment is conducted, which is recorded on the individual's profile. I would like to make clear that for those who require interpreters, Home Office staff have access to telephone interpreters 24/7. Where individuals speak with Immigration Enforcement at an immigration reporting centre the Home Office will provide an interpreter at public expense, whenever necessary.

We must ensure that language services are cost-effective, and the Home Office is committed to assessing language service needs and spend to ensure that we deliver both fiscal responsibility and human compassion.

Unfortunately, the cost assessment of implementation of Baroness Coussins' amendment which you requested during the debate is not readily available, without a greater clarity about the standards of translation services the amendment wishes to introduce. However, the current provision is considered sufficient, and balances value for money, need for translation services, and ensuring sufficient flexibility in the immigration system.

I look forward to further debate of the Bill as it progresses to Report stage, commencing on 28 October.

I hope you find this letter helpful. I will also send a copy to those Peers who spoke in the debate and place a copy in the library of the House.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Katz', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

The Lord Katz MBE
Lord in Waiting (Government Whip)