TRANSLATORS WITHOUT BORDERS

Crisis of Language – in Europe

Words of Relief for the European Refugee Crisis: Orientation, Safety, Empowerment

"The vast majority of those arriving in Greece come from conflict zones like Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan and are simply running for their lives. All people on the move in these tragic circumstances deserve to see their human rights and dignity fully respected, independently of their legal status."
Sectretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, September 2015

The language barriers of the crisis

1. Constantly changing information and populations

Where is the medical clinic? When is the next ferry? How much does it cost to take the bus? Is it going to be very cold tomorrow? Can I apply for asylum in Sweden? Can I register for a transit visa in Macedonia? What does it say on my registration paper?

"It was important for us to know in Arabic where to go, where to sleep and what to do in order to get to our destination. Also, the things we are allowed and not allowed to do." Syrian refugee, Lesbos-Athens ferry, March 2016

2. Linguistic diversity

The refugee and migrant population speak Arabic, Farsi, Dari, Pashto, Urdu, Kurmanji, Sorani, French and more. This is challenging for the humanitarian community!

"There wasn't enough Pashto at the (accommodation) site, many Afghans can read Farsi, but Pashto is better – I understand it better." Afghan refugee, Lesbos-Athens ferry, March 2016

Afghan refugee, Lesbos-Athens ferry, March 2016

3. Host communities speak a different language

The unusual geography of this crisis means that refugees do not typically speak the languages of the host communities they encounter on their route. Translators and interpreters are few and far between – and totally overwhelmed.

"I would like to learn more about the ways to avoid burn out – after all we all work under much pressure!"
Bilingual aidworker/interpreter, Lesbos, 2016

words OF RELIEF

Language Matters

Since deploying the crisis relief translation network 'Words of Relief' in Greece and the Balkans, Translators without Borders (TWB) has achieved the following:

- Collaborated with more than 20 humanitarian organizations – including Danish Refugee Council, Save the Children, Mercy Corps, the Red Cross, UNHCR and grassroots volunteer groups – to reach hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants.
- Trained over 200 staff and volunteers of partner agencies on translation and interpreting in a crisis.
- Worked with partners to develop innovative machine translation tools for the use of aid workers on the ground.
- Mobilized a team of over 250 professional translators acting as rapid responders on our teams.
- Since November 2015, TWB has translated over 800,000 words into Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish, Urdu, Pashto and Greek. This includes guidance on asylum options, critical health information, content specifically for women and minors, camp signage, daily news, and feedback for the humanitarian community.
- Developed terminology databases in Arabic, Farsi, Dari, Greek and Kurdish (Sorani and Kurmanji) with over 1,000 commonly used medical, legal and media terms as well as location names along the route.
- Launched our Words of Relief Digital Exchange open repository of information in languages of the affected populations.

Translators without Borders will continue to work tirelessly to make sure affected communities access the information they need to orientate, stay safe and make informed decisions.

The crisis in numbers

- 362,376 arrivals by sea in 2016
- 5,096 dead or missing in 2016
- 79% of arrivals come from the world's top 10 refugee producing countries

Source: UNHCR

"I don't think any organization by itself, including us, can internally turn around all that information through all those platforms. That is why there is an important link between the work that we do – gathering and providing information – and Translators without Borders, who help us translate all that information."
Stijn Aelbers, Humanitarian Advisor, Internews, March 2016

"There is a lack of access to information regarding the rights of migrants, the protection mechanisms available to them, such as family reunification and relocation (in Greece). Migrants and civil society organisations find the procedures difficult to navigate..."
Francois Crepeau, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, May 2016

translatorswithoutborders.org