

Climate Change, Migration, and the Politics of Communication: Translation and interpreting as infrastructures of sustainability

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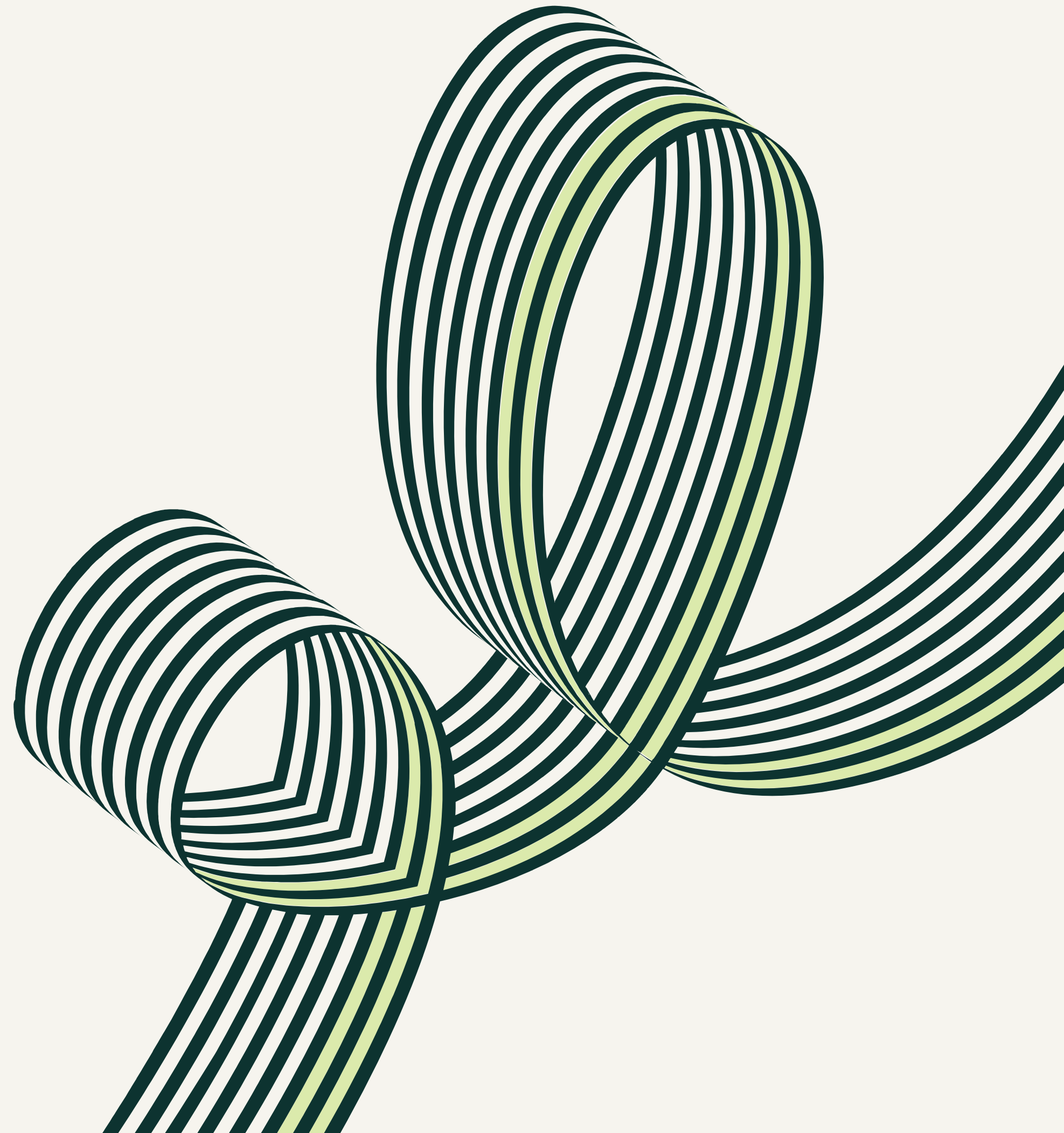


Translating conflict and refuge: language, displacement, and the politics of representation
24th April 2026



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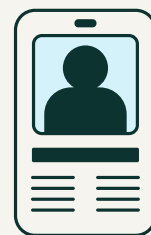


Introduction

Climate-driven migration is a visible way in which human-related environmental change is causing changes in mobility patterns (International Organization for Migration, 2022)

- No clear definition yet of 'climate refugee' (Apap & Harju, 2023)
- 1951 Refugee Convention does not explicitly recognise climate-related causes

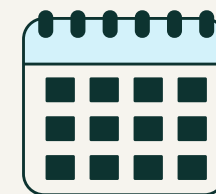
Climate-driven migration impacts mental health of displaced populations, as it affects their social ties and community (Torres & Casey, 2017) & communication is key across the journey



Emergency communication, and early evacuation and warning

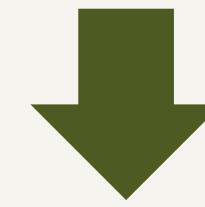


Asylum & regularisation procedures



Long-term integration

Public service interpreting and translation (PSIT) POV: Language access is a sustainable, public infrastructure that allows for access to other rights, not a commodity



Need for institutionalisation of language access and service provision in climate-driven migration policies



Theoretical Framework

Language Access as Public Infrastructure

Crisis translation research frames multilingual communication as an integral component of crisis management (O'Brien, 2022 and Cadwell et al., 2024)



Crisis translation maturity models involve organisational readiness: pre-established workflows, trusted channels, trained personnel, and monitoring systems

Dual-time application

Climate-driven migration combines rapid-onset crises with slow-onset events



1. Emergency warnings, evacuation orders, and shelter information require real-time multilingual dissemination
2. Long-term adaptation demands sustained PSIT provision for legal, health, education, and social services

Crisis translation + PSIT

Access to public information is described as a democratic right (Pena-Díaz, 2022)



Salient in crisis situations

Objectives

01. Nexus establishment

Centering the link between climate change, migration, and T&I, as pressing matters for the short- and long-term future

02. Policy analysis

Explore T&I as resilience infrastructures in the context of climate-induced migration

Crisis translation + PSIT

03. Framework information for climate-driven migration

- Explore T&I as resilience infrastructures in the context of climate-induced migration
- Drawing on evidence from two major initiatives:
 - the Erasmus+ project DIALOGOS, which developed training for public service interpreters in LLDs
 - the Spanish national project Intercomsalud

Methodology

Methods	Qualitative critical policy analysis; document coding	Triangulated with insights from crisis translation research	And from PSIT
Selection & Analysis	6 key international climate and migration policy documents	Crisis translation maturity models (Cadwell et al., 2024) and PSIT professionalisation (Hale, 2007; Pöchhacker, 2016)	DIALOGOS Erasmus+, and the Intercomsalud projects
Objectives	Identify whether language access is a focus point of climate & migration policies and if its provision is mature (i.e. sustainability, funding, operationalisation)		Inform a framework for climate-driven migration language access response

Corpus & results

Document	Language access focus	Type
European Green Deal (2019)	Assesses whether multilingual access is treated as infrastructure for inclusion and whether translation is conceptualised as part of a just transition	Recognition: explicit references to translation, interpreting, cultural mediation, multilingual communication, or language access.
EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum (2020)	Examines whether interpreting and translation rights are operationalised, including details on interpreter qualifications and coverage for languages of lesser diffusion	Operationalisation: concrete mechanisms such as responsible institutions, procurement processes, qualification standards, training requirements, and quality assurance.
Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration	Language access is not a focus point in this text. The commitments are framed in terms of legal rights, protection mechanisms, and policy frameworks.	Non-acknowledgement
IOM Institutional Strategy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change 2021–2030	Determines whether language access is listed as an enabling condition for migrant-centred delivery and how communication is framed across emergency and adaptation contexts.	Operationalisation
Operational/technical guidance (UNFCCC technical guide on human mobility & climate change; IOM climate mobility roadmap)	Analyses whether communication needs (including translation and interpreting) are resourced, monitored and inclusive of LLDs	Operationalisation
Displacement and migration related to disasters, climate change and environmental degradation: An overview of EU policy and legislation	Language access is not addressed, although it discusses protection gaps and the absence of legal status for climate migrants	Non-acknowledgement

Results

1. Recognition w/o operationalisation

- Climate strategies rarely specify translation or interpreting services as part of climate governance (e.g. European Green Deal, 2019)
- Migration policies acknowledge interpreters more frequently because procedural fairness requires them, but provisions are often weak
 - EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum mentions interpretation rights in the context of screening and asylum interviews, but leaves qualification standards, funding, and coverage for LLDs to member states

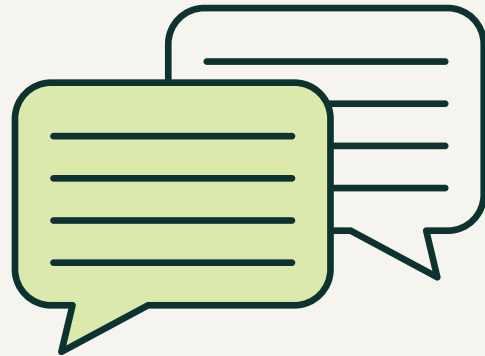
2. Responsibility diffusion

- No clear statements of which agency is responsible for guaranteeing language access across the climate-migration pathway, who will pay interpreters and translators, or how quality and ethical standards will be monitored.
- Policy texts assume that translation and interpreting will occur, but do not embed them in governance and funding planning
- Maturity is required to sustain quality, trust, and cultural appropriateness (Cadwell et al., 2024).

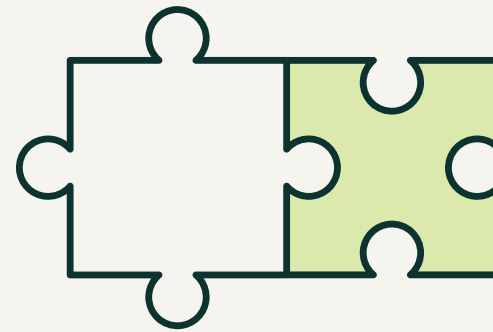
3. Exclusion of LLDs

- References to multilingualism often implicitly refer to “common migrant languages” such as Arabic, Dari or Somali, without acknowledging the linguistic diversity of climate-affected regions or diasporas
- Without explicit LLD strategies, climate migration policies risk reproducing linguistic hierarchies and excluding vulnerable demographics

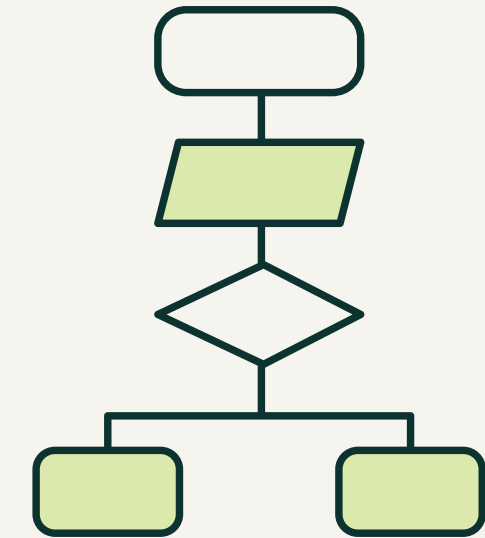
Discussion and proposal



Policies should include minimum measurable indicators such as coverage, LLD-readiness, preparedness, quality, and equitable access



Rights-based and migrant-centred approach that combines crisis translation + PSIT and centers language access as an aspect w/o which the guaranteeing of rights is not possible



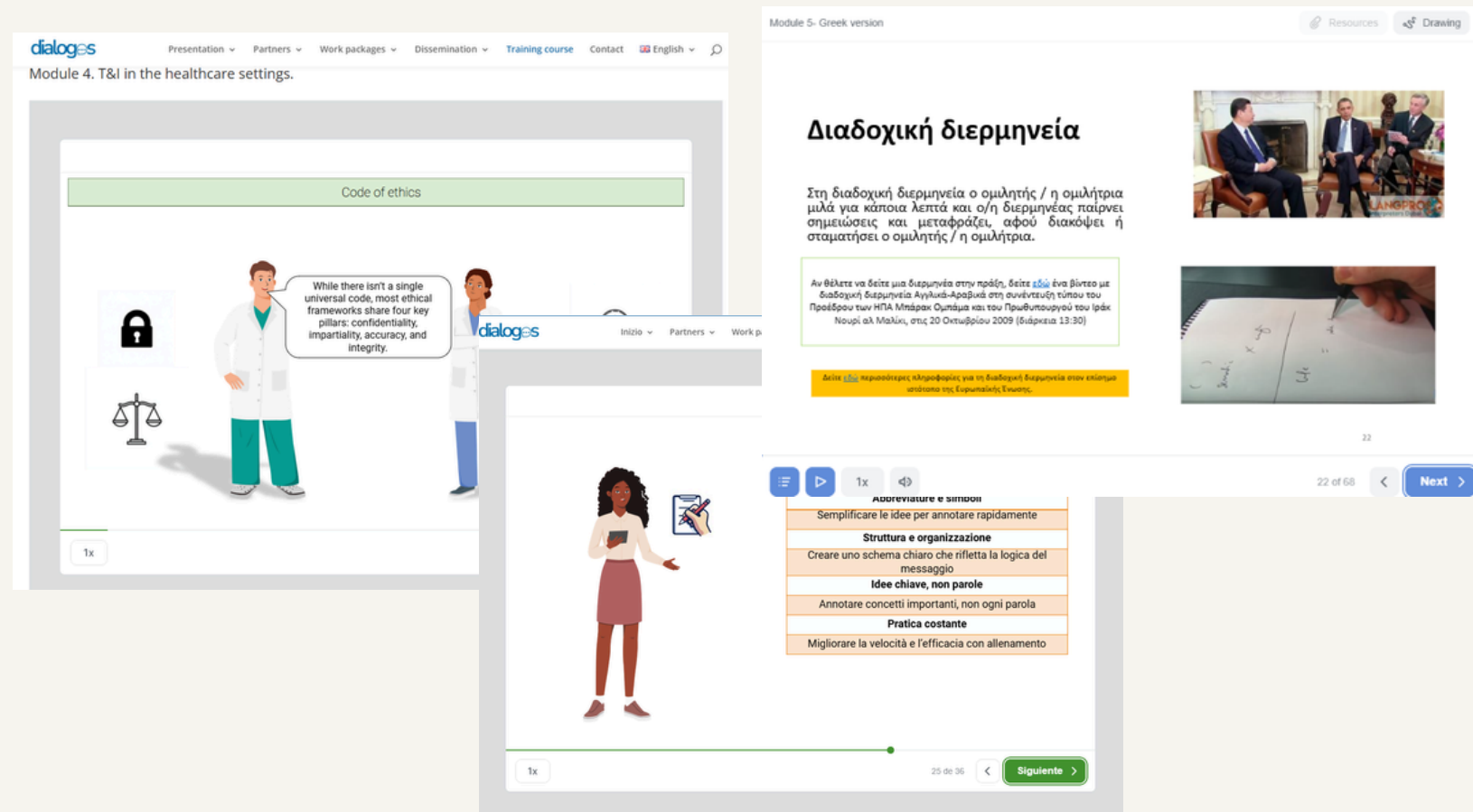
DIALOGOS and Intercomsalud: ready-made materials & know-how

- PSIT training for ad hoc interpreters of LLDs
- Intercultural competence courses aimed at service providers
- Experience on high-stakes encounters and possible communication failures

Ready-made materials



www.dialogoserasmus.eu



www.intercomsalud.es



- Identifies LLD provision as the core gap in PSIT
- Contribution to mapping LLDs in partner countries (although it varies over time)
- Basic PSIT training for emergencies (1st temporality stream): ES-EN-IT-GR
- Designed to be taught across LLDs & LLD-focused

- Identifies biases in healthcare providers' interaction with migrants
- Tackles providers' intercultural competence: cultural auto-perception, cross-cultural communication, register adaptation (Merino-Cabello & Monguilod Navarro, 2026)
- Introduction of interpreting services in infrastructure (budget lines, direct work ethics)
- Implementation of linguistic and terminological resources like portable glossaries (Monguilod-Navarro & Antequera-Manzano, 2026)

Recommendations

Governance and accountability	Authorities should designate lead entities responsible for language access Protocols should coordinate civil protection, health, education, social services, and migration agencies
Sustainable financing	Dedicated funding lines for translation and interpreting, with surge funding for disasters
Professional standards	Minimum qualifications and ethical requirements should be established Continuous professional development should include crisis translation competencies
Dual-time delivery	Rapid response layer (on-call rosters, remote interpreting infrastructure, and multilingual templates for warnings and shelter information) and a continuity layer (embeds interpreters and translators in health services, legal aid, education, housing, and municipal offices, e.g. Intercomsalud).
Monitoring and evaluation	Indicators should track access, quality, and equity, including interpreter availability, waiting times, user satisfaction, error rates, and coverage of LLDs
MT and GenAI	Can enhance capacity but must be used under human oversight. High-risk interactions should never rely solely on automation. a) Risk classification models to guide whether AI tools are appropriate.

Conclusions

Language access is a core **infrastructure of socio-environmental justice** and should be **integrated upstream** into climate and migration governance.

1. Explicitly integrate language access clauses into climate adaptation, disaster risk management and migration plans. Such clauses should specify responsibilities, funding mechanisms and standards.
2. Evidence from the DIALOGOS and Intercomsalud projects shows that developing LLD capacity and embedding intercultural mediation in public services is feasible
3. Co-design approach: Language services cannot be imposed top-down. Migrant and refugee communities possess knowledge about their own linguistic repertoires, dialectal variations, and preferred communication channels.
4. Need for comparative research on how language access operates across jurisdictions. E.g. Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board, New Zealand's Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment



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Thank you!

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