# Professionalizing Humanitarian Interpreting

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**Abstract:** This chapter describes InZone's efforts to train reliable linguistic intermediaries who facilitate communication between international humanitarian organizations and local communities in dozens of local languages spoken in refugee camps in Africa. We begin by describing InZone's history of delivering and improving training for interpreters working in such contexts and we present a definition of Humanitarian Interpreting. Next, we describe the linguistic, ethical, emotional and technological challenges interpreters working in these contexts face and the wide range of pedagogical and technological solutions that InZone has adopted to address these challenges. Finally, we lay out InZone's vision for professionalizing and training humanitarian interpreters at scale.

**Mots-clés :** humanitarian interpreting; professionalization; humanitarian communication; refugee; international humanitarian organizations.

**Résumé :** Ce chapitre présente le travail mené par InZone afin de former des médiateurs linguistiques fiables, facilitant la communication entre les organisations humanitaires internationales et les populations locales dans des dizaines de langues parlées dans les camps de réfugiés en Afrique. Nous retraçons tout d'abord l'histoire d'InZone en matière d'offre et d'amélioration des formations destinées aux interprètes œuvrant dans ces circonstances, et proposons une définition de l'interprétation humanitaire. Nous décrivons ensuite les défis linguistiques, éthiques, émotionnels et technologiques auxquels ces interprètes sont confrontés, ainsi que la vaste gamme de solutions pédagogiques et technologiques adoptées par InZone afin de relever ces mêmes défis. Enfin, nous exposons la vision d'InZone en faveur de la professionnalisation et de l'essor de la formation des interprètes humanitaires.

**Mots-clés :** interprétation humanitaire ; professionnalisation ; communication humanitaire ; réfugié ; organisations humanitaires internationales.

## 1 Introduction

Communication is critical in humanitarian action. Since language and culture condition conflict resolution and the transition to new forms of governance, communication in the languages of persons in distress and sensitivity to their cultures, as well as a strong set of accompanying skills, are indispensable in fragile, conflict and post-conflict settings.

InZone pioneers innovative approaches to multilingual communication and higher education in communities affected by conflict and crisis. As an academic center based at the University of Geneva, we have spent over a decade designing, developing and scientifically validating learner-centered and technology-supported pedagogical models in several regions of the world, training humanitarian interpreters onsite – in locations as diverse as Kenya, Afghanistan, Jordan, and Greece – and in blended learning contexts.

This chapter describes InZone's efforts to train competent linguistic intermediaries who facilitate communication between international humanitarian organizations and local communities. The first section of this chapter describes InZone's history of delivering and improving training for interpreters working in such contexts and presents a definition of Humanitarian Interpreting. Next, we describe the linguistic, ethical, emotional and technological challenges interpreters working in these contexts face, and the wide range of pedagogical and technological solutions that InZone has adopted to address these challenges. Finally, we lay out InZone's vision for professionalizing Humanitarian Interpreting at scale.

## 2 Training humanitarian interpreters through iterative innovation: A brief history of InZone

InZone's first training for humanitarian interpreters took place in 2005. At the request of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and USAID, 14 interpreters from Iraq were scheduled to participate in a two-week onsite training program in Geneva. Building on its knowledge of skills acquisition, interpreter training and virtual learning, the University of Geneva's *École de Traduction et d'Interprétation* (ETI) offered the first training in what would later come to be known as Humanitarian Interpreting. Of the14 students originally accepted for the course, only 4 managed to obtain visas to travel to Switzerland, underscoring the difficulties of offering such training in Geneva. Based on the insights gleaned from learners enrolled in this course, the idea of designing and developing a contextualized training course for humanitarian interpreters was conceived.

In collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the first comprehensive Basic Course for Humanitarian Interpreters was launched for ICRC field interpreters. The first two editions of this course were delivered entirely online in 2007 and 2009, using the *Virtual Institute* platform custom-built for the University of Geneva's Interpreting Department.

In response to feedback on the two online editions of the Basic Course, in 2010 the first blended version of the Basic Course was offered for humanitarian interpreters working in the United Nations Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) Nairobi office. Originally, the beneficiaries were refugee interpreters already working with UNHCR for refugees arriving in Nairobi. However, UNHCR was quick to invite InZone to deploy training in the Kakuma refugee camp in northwest Kenya. Subsequently, InZone designed courses for interpreters working with *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) and ran training courses for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

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The initiative to improve humanitarian communication 'at the last mile' was then consolidated into a project entitled InZone (Center for Interpreting in Conflict Zones), which operated as part of the University of Geneva's Interpreting Department.

The task of training interpreters based in refugee camps introduced an entirely new set of linguistic, ethical, and emotional challenges (see Section 4), as these interpreters were refugees working for clients who were refugees themselves. Furthermore, these interpreters were part of the UNHCR incentive work scheme, where working hours and remuneration were not clearly regulated (Moser-Mercer 2015). This stood in stark contrast to the regular work contracts held by the ICRC interpreters that InZone was training. As a result, InZone began contextualizing learning materials – through interpreted scenarios, role plays, and so on – for specific UNHCR and ICRC settings.

## 3 InZone's Humanitarian Interpreting Courses

As InZone further developed its approach, the Basic Course was divided into two sections. A three-day onsite portion allowed for proper onboarding of students and an introduction to skills not readily acquired online, while six online modules allowed for regular follow-up and skill development. Pedagogical design was based on the theory of skill acquisition and deliberate practice: expertise is developed when motivated individuals are given focused tasks, required to practise their skills repeatedly, and provided with clear feedback (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer 1993; Ericsson 2000: 195; Moser-Mercer, Frauenfelder, Casado & Künzli 2000). As such, in all InZone courses, learners tackle tasks of increasing complexity, while trainers and tutors provide feedback on learners' strengths and weaknesses. Based on this feedback, learners carry out targeted practice focusing on clearly identified challenges. They are given time to reflect on their performance, identify skills that require further honing, and engage in trial and error learning to develop the complex cognitive skills needed to work as interpreters (Hervais-Adelman *et al.* 2015).

Over the years, the Basic Course has lasted anywhere from five weeks to 12 months. While a five-week intensive course combining onsite and online components maximizes learner retention, the heavy workload is often incompatible with humanitarian interpreters' professional obligations; while the compressed schedule does not provide enough time to allow for proper, lasting skill acquisition. By contrast, in a 12-month course, there is a risk of significant attrition. In light of this, recent editions of the Basic Course have run for approximately three months, maximizing learner retention and allowing sufficient time for skill acquisition without overburdening learners, who are also working as interpreters for UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in the refugee camps.

Several additional insights gleaned from online teaching helped to fine-tune the Basic Course. First, the six modules were redesigned to integrate more specific learning objectives throughout the course. Second, certain activities were delivered onsite to initiate skill acquisition, with the understanding that onsite feedback would help improve subsequent online performance. Third, greater attention was paid to how ethical challenges dovetailed with skill acquisition. Finally, activities were contextualized to maximize achievement of learning outcomes and recognize the role of incidental learn-

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ing. As a result, trainers assigned to a Basic Course remained with the cohort from beginning to end; additional online tutors who had joined the team to cover specific language combinations worked hand-in-hand with trainers who had delivered the onsite component, allowing them to focus on each learner's progression and provide consistent, pertinent, learner-centered feedback.

In 2013, InZone built its first learning hubs in the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya. Equipped with ten learning stations each, these refugee-run, solar-powered hubs support virtual and blended learning for a wide range of formal and non-formal higher education courses, including InZone's Humanitarian Interpreting courses. Refugees were hired to open the hubs during the evenings and weekends, at times that were compatible with learners' professional schedules. Courses used the Interpreting Department's virtual learning platform, which allowed for online interaction with peers and tutors and tracking of student progress and performance (*cf.* Motta 2006). The custom-built platform was created for low-bandwidth environments and featured responsive design; as a result, students could complete exercises in low-connectivity environments and from a wide variety of devices, including smartphones and tablets.

In order to promote learner retention and local capacity-building, InZone's course designers have also focused on cohort sizes and tutoring. Over the years, we have learned that scaling learner-centered pedagogy was challenging; consequently, InZone's Humanitarian Interpreting courses are generally capped at 15 students per cohort. We have also recognized the value of local e-learning facilitators, who serve as a visible focal point for enrolled students, motivating them to complete the course and providing tips and suggestions to learners (see Section 6). Recent efforts have aimed to build local tutoring capacity and empower refugee tutors to take responsibility for a course, with a view to fostering local expertise to the point at which courses can be run with limited supervision from Geneva (see Section 7).

Such efforts are clearly linked to scalability. While building local capacity represents one approach to fostering scalability, InZone is highly cognizant of the significant need for Humanitarian Interpreting training, both within Africa and elsewhere. Consequently, InZone has designed and is building a comprehensive series of e-learning courses for humanitarian interpreters. Section 7 details InZone's work to professionalize and scale up Humanitarian Interpreting.

To date, InZone has offered over a dozen editions of the Basic Course to over two hundred learners. Student feedback has consistently indicated an interest in more advanced humanitarian interpreter training. To respond to this need, InZone has developed a series of more advanced courses. In 2014-15, InZone and Kenyatta University offered the first edition of the Certificate in Community Interpreting, which was designed to professionalize community interpreting for Somali <> English interpreters in the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps and in Nairobi's urban refugee community. This nearly 100% online course reflects InZone's commitment to partnering with local universities and organizations with extensive knowledge of local challenges. It included modules on English enhancement, community interpreting, interpreting management, beginning and intermediate consecutive interpreting, and

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basic whispered and simultaneous interpreting, all adapted to the difficult conditions experienced by course participants. Seventeen learners, including 4 women, graduated from the course in 2015, representing a 94% completion rate.

One year later, InZone launched the Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) in Humanitarian Interpreting, a year-long (11 ECTS [1] postgraduate course which aims to provide professional-level training (EQF [2] level 5) in Humanitarian Interpreting. The CAS is designed for field interpreters, interpreters working for humanitarian organizations, and members of the diaspora hoping to utilize their language and cultural skills to facilitate humanitarian communication. It includes modules on humanitarian interpreting skills, interpreting ethics, international law for humanitarian interpreters, and humanitarian organizations. In an innovative partnership, the course incorporated DisasterReady.org's Humanitarian Starter Pack I and II modules, which foster an understanding of humanitarian contexts and principles; these were complemented by formative assessment activities designed by InZone and accredited by the University of Geneva's Continuing Education Center.

Advanced certification and training courses increase mobility from one humanitarian organization to another and expand the pool of professional talent for humanitarian organizations that rely on quality communication to implement programs in the field. They also provide the grounding that refugee interpreters need to build a new career when resettled in a foreign country and rejoining the diaspora communities. Indeed, CAS participants have gone on to serve as tutors for other InZone courses, pursue further higher education, work for a variety of humanitarian organizations, coordinate interpreting services for international organizations, and find interpreting positions after resettlement in a new country. All three refugee graduates of the first edition of the CAS found work as humanitarian interpreters after resettlement, while the remaining non-refugee graduates continue to work as interpreters for humanitarian NGOs. Furthermore, the four Basic Course graduates whom we know have been resettled all work as community interpreters in the home communities of their new host countries. This is fully in line with humanitarian principles: courses should be relevant for refugee learners in a wide range of settings – whether they stay in the camp, integrate into the host community, are repatriated, or are resettled.

In 2016 and 2017, InZone piloted the Rapid Response Module for Humanitarian Interpreters, a one-hour self-learning module that leverages the potential of e-learning to provide an introduction to basic interpreting concepts, methods and tools, cultural and ethical challenges, interpreting-specific psychosocial stressors, potential health issues, and self-care strategies for interpreters working in disaster zones and other humanitarian contexts (Delahayes, Gibbs & Sebastiani 2016; Delahayes & Sebastiani 2016). Further detail on this module and InZone's approach to professionalizing Humanitarian Interpreting is provided in Section 7.

1. ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. See https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources/european-credit-transfer-accumulation-system_en.)

2. EQF: European Qualifications Framework. See http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf.

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InZone recognizes that learning is best supported when potential barriers are minimized. To this end, recent editions of the Basic Course have been held at the UNHCR compound, where humanitarian interpreters already report for work on a daily basis. Our most recent round of student surveys and tutor focus groups from Kakuma (Goldsmith, 2017) revealed that blending professional and academic commitments by allowing students to pursue learning in their workplace – where onsite tutor feedback is also provided – represents a significant improvement over previous efforts where coursework was more compartmentalized and learning spaces were further removed from professional environments.

## 4 Defining Humanitarian Interpreting

InZone defines Humanitarian Interpreting as the act performed by interpreters working for organizations with a humanitarian mandate, such as UNHCR, ICRC, MSF, the World Food Programme (WFP) or Save the Children.

Humanitarian interpreters:

— work in **fragile environments**, including conflict and post-conflict contexts, refugee camps, urban refugee settings, and other contexts where International Humanitarian Law, human rights law and refugee law apply;

— pursue the missions of humanitarian organizations in **situations of human suffering**, including visits to detention centers and field hospitals and interviews related to refugee status determination and with victims of conflict;

— work with **beneficiaries protected under International Humanitarian Law**, including children, women, civilians, detainees, refugees, displaced, and wounded or sick persons; and

— have **no institutionalized professional community**, association or established code of professional ethics.

Humanitarian interpreters differ from conflict zone interpreters for several reasons, including the mandate of the organizations for which they work, the contexts in which they operate, the times at which they are called upon to provide interpreting services, and the fact that they are neither associated with a military deployment nor embedded in the military.

Humanitarian interpreters work for organizations with a humanitarian mandate – predominantly international aid organizations. In contrast, according to the definition adopted by AIIC, conflict zone interpreters 'serv [e] as field linguists for the armed forces, journalists, NGOs, and other organizations in conflict zones' (AIIC *et al* 2012: 1). Conflict zone interpreters can be either members of the military who serve as language specialists – often referred to as military linguists – or civilians who are embedded within the military, but are not enlisted. As such, conflict zone interpreters work for one of the warring parties and support reconnaissance and combat missions, while humanitarian interpreters support civilians dealing with the consequences of war, such as forced displacement due to violence and persecution. The narratives the two types of interpreters have to deal with are thus substantially different.

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Since humanitarian interpreters and conflict zone interpreters are often recruited from among the local population, they may both face delicate ethical challenges, straddling the boundaries between their communities and the organizations for which they work. In particular, they may struggle to navigate the ethical issues surrounding neutrality and impartiality (Baker 2010): they are seen as siding with international forces or organizations on account of their employment relationship, but also have an allegiance to their own communities, and may experience role conflict due to the language and culture they share with the people for whom they interpret (Moser-Mercer 2015). Since working for one party implies loyalty to that party, military interpreters cannot be considered to be neutral.

In light of these ethical challenges, trainers of both humanitarian and conflict zone interpreters underscore the importance of neutrality and impartiality (*cf.* AIIC 2012; Moser-Mercer 2015). The ICRC goes one step further, and has a policy of not sending interpreters to countries of which they are nationals so as to guarantee adherence to these key tenets of interpreting.

Conflict zone interpreters tend to work in particularly 'high-risk environments' (AIIC *et al* 2012: 1) during a conflict itself, while humanitarian interpreters more frequently operate after hostilities have largely subsided. Conflict zone interpreters 'accompany raids and participate in combat foot patrols, vehicle patrols, ambushes, bomb-clearing and base security missions. They are usually dressed in army fatigues, and they may wear body armor and carry weapons' (Moser-Mercer 2015: 309). In contrast, humanitarian interpreters are less frequently in the direct line of fire. As Moser-Mercer (2015: 303, drawing on Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2011: 14) points out, however, 'conflict can escalate from mere differences to contradictions, polarization, violence and war, and then can de-escalate following a ceasefire designed to pave the way to an agreement, normalization and reconciliation. War, then, is not the only form of conflict and not every conflict assumes the scale of a full-blown war.'

Regardless of these differences, humanitarian and conflict zone interpreters share certain characteristics. Both are frequently drawn from the local populations and are tasked with remaining neutral and impartial while working. Both types of interpreters tend to work in fragile contexts and to lack professional recognition and training, Finally, since both humanitarian and conflict-zone interpreters regularly face protection-related challenges, the organizations employing them should be held responsible for guaranteeing their safety and protection in these trying contexts.

## 5 Humanitarian Interpreting at the last mile

Since our very first Humanitarian Interpreting courses, InZone has been drawing up an inventory of humanitarian communication challenges encountered by participants (*cf.* Moser-Mercer 2017). Using a pre-course survey, role plays, and exercises designed to collect 'tough cases,' InZone has gained a comprehensive understanding of the considerable humanitarian communication challenges at the last mile. These challenges can be roughly organized into three categories: linguistic, ethical or role-related, and emotional challenges.

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Humanitarian interpreters face linguistic challenges when trying to find equivalents between source and target languages, particularly when social relationships such as kinship systems differ, as is the case with the displaced Somali population in Africa. They may struggle with long statements, fast speakers, technical terminology, different dialects, and the gestures or body language that beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance use. Audibility issues (such as a very soft-spoken individual), noise from adjacent interview rooms, and a lack of privacy further complicate their work. Finally, it may be difficult for them to do their job when the beneficiaries understand the language spoken by the humanitarian actor, or when they face a heavy workload: at times, they may be the only interpreter available for a particular language.

In terms of ethical or role-related challenges, humanitarian interpreters may struggle when beneficiaries do not understand turn-taking or turn length, look at the interpreter rather than the humanitarian actor, or fail to answer a question, leading to silences in the room and a lack of clarity regarding who controls the exchange. Beneficiaries may ask the interpreter to advocate on their behalf, support them, or improve their stories so they meet the requirements for refugee status. They sometimes approach the interpreter to discuss their case outside the interview context. They may also hide information, provide false information which the interpreter discovers, be incoherent or repetitive, or provide more information than the humanitarian actor requested. Furthermore, humanitarian actors sometimes blame interpreters when a beneficiary is evasive or when their statement is unclear or changes from the first to second interview. Humanitarian actors may also obligate interpreters to intervene when beneficiaries are uncooperative. Consequently, humanitarian interpreters face ethical and role-related challenges from both beneficiaries and humanitarian actors.

Humanitarian interpreters must tackle numerous emotional challenges in their daily work. Beneficiaries often share emotionally charged statements or relate traumatic stories; when beneficiaries become emotional or start crying, interpreters may follow suit. Humanitarian interpreters often suffer from vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, and may have nightmares from interpreting such harrowing stories. Stressors from within the workplace or from their personal lives may interfere with an interpreter's performance. Furthermore, when humanitarian actors make interpreters feel unwelcome or fail to express appreciation for their work, interpreters' motivation may decrease.

Humanitarian interpreters also face other challenges which are more difficult to classify. Due to limited transportation options, interpreters may struggle to get to work. They may also encounter security or protection-related issues if beneficiaries seek retribution. In some cases, male interpreters struggle to interpret for female beneficiaries or vice-versa. Finally, long working hours, a lack of capacity building for humanitarian interpreters, and working as an interpreter for many years on end may lead to interpreter burnout.

By designing appropriate learning activities – including role plays and collaborative problem-solving – InZone's training courses have been designed to address these challenges.

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The vast majority of linguistic challenges can be mitigated through language enhancement, glossary-building, research, and collaborating with colleagues to identity potential solutions where there is a lack of equivalencies between the source and target language. Certain challenges require bespoke solutions. For example, InZone trains interpreters to translate only between language variants they understand and prepares them to educate interpreting users about such linguistic differences. Furthermore, InZone regularly runs a two-hour onsite seminar for users of interpreters, raising awareness about the aforementioned challenges and brainstorming solutions. InZone currently plans to develop an e-learning module for interpreting users, which could be accompanied by virtual training sessions.

Most ethical or role-related challenges can be resolved by clearly delimiting the roles all three individuals play in an interview. Figure 1 below identifies the boundaries and directions in which communication should ideally flow.

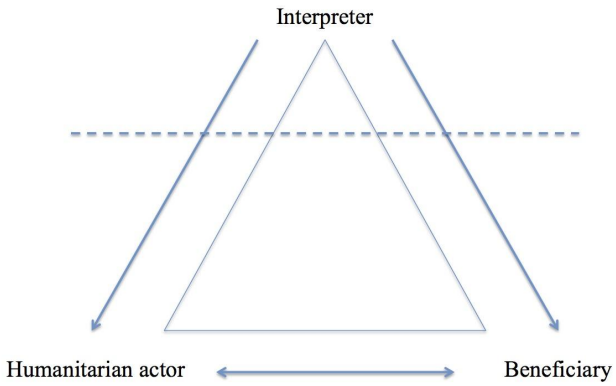



Figure 1 – The trialogue

During an interview, the interpreter is tasked with acting as a neutral conduit, and should make every effort to remain neutral so information can be freely exchanged between the humanitarian actor and beneficiary (for a comprehensive discussion of the conduit model, see Hsieh, 2016). The humanitarian actor should address the beneficiary, and vice versa. The humanitarian actor is in charge of the interview and manages it. Although interpreters do not make any management decisions during the interview, they do make professional decisions, such as asking for clarification if they do not understand a statement, asking that only one person speak at a given time, and interrupting the interview if they become too emotional and cannot provide a professional service. Following these professional guidelines makes humanitarian interpreters more likely to remain neutral and impartial, thereby limiting the challenges they face and optimizing the outcome of an interview.

By training interpreters in self-care strategies and attending to their psychosocial well-being, including how to handle stress, InZone aims to alleviate many of the emotional

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challenges that arise when interpreting in fragile contexts. Concretely, training aims to facilitate a greater understanding on the part of the interpreter of his or her own physiological and mental responses, considering interpreting-specific stressors, warning signs of stress, coping strategies, resilience, and moral efficacy. Interpreters are trained to deploy the coping strategies that they have developed before the interview starts, during the interview, right after the interview, and after leaving work. Coping strategies humanitarian interpreters have shared with the training cohort have included belly breathing (taking three deep breaths), taking positive steps to detach oneself during the interview, and finding activities (sports, music, dance, storytelling, etc.) that help to clear their mind after work. By fostering self-reliance and contextually validated strategies, interpreters are better equipped to stay above the dotted line in the triangle in Figure 1. As a result, interpreters can remain more detached – both physically and emotionally – from what they hear.

## 6 Pedagogical and technological solutions for professionalizing Humanitarian Interpreting in conflict-affected low-resource contexts

Beyond the communication-related challenges mentioned above, InZone has encountered additional difficulties that learners in low-resource contexts face. Moser-Mercer's (2014) pilot study of learners from Dadaab Refugee Camp enrolled in a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) observed technological challenges including a lack of access to computers, older mobile phones with small displays that were poorly suited for academic learning, the high cost of purchasing data, poor connectivity, and slow download speeds. Over the years, we have also noted that learners may have rudimentary Internet skills; few have previous experience in online or blended courses. Although the number of smartphones and laptops owned by students is on the rise, we continue to see limited resources in refugee contexts – paper and writing utensils are in short supply. Furthermore, though employers offer a limited number of decommissioned computers for learners to use, they may not be able to provide technical support. Power outages, flash floods, security alerts, and health and protection issues all represent challenges that individuals must surmount to pursue their learning (Moser-Mercer, Delgado Luchner & Kherbiche 2012). Furthermore, as most of our students from Africa are already working for UNHCR or another humanitarian organization, they must juggle their professional, personal, and academic commitments in order to maximize time management. Finally, mobility represents an additional hurdle for refugee learners: simply getting to work or to the learning hub can be challenging, and a number of learners have been resettled, repatriated, moved to a different refugee camp, or dropped from the UNHCR interpreter roster while the course in which they were enrolled was in session.

InZone has adopted a wide range of technological and pedagogical solutions to address these challenges. Technological solutions begin with a virtual learning support matrix, which aims to support learners as they move from basic IT skills such as email and texting to more intermediate and advanced skills like file management, downloading and uploading documents, using a virtual learning platform, receiving and giving

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online feedback, and engaging in online collaborative learning. To address bandwidth issues, learning and assessment materials are preloaded on pen drives which are distributed to students; InZone's low-bandwidth learning platform features responsive design, making it accessible from computers, tablets, and mobile devices. Given the high cost of Internet access when outside the workplace, InZone students also use WhatsApp Messenger, a free cross-platform mobile messaging system that facilitates fast and easy communication among students and tutors.

On the pedagogical front, the online portion of InZone's courses is largely asynchronous, allowing learners to complete activities, review feedback, and engage in online and onsite collaborative learning when their schedules permit. We have also found that clear deadlines, regular encouragement, a reliable support system, and additional flexibility when needed (e.g. given low connectivity or family-related challenges) all contribute to keeping learners on track and foster course completion in InZone's learning ecosystem.

To this end, InZone's tutor-led model represents an innovative approach to professionalizing humanitarian interpreter training. Past graduates of InZone's humanitarian interpreter training courses are recruited to serve as local tutors and provide onsite support for all InZone courses in Africa; one Arabic-speaking Somali graduate is currently tutoring a course in the Middle East. We generally recruit one tutor per five to eight students, and aim to ensure gender, linguistic, and ethnic diversity among tutors in a given cohort. Tutors are encouraged to build strong, professional working relationships with tutees. Since local tutors regularly check in with learners and can easily reach out by text message, phone, or in person, they play a key role in supporting learners.

Tutoring helps tutees to feel part of a community, explore their strengths and weaknesses without fear of being assessed, stay on track, receive reminders and tips for returning to work when motivation is flagging, develop a relationship of trust with their tutor, and to learn to manage course content effectively (Motta, 2017). Our humanitarian interpreting tutors serve as both coaches – helping learners to achieve the learning goals by encouraging and challenging them, fostering debate and reflection, providing constructive feedback and IT support, and ensuring that they meet deadlines – and subject matter experts, clarifying misunderstandings, pointing learners to other sources of information, and providing language-specific feedback to help them improve their interpreting skills. Using a wide variety of techniques – including questioning, encouraging, listening, motivating, providing formative feedback, keeping learners on track, and drawing up learning contracts where appropriate – they promote the transition from transmissive to collaborative learning and help students develop the skills needed to become independent learners (ibid).

## 7 InZone's vision for scaling up and professionalizing Humanitarian Interpreting

A decade's experience of training humanitarian interpreters in the field and evaluations of various training courses (Moser-Mercer, Kherbiche & Class, 2014; Delgado Luchner 2015; InZone, 2016) have revealed a clear need for professionalizing the Hu-

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manitarian Interpreting sector. Indeed, most humanitarian interpreters are recruited not because they are trained professionals, but because they happen to know two or more languages and are in the right place at the right time. In the aftermath of a disaster, many interpreters are needed at very short notice, yet the vast majority receive little or no formal interpreting training (Businaro 2012; Moser-Mercer & Bali 2007). Poor communication due to a dearth of trained translators and interpreters can hamper relief efforts and the provision of humanitarian aid in the wake of an emergency (Shepherd-Barron 2010), leading to wasted resources and even causing harm (Dmitracova 2009). Due to the volatility and mobility that characterize the humanitarian context – and since interpreters use their positions as a stepping-stone to higher-level posts or resettlement in certain organizations – the interpreter rosters of humanitarian organizations change regularly.

Despite the absence of a proper career path, humanitarian interpreters need to be motivated to improve their skills. In order to enhance the quality of humanitarian communication at the last mile, training institutions should go beyond training and advocate for professionalization while designing, developing and deploying learning pathways that support professionalization across the humanitarian sector. Furthermore, organizations must recall that they work within the framework of International Humanitarian Law, and that the humanitarian principle of 'do no harm' (Anderson, 1999) applies.

The shortage of trained humanitarian communicators and the burgeoning demand for humanitarian interpreter training calls for a response that can be scaled up, in which self-study modules facilitate acquisition of basic Humanitarian Interpreting skills (*cf.* Delahayes & Sebastiani 2016) and local tutors are empowered to serve as trainers.

To this end, InZone has designed a building-block approach to training humanitarian interpreters that offers pathways to professionalization. Online, self-study modules aim to foster the development of progressively more advanced levels of interpreting skills, ethics, professionalism and psychosocial well-being. Optional modules allow for specialization in the legal foundations underpinning Humanitarian Interpreting, more advanced skills such as sight translation and terminology management, and organization-specific or regionally relevant interpreting scenarios which allow them to operate professionally in their specific contexts. The learning pathways are designed to allow interpreters to move from a basic skill level enabling them to become operational in a variety of humanitarian settings to an intermediate level fostering development of professional interpreting skills and an advanced level certifying a humanitarian interpreter's expertise in handling all humanitarian contexts at an expert level. Additional deliberate practice, coupled with online and onsite support from tutors, helps to hone the skills presented in skills-based modules.

As interpreters may be recruited by international relief organizations and deployed at short notice to address pressing needs (Businaro 2012), the initial module (the Rapid Response Module for Humanitarian Interpreters) is an on-demand introduction to Humanitarian Interpreting. In approximately one hour, learners work through a series of realistic interpreting assignments, discovering basic interpreting concepts, methods and tools, their cultural and ethical implications, interpreting-specific psy-

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chosocial stressors, potential health issues, and self-care strategies. Leveraging e-learning technology, this self-study course provides an orientation for interpreters working in disaster zones and other humanitarian contexts. Through a 'one day in the field'narrative structure, learners are guided through an orientation meeting, three training assignments, and a debriefing. Throughout the course, they receive interactive feedback on challenges likely to arise in the field – including emotionally-charged settings and cultural and ethical quandaries – that empower them to make informed judgments about nuanced interpreting dilemmas. The interactive course is compact and free, user-friendly, designed for low-bandwidth and mobile devices, downloadable, and accessible even to learners with lower levels of English proficiency; the language is comprehensible for those with a B1 level in English as per the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. (For a detailed discussion of this module, see Delahayes, Gibbs & Sebastiani 2016 and Delahayes & Sebastiani 2016.)

The Rapid Response Module for Humanitarian Interpreters was piloted with 30 interpreters working with Arabic, Dari, Farsi and Pashto in Greece and 15 interpreters working with Acholi, Amharic, Arabic, Bembe, Diding'a, Dinka, French, Fur, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Lingala, Lopit, Lotoku, Nuer, Somali and Tigrinya in Kenya. Our evaluation of the first pilot found that learners who had completed the course had grasped the basics of Humanitarian Interpreting, and that the module's interactive nature supported self-study and motivated participants to continue to completion. Consequently, the module was seen as a solid lead-in to more advanced Humanitarian Interpreting courses and a model for future e-learning courses (Delahayes, Goldsmith, Sebastiani & Gibbs 2016). Study results also revealed that learners would like to see the module translated into their working languages and the language of the country in which they were working. Consequently, InZone is currently collaborating with a team of volunteers to localize the module into priority languages for humanitarian settings.

In the second pilot, the module was used as the lead-in to a Basic Course run in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. Instructors observed that learners were much better prepared for the onsite training, noting higher motivation levels and a broader understanding of key interpreting concepts.

InZone's most recent courses – including the 2017 Basic Course in Kakuma Refugee Camp – have adopted the tutor-led approach described above. In this most recent iteration, Kakuma-based refugees who had completed InZone's Humanitarian Interpreting courses – including more advanced training courses – were hired as tutors. Tutors supported and encouraged learners as they worked through course material, helping to keep them on track and brainstorm solutions to challenges as they arose. For the first time, InZone trained tutors to provide individualized online and *in situ* feedback to tutees on their work; this was complemented by global feedback from InZone's Geneva-based trainers. By recruiting tutors with extensive experience, advanced training, and a broad range of language combinations, we were able to cover the vast number of languages used by learners. Where local tutors could not cover all language combinations, they were entrusted with recruiting from among InZone-trained

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interpreters who could provide language-specific feedback for the many languages spoken in humanitarian settings.

By leveraging e-learning modules and training local tutors to facilitate skill acquisition, InZone aims to build capacity on the ground. Indeed, our ultimate goal is to train up local tutors to run courses independently, with InZone providing input on an as-needed basis. By pursuing this goal, we promote refugee ownership and empowerment, build a community of trained humanitarian interpreters, foster South-South capacity building by training graduates to run introductory courses for humanitarian interpreters, and ensure sustainability and the ability to scale up higher-level learning in fragile contexts (*cf.* Moser-Mercer, Hayba & Goldsmith 2016).

## 8 Conclusions

In the 12 years since the launch of our first course, InZone has developed an in-depth understanding of humanitarian communication scenarios in the field, allowing us to develop courses that were contextually relevant, adapted to interpreters' work schedules, deliverable largely at distance, and accessible in low-connectivity environments. These courses have also factored in a sufficiently long period of time to allow for skills to develop to a level of expertise that would guarantee optimal performance in legally and emotionally complex communication scenarios framed by International Humanitarian Law. We have also endeavored to refine our pedagogy, develop contextualized learning materials, utilize learning platforms that are well-suited to low-resource environments and low-level IT skills, and design learning sequences that blend onsite and online activities. Ongoing evaluation and feedback from learners and trainers have further contributed to enhancing our model.

As we look tothe INEE *Minimum Standards Handbook* (2010) and the *Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response* (2018) as exemplary guides to enhancing humanitarian accountability, it is clear that we must strive to build on the solid, recognized foundation of our existing courses while developing scalable learning pathways that allow for the professionalization of Humanitarian Interpreting. We are accountable to the profession of Humanitarian Interpreting, and ultimately accountable to beneficiaries who should be able to enjoy the protection of their rights under International Humanitarian Law, human rights and refugee law. Such protections should be provided by humanitarian organizations in a language that refugees and persons of concern under International Humanitarian Law can comprehend. We are also accountable to the humanitarian sector as we support the improvement of standards of practice, professional development and capacity building. Our courses are not simply about training; indeed, their ultimate goal is to support the professionalization of the humanitarian sector and advocate for quality humanitarian communication at the last mile.

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