



## BetweenLanguages

Quality standards and minimum requirements  
for the qualification of interpreters in social  
work settings in Germany

Project partner:

Funded by:



# Imprint

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# Foreword

Dear readers,

Germany is and has long been a country of immigration. Almost a quarter of its population calls Germany home, while also having roots in other cultures and knowledge of other languages.

"The limits of my language are the limits of my world" - as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said. Language skills are essential for understanding others and making yourself understood. To ensure that everyone in our country can achieve their full potential from the very start and that there are no hurdles to participating in society, early and consistent language support is crucial. Provision of good language mediation is equally of the utmost importance.

Many of the 19.3 million people with a family history of immigration are bridge builders and mediators in our country: between majorities and minorities, Germans and new immigrants, or perhaps locals and refugees. Language mediators (Sprachmittler\*innen) are also important pillars of this bridge-building. New immigrants in particular, but also some older people with a history of immigration, need support with communication and removing language barriers.

Our social services, educational institutions, social and employment services and health and care services also rely on high-quality language mediation. These services lay important foundations for integration for many people. That is why communication and cultural mediation must be guaranteed there.

BetweenLanguages, a research project, makes an important contribution to this. I am very happy that the project would like to help to improve training for language mediators. Our state and social institutions need to know the quality of training they can rely on when using language mediators.

I would like to thank the Research Group on Migration and Psychosocial Health at the IDepartment of Medical Psychology at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf for collating the quality standards. Their results and this brochure offer good advice and support for providing an appropriate, viable and affordable service to language mediators.

I hope you enjoy reading the brochure!



Yours, Annette Widmann-Mauz Member of Parliament  
Minister of State in the Federal Chancellery  
Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration

Dear readers,

Since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany, many migrants have contributed tremendously to integration by helping their family members and fellow countrymen to communicate, among other things.

Regardless of this, there are areas of life and contexts where it is necessary for the verbal transmission of what has been said to be exact and completely accurate in terms of content. To ensure the long-term quality of language interpretation in these contexts and to avoid errors caused by the use of unqualified interpreters and language mediators, a qualification system for language mediators and interpreters should be established in social work settings in Germany.

Non-academic qualification programmes for language mediation have existed in Germany for many decades. These programmes still make an enormous contribution to making language mediation in Germany more professional. Due to the lack of national integration measures, there is as yet no nationwide uniform system of qualification. Instead, there are currently 88 different qualification programmes in Germany alone, which can differ significantly in terms of basic aspects, such as entry requirements, length of course and course contents.

In order to motivate more people to become involved in language mediation in the long term, to offer providers of training schemes suggestions for further development and ultimately to strengthen the job profile and language mediation role, we have decided to work with a range of players in Germany to develop these quality standards and minimum requirements. It was important to us that, as a scientific, independent institution, we were able to collect and collate relevant data to serve as the basis for a consensus process.

In the consensus process, it was very important to us to bring all relevant players in Germany together and collaborate on the development of existing standards. Thanks to the forum for shared discourse and the great willingness to develop solutions, it was possible to gain consensus from some conflicting attitudes. We were however unable to reach consensus on some points.

These quality standards and minimum requirements do not claim to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, they currently represent the best available professional consensus on the qualification of language mediators and interpreters in Germany.

At this point, we would like to thank all those who made these standards possible. Firstly, there are language mediators, experts and refugees, who have shared their experience and thus contributed to a broad and high-quality database. Furthermore, there are the participants in the consensus process who contributed their expertise in an extremely constructive manner and who were committed to developing the best possible standards.

Kind regards,



Prof Dr Mike Mösko  
Project lead



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# Summary

This "Quality standards and minimum requirements for the qualification of interpreters in social work settings in Germany" brochure presents the results of the two-year "BetweenLanguages" research project. The project was co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union.

An extensive database was developed on the basis of an international assessment of existing training measures and evaluated studies, together with extensive surveys of language mediators / interpreters, institutional users, refugees and experts. This provided the foundation for the consensus procedure, in which experts from Germany and players from the field of language mediation and interpreting developed the quality standards in several stages.

The quality standards are divided into structural characteristics of the training measure (such as organisational framework, admission requirements, completion of the training, support for participants), contents of the training measure (such as interpreting, professional ethics and role perception, specialist knowledge, cultural topics, linguistic skills and social / emotional / communication skills), quality assurance requirements and the title after qualification.

The quality standards serve as a nationwide structural and content-related framework for training measures for language mediators and interpreters in social work settings, and are intended to provide guidance for educational institutions, investors, political figures and users in this field. As such, the quality standards and minimum requirements constitute a building block towards making language mediation and interpreting in social work settings in Germany more professional.



# I. Preamble

## Background

Since its foundation, the Federal Republic of Germany has experienced a number of waves of immigration. The majority of immigrants have not grown up with German as their mother tongue and have managed to communicate in Germany primarily due to the help of their families, relatives and fellow countrymen.

Even assuming a favourable development (young age, good learning conditions, etc.), it takes years for immigrants to master the official German language in all its complexity and be able to communicate independently with the employment agency, public authorities or health care system. It is therefore not surprising that, according to the Socio-Economic Panel (IAB Migration Sample), 37% of migrants have poor or no German language skills, even after more than eleven years in Germany (Liebau & Romiti, 2014).

In order to overcome the language barriers, Germany has so far only focused on providing language courses as a means to acquiring the official language. In many cities, municipalities and counties, however, it has been shown that professional language mediation or interpreting is also necessary for all those situations in which the language skills of migrants and refugees are not (yet) sufficient. This ensures that conversations are as successful as possible and that, despite language barriers, clients or patients can make full use of available advice and care services.

In order to promote and ensure high-quality language mediation and interpreting, some countries have set up systems for the qualification of language mediators and interpreters. These systems are used to define, establish, and guarantee uniform quality standards throughout the country in the long-term. Examples include Australia and Switzerland, in particular, which have been operating standardised quality assurance systems across the country for a number of years, focusing on the qualification of language mediators and interpreters. In Switzerland, this quality management process is combined under the national interest group INTERPRET. In Australia, the standards for professional interpreting and translation are set out and promoted by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

The terms language mediation (Sprachmitteln/Sprachmittlung) and interpreting will hereafter be presented as equals in such instances where a distinction is not necessary or conveniently feasible. This relates, in that instance, to the general activity by which the conversation between two people who do not have a common language is made possible by a third person. The parallel use of both terms is intended to avoid positioning in the discussions at technical and political level around these terms in these text passages. Since the content of these discussions is based on different opinions on the structure of the role of language mediators and interpreters, the aim is to avoid creating a bias on a linguistic level. Otherwise, the presentation would threaten to undermine the central objective of the project from the outset, since the definition of a specific role perception for the qualification of individuals for this activity had only been established as one of the results at the end of the project. It is therefore intended to express maximum impartiality on a linguistic level before and during this process, which is driven by scientific methods.

There are currently around 11 million German residents who hold foreign citizenship. A quarter of the total population has a migrant background, two-thirds of whom have their own immigration experience (Federal Statistical Office, 2018). The majority of these immigrants or refugees have, at least at the beginning, insufficient knowledge of the German language that would be necessary for conversations that clients or patients have in the different fields and facilities. As a result, there is a high need for language mediation and interpreting in order to ensure that adequate advice and support is provided in social work settings.

So far, however, in Germany there are no uniform standards for the qualification of language mediators or interpreters in this particular field of activity. As a result, language mediators and interpreters working in social work settings have different levels of qualifications. It is not uncommon for non-qualified individuals, such as family members, friends and colleagues, to be involved in language mediation or interpreting (Ahamer, 2013). Particularly in the field of social counselling and support for refugees, this task requires a variety of skills, which can in no way be assumed from someone who speaks German and the other required language in everyday life. Furthermore, language mediators and interpreters work under enormous time pressure and with sometimes highly stressed and vulnerable clients, with low pay and, at times, a lack of recognition. The psychosocial burden in this working context has also been proven to cause secondary trauma (Wichmann et al., 2014).

In Germany, the training measures that are currently on offer range from three-hour workshops to one and a half years of full-time training or two-year master courses. In addition, there are a multitude of sometimes confusing names for all those differently qualified individuals: volunteer interpreters, refugee guides, refugee sponsors, community interpreters, integration guides, integration mentors, intercultural assistants, cultural interpreters, cultural guides, cultural mediators, language guides, language mediators, language and integration mediators, language and culture mediators - to name just a few. These different wordings can only partly be attributed to the different emphases of work focuses, task profiles and roles.

This broad range of terms leads to great confusion as regards the respective focuses and strengths of the courses on offer and the skills acquired as a result. Conversely, this large but hardly structured range of qualifications leads to uncertainty for individuals wanting to gain a qualification to work in language mediation or interpreting. On what basis should a person choose a useful training measure that is recognised and actually opens up earning potential? If nothing else, communication between refugees and the different players in social and official institutions can suffer from these uncertainties, and with it the quality of the social care provided (Flores et al., 2003; Bauer & Alegria, 2010). This can also lead to undesirable medium and long-term follow-up costs; for example, if, due to ineffectively interpreted communication between specialists and clients, access to the (appropriate) services and measures is not guaranteed or specialist personnel and other resources of the facilities have to be used more than is necessary - in other words, inefficiently.<sup>1</sup>

The above reasons make it necessary to consolidate and outline this professional field. Not only is it necessary to provide guidance for all three target groups who bear responsibility within social work settings in this field which is characterised by "institutionalised emergency solutions"<sup>2</sup>, i.e. for educational institutions, mediators, political decision-makers and



institutions using language mediation or interpreting. The foundations must also be laid for language mediators and interpreters in terms of participation and appreciations. This is primarily achieved through good and stable earning opportunities based on solid qualifications. In addition, there is the job of creating clearer conditions in relation to volunteers in the field of language mediation or interpreting, so that they do not experience a creeping decline in legitimacy, but can provide their valuable services where they can be put to effective use.

The quality standards and minimum requirements produced herein as a guidance tool in heterogeneous conditions are intended to provide an important contribution to overcoming all of these challenges. The "BetweenLanguages – Quality standards for the qualification of language mediators in social work settings in Germany" project aims to tackle these challenges. The two-year project was co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union.

### Objective of the standards

Overall, the quality standards are intended to contribute to strengthening qualified interpreting in

1 The healthcare sector, for example, provides clear indications of the negative effects of language barriers that are not or insufficiently managed. For example, medical care for people with language barriers differs from those without: shorter inpatient treatment (Lebrun, 2011; Bermejo et al., 2009); refusal of outpatient specialist treatment (Möske et al., 2013); higher dissatisfaction with care (Yeo, 2004); fewer visits to psychiatric support facilities (Ohtani et al., 2015).

2 This is what Sonja Pöllabauer stated on 18.6.2018 in her lecture entitled "Development of language mediation in German-speaking countries" at the "Quality standards for the qualification of language mediators" closing conference at the University Hospital Hamburg-Eppendorf.



Germany. The standards are intended to facilitate the development of training programmes. They are also a quality assurance tool that can be used to review and, if necessary, expand existing qualifications. They also provide guidance when evaluating training measures.

### Target group

The quality standards provide guidance not only for lecturers, professional associations, scientists and practitioners but also for providers of training measures.

In addition, prospective language mediators and interpreters and those already active in this field should be able to assess their own (further) qualification needs and select suitable measures based on the quality standards and minimum requirements.

### Self-perception

The principles of scientific work, such as correctness and accuracy of content, transparency and verifiability, together with the choice of appropriate methods formed the basis for the development of the quality standards. The methods and results of data collection in scientific publications are described in detail.

Due to the scientific project management, the project could be carried out independently of any content-related interests in the field of qualification and placement of language mediators or interpreters. For example, the authors moderated the consensus process, but were not themselves entitled to vote and therefore did not provide an opinion.

It was important to the authors to incorporate the perspective of many different players and experts in the development of standards, as well as ultimately allowing them to decide on the standards themselves. For this reason, a consensus procedure was carried out to decide on the design, which involved a large number of relevant players and interest groups from the field of language mediation or interpreting in Germany.

The primary tasks of the project team involved applying scientific methods for data collection and consensus building, setting up of a broad discussion between important institutional players and political interest groups and the sustainable dissemination of the results.

Regardless of the goal of more effectively interpreted communication, we consider the promotion and insistence that immigrants learn German to be an important integration factor. However, it is obvious that a lot of discussion contents and contexts require advanced linguistic skills and professional framework conditions. Since many immigrants do not (yet) have these linguistic skills and, at the same time, the use of lay interpreters undermines professional framework conditions, effective communication in many conversations can only be achieved with sufficiently qualified interpreters or language mediators.

Against this background, the project team has made a lasting contribution to increasing the effectiveness of interpreted communication as well as the recognition of interpreters and language mediators in social work settings.

## 2. Data collection

The quality standards were developed in a multi-stage process (see Figure 1). The aim of the first section was to create a comprehensive database, which resulted in determining quality standards and minimum requirements by means of a consensus process in the second section of the project.

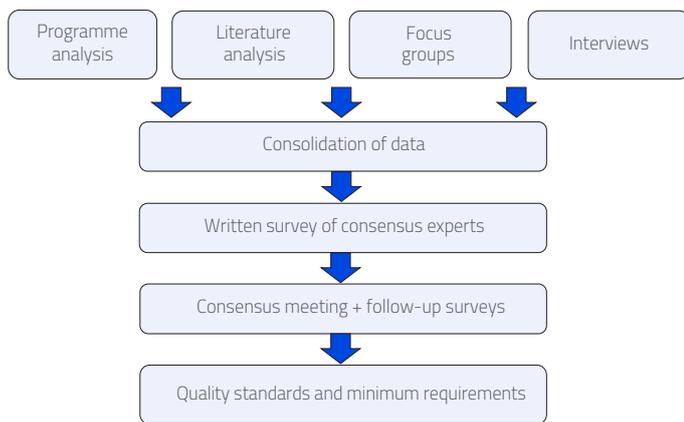


Figure 1: Overview of the multi-stage process for developing the quality standards

The database consists of international programme research, research into evaluated qualification programmes and a needs assessment.

### 2.1 Programme analysis

The programme analysis was used to research and take stock of existing training measures. For this purpose, online services offered in the area of language mediation and interpreting were systematically collected with Google, Bing, Yahoo! and Ask.com search engines in the search languages of German and English. They were then sorted and evaluated. This search was conducted between December 2016 and February 2017. For this research, it had to be ensured that, as a minimum, the training measures did not ignore the area of responsibility of language mediation or interpreting in social work settings. For example, measures that were explicitly limited to another field of work (e.g. health care or court interpreting) were not taken into account.

**Germany:** Based on these criteria, a total of 88

training programmes for language mediators and interpreters were identified for Germany. These range from short training courses lasting three hours to two-year master's courses. The range of offers is therefore extremely diverse in terms of the scope, teaching content and degree obtained in each case.

**Abroad:** Of the measures offered abroad that were found during the research, 209 corresponded to the above-mentioned selection criteria. Here, health care and the legal field in particular are very much in focus.

It was possible to identify a total of 297 programmes and access the relevant information on their characteristics. Such information included details on general conditions (admission requirements; time structure; examination requirements; future fields of work) and data providing an overview of content-related focusses and processes. It is worth noting that, at the time of the research, it was not possible to find a single training programme with entirely freely accessible structural characteristics and content design, i.e. detailed curricula and teaching materials that were made transparent.

### 2.2 Literature analysis of evaluated training programmes

In this second step, the database for the consensus process was expanded to include the knowledge gained from scientific evaluations of training measures. The main question was whether there was scientific evidence regarding the effectiveness of the individual training measures - i.e. whether there were programmes with demonstrable effectiveness. This internationally and systematically conducted search in late 2016/early 2017 used scientific literature databases from psychology, the natural sciences, social sciences, linguistics, education and life sciences<sup>3</sup>. We were looking for reviews of training measures for language mediators and / or interpreters in social work settings. We only considered those reviews which indicated a systematic implementation and were based on data, the source of which was not the provider of the programme itself. In total, only

<sup>3</sup> The parameters were determined according to the Cochrane model, based on PICO criteria. The search languages for the above-mentioned databases were German and English.

nine studies met these criteria (Mueller et al., 2018). This result demonstrates that very few international training measures are made transparent, independently reviewed and published.

## 2.3 Assessment of needs through consultation with those involved

In order to include the perspective of stakeholders in the database for the consensus process, interviews were conducted with language mediators and interpreters, their users in the institutions, refugees and experts. The aim of the survey was to procure evaluations and suggestions from the groups of people or individuals involved regarding the training requirements of language mediators and interpreters. To this end, two forms of qualitative data collection were carried out: focus groups and individual interviews.

### 2.3.1 Focus groups

The focus group procedure (Bohnsack, 2013) brings together between six and twelve people with similar background experience for a moderated and content-focused discussion. The following target groups were interviewed separately in the course of data collection:

1. Social work professionals
2. Social work volunteers
3. Refugees (Dari or Arabic speaking)
4. Volunteer language mediators and interpreters
5. Professional language mediators or interpreters (paid and with low qualifications)
6. Professional language mediators or interpreters (paid and certified as language and integration mediators)

For the first five target groups, one focus group was conducted for each target group in Hamburg and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). For the sixth target group, only one focus group was conducted in NRW.

Eleven focus groups with a total of 85 participants were carried out with the help of a semi-structured guide. Special attention was given to the participants' own target-group-specific experiences in three-way communication in social work settings.

Focus group	Social work professionals n = 18	Social work volunteers n = 13	Language mediators / interpreters (volunteers) n = 14	Language mediators / interpreters (paid, low qualification) n = 17	Language mediators (certified as language and integration mediators) n = 7	Refugees n = 16
Gender	m = 3 / f = 15	m = 9 / f = 4	m = 9 / f = 5	m = 6 / f = 11	m = 1 / f = 6	m = 9 / f = 5 / ns = 2
Age	24–70 years [M = 43; SD = 14]	25–80 years [M = 52; SD = 16]	24–64 years [M = 41; SD = 12]	28–67 years [M = 47; SD = 11]	28–54 years [M = 44; SD = 8]	19–61 years [M = 30; SD = 10]
Work experience	1–53 years [M = 15; SD = 15]	1–40 years [M = 9; SD = 13]	0,5–35 years [M = 11; SD = 13]	0,5–18 years [M = 4; SD = 5]	1–11 years [M = 4; SD = 3]	-
Language skills	German = 18 English = 13 French = 3 Spanish = 2 Arabic; Bambara; Ntcham; Bosnian; Ewe; Croatian; Lamba; Polish; Russian; Serbian (each = 1)	German = 13 English = 2 Farsi = 2 Arabic; Dari; French; Spanish (each = 1)	German = 14 Arabic = 5 English = 3 Farsi = 2 French = 2 Kurdish = 2 Polish = 2 Spanish = 2 Turkish = 2 Azerbaijani; Djenma; Hausa; Croatian; Serbian (each = 1)	Farsi = 17 German = 17 Dari = 7 Arabic = 6 English = 6 French = 3 Kurdish = 2 Turkish = 2 Amharic; Tigrinya (each = 1)	German = 7 Arabic = 2 Dari = 2 Farsi = 2 Bosnian; English; Kurdish; Croatian; Russian; Serbian (each = 1)	Arabic = 8 Dari = 6 German = 6 English = 5 Farsi; Kurdish; Turkish; Urdu (each = 1)

Table 1: Overview of the composition of the focus groups ("M" = mean; "SD" = standard deviation from the mean)

### 2.3.2 Individual interviews

In order to integrate the experience of other people into the database, individual interviews were carried out with other refugees, academically trained interpreters, scientists and experts. A total of 26 people were interviewed in person or over the phone. Among them were twelve refugees (speaking Tigrinya, Arabic and Kurmanji), two people with a master's degree in interpreting, four scientific experts, four senior employees of service users and four people with a coordinating function in the quality assurance, placement and qualification of language mediators or interpreters. All surveys were semi-structured, i.e. the individuals were asked to convey their experience or perceptions using a target-group-specific guide, insofar as those are relevant to the training needs of language mediators and interpreters in social work settings.

The two types of survey were evaluated by means of a content analysis of the participants' answers, written in the form of transcripts, based on the standards of social research (Mayring 2013). The qualitative data was evaluated by means of MAXQDA software. The structural and content requirements for a suitable training measure mentioned by the participants were summarised in a further partial data set.

### 2.4 Data basis for the consensus process

The final step in the creation of the finished database for the consensus process based thereon consisted of merging the partial data sets 2.1 to 2.3 into an aggregate data set. In a three-stage-process, redundant entries were identified and combined into individual distinct characteristics. At the same time, a system consisting of upper and lower categories was designed based on the entries. Finally, all characteristics were classified in the system. On the one hand, an individual characteristic was ultimately designated by staying as close as possible to the original wording. However, the designation of a characteristic was meant to enable integration into the overall system of the data table in as comprehensible a manner as

possible. In addition to these aspects, the correct translation of the characteristics from English into German was included.

The appropriate balancing of the two requirements, maximum authenticity and conclusive systematics, was a particularly tremendous challenge for the process. In terms of quality assurance, this editing process was carried out simultaneously by two scientific project employees. At regular intervals, results were compared, divergences discussed and results adjusted.

Finally, 227 distinct characteristics were defined and distributed across four sub-sections. The sub-sections include structural properties, content and quality assurance of the training measure and the title of those qualified.

### 2.5 Consensus procedure

On the basis of the scientific surveys, the condensed data table now provided a wide and detailed wealth of possible structural properties and content that had been brought to light by the various data sources. In order to make a wise choice based on quality standards, a so-called formal consensus procedure was conducted by means of the Delphi method (Häder, 2006). The aim of the consensus process was to create an easy-to-use catalogue of characteristics of a high-quality training measure for language mediators and interpreters in social work settings. All characteristics were to be classified by the group of consensus experts in terms of whether they would ultimately be mandatory or optional in such a measure.

The consensus process finally implemented for this is based on the procedure of the 'Consensus Development Conference' (Waggoner 2016). At the heart of this process are personal meetings of experts who - depending on the topic and objective - cover differently wide ranges of specialist areas together. They discuss and evaluate current research results and formulate consensual syntheses and approaches for their own area of work. Both laypersons and other

experts alike are generally addressed. The usefulness of this procedure is described in scientific literature as follows: "This particular approach to developing a consensus is useful [...] because it allows a multidisciplinary approach to solving a problem or creating a policy." (Waggoner 2016)

In fact, it was possible to attract a very broad spectrum of organisations as participants of the consensus process of the BetweenLanguages project - especially those who fulfil tasks related to qualifications, certification, placement, quality control, research, and political guideline competence in the area of language mediation or interpreting, or those who use the services of language mediators or interpreters. Specifically, representatives of 20 relevant institutions from all over Germany classified the characteristics from the data table according to their usability in a total of three voting sessions<sup>4</sup>.

The rating system consisted of two levels which, together, assigned a specific status to each characteristic.

At the first level, each characteristic was evaluated by each and every participant with regard to its significance for the training measure, using the following gradation:

- "Mandatory" if indispensable for the training measure;
- "Optional" if useful but not absolutely necessary;
- "Not relevant" if not effective, that is, superfluous or counterproductive for a high-quality training measure.

At the second level, the frequency of these assessments per characteristic was counted. A consensus was reached when at least 75% of the ratings submitted covered one of the three categories.

In order to obtain a consensus as mandatory, optional or not relevant for as many characteristics as possible, there was a total of three voting sessions. This enabled a specialist discussion on the pros and cons of certain assessments between the

### Session 1:

Written vote prior to the consensus meeting

### Session 2:

Two-day consensus meeting at the UKE in Hamburg

### Session 3:

Written vote following the meeting on some remaining characteristics

individual sessions:

Depending on the trend for each characteristic in the first session, the assessment option with the supposedly best chances of a consensus was put to the vote in the remaining two rounds. If, for example, a characteristic had a simple majority but no 75% consensus for 'optional', the moderation team again - usually following prior discussion - put the 'optional' rating to the vote.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the ratings, the participants were also asked for a comment on the characteristics provided for selection, which was used in all three sessions. Particularly during the conference, a lively debate ensued repeatedly, the most important points of which can be found in part in the explanations for individual characteristics in Chapter 3 ("Results").

In addition to the conflicting views and clarification of individual characteristics, the discussion also led to important restructurings and reshufflings of the data table. For example, several individual characteristics have been repeatedly combined into a compulsory elective list, on the basis of which educational institutions can develop their own priorities. Furthermore, in the course of this, new conceptual versions or further adjustments to the wordings of characteristics were discussed, mostly in order to adapt the terms to the relevant technical language.

This is how, through the participants' active discussion of the first template, a differentiated catalogue with several levels, which provides options and background explanations to its recipients, was generated from the originally one-dimensional, sometimes cumbersome list of characteristics.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 5 contains a list of the participating institutions. In addition, 13 further organisations had been invited to participate, but were unfortunately unable to do so due to time constraints or other reasons. These included relevant federal ministries or federal offices, foundation institutions, federal associations of migrant organisations and higher-level institutions from the field of training and further education or educational work in general.

<sup>5</sup> Only the participants in the consensus procedure mentioned in Chapter 5 were entitled to vote; the project team at UKE limited itself to the role of moderation in building consensus and was not entitled to vote.

## 3. Results

The following list includes the elements classified as mandatory or optional with consensus. In addition, characteristics that were particularly intensively and controversially discussed and which were ultimately considered irrelevant in the consensus or voted entirely without consensus are mentioned and explained.<sup>6</sup> This is based on the idea that a profile such as the one presented herein, cannot be created meaningfully solely by a positive definition of the associated elements. In fact, the profile becomes more distinctive – especially in a very heterogeneous field of activity – at least as much through transparency in its boundaries and uncertainties. In addition to the description of the characteristics, a few explanations, which are mainly based on arguments of the consensus experts, can be found. They are supposed to portray the pros and cons, particularly in those instances that provoked the largest need for discussion.

The detailed presentation of the results contains the following markings for your information:

To design of a training measure, all characteristics marked with a green <sup>M</sup> are **mandatory**, all those marked with a blue <sup>O</sup> are **optional** and all characteristics marked with a red <sup>N</sup> have been deemed **not relevant**.

In terms of the characteristics highlighted in grey, the group of consensus experts was unable to come to an agreement on any of these three possible ratings.<sup>7</sup>

The quality standards are divided into (3.1) structural characteristics of the qualification measure (such as organisational framework, admission requirements, completion of the training, support offers for participants), (3.2) content of the training measure (such as interpreting, professional ethics and role perception, specialist knowledge, cultural topics, language skills and social / emotional / communication skills), (3.3) quality assurance requirements and (3.4) the title after qualification.

### 3.1 Structural characteristics of the training measures

The following list contains specifications that mainly concern the organisational framework as well as admission, evaluation and support of participants in such a training measure.

#### 3.1.1 Organisational framework

The training measure is to be carried out as a **classroom event<sup>M</sup>**. It can be supported by **individual e-learning modules<sup>O</sup>**. Any training conducted solely **online<sup>N</sup>** is not an option.

**German is intended as the language of instruction<sup>M</sup>**. If the language constellation permits, **other working languages of participants can also be used as the language of instruction<sup>O</sup>**.

Depending on the specific target group on site, the qualification measure can be offered in a **full-time or part-time<sup>M</sup>** model.

In any case, an **internship with real-life interpreting assignments<sup>M</sup>** must be provided for the participants. In addition, a **shadowing session<sup>O</sup>** can also be offered. Especially with a broad-based qualification, gathering experience in as many different assignments as possible in different locations is more effective than shadowing in only one place.

No consensus was able to be reached on the **overall time scale of the training measure**. The definition of a total scope of classroom training, practical units and self-study times – the decisive argument runs – can only be done reliably on the basis of a detailed curriculum.

#### 3.1.2 Admission requirements

All participants must be **proficient users of German**, as the working language German, and have to speak both the working language and their other working **languages at language level B2<sup>M,8</sup>**.

The **proof of language level C1<sup>N</sup>** as an entrance requirement was ruled out as the C1 certificate is considered to be too high a threshold for participation. This applies in particular for speakers of such languages

6 The list contains a total of 117 characteristics of the following distribution: 81 mandatory, 18 optional, 13 not relevant, 6 without consensus, whereby each option is counted for compulsory elective characteristics.

7 While all of the features classified as mandatory or optional are documented below, only a selection of the characteristics, decided by the editorial team, that are not relevant or have been adopted without consensus can be found. The main criterion for the selection was the above-mentioned value of an irrelevant or undecided characteristic for the formation of an overall training measure profile that is as easy to understand as possible.

8 In the absence of alternative language assessment tools, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (GER) is used to classify language skills. However, it should be kept in mind that the European Framework of Reference was firstly not developed for the requirements of interpreters and secondly not for all the languages spoken in Germany.

whose written language is not developed to the same extent as the oral language or is generally not taught in the countries of origin; proof of level C1 would largely exclude speakers of these working languages.

However, the learning goal of **expanding the oral command in all working languages to a standardised level that is comparable to C1<sup>M</sup>** should be established as the learning goal.

Participants must demonstrate at least an **intermediate level of education<sup>M</sup>**. The intermediate level of education (i.e. school experience comparable to the German secondary school leaving certificate) is mainly considered important to ensure general literacy skills. Nevertheless, individuals with an interrupted educational profile should, if possible, not be excluded on the basis of formal criteria.

Nonetheless, the level of the **German secondary school leaving certificate is desirable<sup>O</sup>**.

It is essential to verify the **personal suitability<sup>M</sup>** of applicants. Although this criterion is difficult to put into practice, however, it opens up scope for action if unsuitable applicants have to be excluded. This can be the case, for example, if the admission interview shows misanthropic attitudes or cognitive or mental health impairments that are not compatible with the intended professional tasks and challenges.

In addition, the following requirements are considered conducive to participation:

**At least one professional qualification<sup>O</sup>** has been obtained. Someone already has work experience as a **language mediator or interpreter<sup>O</sup>**.

Someone has a **migration background relating to at least one of the working languages other than German<sup>O</sup>**.

Existence of **computer skills<sup>O</sup>**.

In contrast, "**life experience<sup>N</sup>**" is found to be unsuitable as an admission requirement. Regarding the review of a **police clearance certificate** as an admission requirement, no consensus was reached. Here, the opinions differed: since it is not necessary for the qualification itself, it does not have to be checked. However, it was argued that it may well be relevant for the practical parts of the qualification and for later

employment in certain fields of work and, therefore, it would be a sensible admission requirement.

The following measures are considered necessary or suitable in order to check compliance with the above-mentioned admission requirements:

An **admission interview<sup>M</sup>** is to be held with each applicant.

**Proof of language proficiency<sup>M</sup>** in the desired working languages must be provided by means of a current CEFR certificate (Trim et al., 2009), insofar as this is possible for the working languages in question. Alternatively, comparable knowledge should be demonstrated. Due to the usually high costs incurred when obtaining a certificate, this should be avoided where possible, if the language skills in question can be ascertained beyond doubt during the admission interview.

While **letters of motivation<sup>O</sup>** may also be considered for quality assurance, **letters of recommendation<sup>N</sup>** should not be requested.

An **entrance exam<sup>N</sup>** should be avoided in favour of a review of the enhanced skills at the end of the training measure.

### 3.1.3 Completion of the training measure

At the end of the training measure, a **final examination<sup>M</sup>** is to be carried out in the form of an **oral interpreting examination<sup>M</sup>**. Firstly, it consists of an interpreting simulation (setting situation), followed by an examination interview, which serves to reflect on the simulation and to query specific, imparted knowledge.

A **written final thesis<sup>O</sup>**, i.e. a longer, independent text that responds to a certain question, can be part of the final examination.

It is not considered useful to conduct a **written examination<sup>N</sup>** (e.g. to assess the imparted declarative knowledge).

### 3.1.4 Support for participants

The following support measures must be available in the sense of a compulsory elective subject during the

training measure. This means that the provider of the training measure must ensure that the participants can use at least one of the following support measures<sup>M</sup>:

- Individual supervision or coaching<sup>M</sup>
- Group supervision<sup>M</sup>
- Peer coaching or exchange<sup>M</sup>
- Mentoring<sup>M</sup>

In addition, the participants must be provided with suitable information on the field of work<sup>M</sup> during the training measure, in order to facilitate the subsequent career start. Chaperoning the participants<sup>N</sup> after completion of the training measure and as they begin their careers as an interpreter is not considered useful.

## 3.2 Contents of the training measures

### 3.2.1 Interpreting

The interpreting assignment<sup>M</sup>

This includes its preparation (including a preliminary discussion), the assignment itself (especially its process as well as tasks and requirements of the interpreter) and its follow-up (including a follow-up discussion).

Basic interpreting techniques, strategies and methods<sup>M</sup>

The basic techniques, strategies and methods, in particular, have to be practised. In addition to general issues such as the seating arrangement in a dialogue setting, consecutive interpreting and note-taking techniques, it also includes accuracy, registers (e.g. colloquial versus educational language), conveying nuances, the transmission of idiomatic expressions and metaphors, paraphrasing, language style and tone of voice. It is only possible to complete these lists with any meaning when the curriculum is being created. Depending on the specific area of application, decisions must be made on the following contents that are to be added if necessary:

- Telephone interpreting<sup>O</sup>
- Video telephone interpreting<sup>O</sup>
- Interpreting for groups<sup>O</sup>

Since the area of responsibility of those qualified only

includes occasional sight translations (for example, documents that are directly relevant to the conversation), there is no need for content on professional translation<sup>N</sup>, i.e. the translation of a written text in one language into a written text of a second language.

Theoretical foundations of interpreting<sup>M</sup>, on the other hand, should be taught.

In addition, participants should be prepared for discipline-specific types of conversation and conversation situations<sup>M</sup>. In order to tailor the needs of future interpreters to future assignment needs, at least one of the following items must be discussed:

- Overview of discipline-specific language mediation and interpreting<sup>M</sup>
- Social services<sup>M</sup>
- Asylum<sup>M</sup>
- Public authorities<sup>M</sup>
- Education<sup>M</sup>
- Healthcare<sup>M</sup>
- Employment or employment market<sup>M</sup>

Depending on the selected topic, knowledge about the relevant types of conversation and how they function (i.e. the parties involved, their purpose, their typical course of action and any special characteristics) must be conveyed. It is particularly important to raise the comparative awareness of the participants. They should be informed about the similarities and differences of the requirements in the different fields. Interpreting in police and judicial matters is explicitly excluded as a possible discipline<sup>N</sup>.

### 3.2.2 Professional ethical principles and role perception

The following professional ethical principles<sup>M</sup> should be imparted:

- Confidentiality<sup>M</sup>
- Impartiality/multipartiality or neutrality<sup>M</sup>
- Data protection and privacy<sup>M</sup>
- Accuracy<sup>M</sup>
- Completeness<sup>M</sup>
- Sense of responsibility<sup>M</sup>
- Transparency towards professionals and clients<sup>M</sup> (for example, if the interpreter and client know each other)

In addition, there is the area of **legal implications<sup>M</sup>** in the event of violations of these principles. This applies in particular to **questions of liability<sup>M</sup>** for the professional activity as an interpreter.

The following **practical challenges<sup>M</sup>** are to be addressed separately:

- **Contrast between professional ethical principles and practical application<sup>M</sup>**
- **Managing conflicts and the crossing of boundaries<sup>M</sup>**
- **Managing balance of power within the triad<sup>M</sup>**
- **Dealing with gender issues<sup>M</sup>**

In addition, there is an important demarcation for the perception of the roles: the **roles of a companion<sup>N</sup>** and **carer<sup>N</sup>** must be clearly separated from the role of an interpreter. The two above-mentioned roles of companion and carer are considered to be incompatible with the professional role of an interpreter and its professional ethical principles. Interpreters must have clarity about their own role as well as the professional ethical principles. Every time the interpreting role is linked with that of the companion or carer, there is the risk of role ambiguities, which is why the tasks of accompanying and looking after should be taken over by other professionals.

In conveying the principles and the role perceptions, it's very important to discuss the **implications and self-reflection with respect to the interpreter's role<sup>M</sup>**.

### 3.2.3 Expertise

This specialist knowledge – understood in a narrow sense – includes, among other things, the **legal framework in Germany<sup>M</sup>**. Depending on the focus of the training, at least one of the following legal subject areas must be discussed:

- **Basic democratic rights and values<sup>M</sup>**
- **Basics of law for foreign nationals<sup>M</sup>**
- **Basics of asylum law<sup>M</sup>**
- **Foundations of social security<sup>M</sup>**
- **Foundations of juvenile justice<sup>M</sup>**

This specialised acquisition of knowledge by the participants in one of the above-mentioned areas should not in any way water down the allocation of roles within the triad: in any case, the expertise of the person in charge of the conversation must have absolute priority.

No consensus could be reached regarding the extension of this list by adding the topics of **socio-political developments in Germany, the development of migration policy in Germany, as well as current migration and integration issues**. Whilst contents of these subject areas had been classified as vital background knowledge on the one hand, serious concerns emerged with regards to the fact that an interpreting qualification cannot meet such a requirement of political education. The coherences to be conveyed are reportedly too complex for this and also require constant updating, which is why this requirement exceeds the possibilities of such a training measure.

In order to at least partly compensate for this difficulty, **research skills<sup>M</sup>** should be taught as an integral part of the training measure. Under certain circumstances, this can include an introduction to **the use of a PC for research purposes<sup>O</sup>**.

However, **institutional knowledge in relevant fields of application in Germany<sup>M</sup>** should be taught. Knowledge about one of the following areas should be conveyed, again in the sense of an elective subject:

- **Social work setting<sup>M</sup>** (including regional advisory services; employment agency or job centre; child and youth welfare)
- **Asylum<sup>M</sup>**
- **Public authorities in general<sup>M</sup>**
- **Education and training<sup>M</sup>**
- **Health<sup>M</sup>** (including: healthcare for refugees)
- **Housing matters<sup>M</sup>**
- **Health insurance<sup>M</sup>**
- **Overview of structures and processes in the above-mentioned seven fields of work<sup>M</sup>**
- **Basic knowledge of the legal system<sup>M</sup>**

In view of the unmanageable variety of languages and countries, the **transfer of knowledge about the countries of origin<sup>N</sup>** was not considered to be feasible in terms of complexity and timeliness.

### 3.2.4 Cultural subject areas

This area of knowledge and culture is to be treated differently from specialist knowledge in the narrow sense, as listed under (3.2.3) above.

This is due to the fact that the conveyance of cultural terms, theories of diversity, intercultural communication and the like, in itself, harbours the risk of encouraging culturalisation. This would mean that instead of the desired awareness of cultural specifics, prejudices and clichés might be conveyed or consolidated.

In contrast, the focus should be on **diversity management<sup>M</sup>**, for which two points must be taken into account:

Firstly, there should be room for **reflection on the culture-specific perceptions of identity, culture and external image<sup>M</sup>**. These questions can be concretised, for example, in terms of gender roles, health/illness or educational ideals and attitudes to ethnic or religious conflicts.

Secondly, the **awareness of one's own culture-specific view or attitude<sup>M</sup>** should be encouraged.

The aim should therefore be to achieve (cultural) diversity competence, which must not be reduced to a culture-contrasting approach.

### 3.2.5 Language skills

In terms of language skills, the following three areas are relevant:

Firstly, **teaching technical language of the respective field of work<sup>M</sup>** (for German as well as the other working languages) should be at the heart of this part. Technical terminology should not be reduced to building up and expanding vocabulary, even if this is of course particularly necessary for certain fields of work. Rather, wording skills and specific grammatical phenomena should be discussed.

Secondly, **language actions and interpreting skills<sup>M</sup>** should be mentioned. This particularly includes the competence to choose the appropriate interpreting technique according to different situations.

Thirdly, the training measure should offer space for a **reflection of the language(s) of origin<sup>M</sup>** of the participants.

On the other hand, there is no plan to provide **language instruction<sup>N</sup>** for German or other working languages of the participants as part of the training measure, since the training is not intended to duplicate offers already established for teaching German and other languages. Instead, the increase in language proficiency and language level should be achieved through active use of the language in the classroom (especially in the interpreting exercises), in real-life interpreting assignments of the accompanying internship and through independent learning of the participants in addition to the training measure.

### 3.2.6 Social/emotional/communication skills

**Communication skills<sup>M</sup>** of participants need to be strengthened individually in the following areas:

- **Social and communication skills in general<sup>M</sup>**
- **Behaviour and conversation in language mediation / interpreting situations<sup>M</sup>**
- **Conversation and communication with representatives of institutions<sup>M</sup>**
- **Non-verbal communication<sup>M</sup>**
- **Discrimination and strategies for action<sup>M</sup>**

With regard to their **personal, emotional competences<sup>M</sup>**, the participants' skills should be strengthened in the following areas:

- **Reflection skills<sup>M</sup>**
- **Confidence-building towards specialist and client<sup>M</sup>**
- **Self-care and self-stabilisation<sup>M</sup>** (This includes appropriate ways of dealing with emotionally stressful situations when interpreting.)
- **Managing difficult cases<sup>M</sup>** (This includes, for example, cases of domestic and sexual violence, reports of victims of torture and the like.)

No consensus could be reached on how to **teach empathy skills**: while the need for empathy on the part of the interpreters is undisputed, it was questioned explicitly whether or with what effort it is possible to convey an empathic attitude.

### 3.3 Quality assurance

Quality assurance must be ensured by **evaluating the training measure<sup>M</sup>**. It forms an important component of quality management and can be conducted either in writing or orally, internally or externally. In any case, the **participants must be surveyed<sup>M</sup>**, with all participants being interviewed at least once per training measure.

The evaluation can be supplemented by

- A survey of the lecturers<sup>O</sup>
- A survey of the graduates<sup>O</sup>
- A survey of users<sup>O</sup> (after interpreting assignments; e.g. social workers)
- A survey of clients<sup>O</sup> (following interpreting assignments; e.g. refugees)

### 3.4 Title after training

The term "interpreters in social work settings"<sup>M</sup> was defined as the name for those qualified as described<sup>9</sup>, since the term interpreting best describes the main activity to be carried out.

In contrast, the term 'language mediator' in its most common use reportedly includes, at least in Germany, written translation. However, this was not appropriate for the expected subsequent task profile of those to be qualified. The fact that the term is usually used with high expectations in regard to the level of qualification of the bearer also speaks for the term interpreter, although this is in no way secured - for example through a protection of the job title - i.e. anyone can offer services as an interpreter. It therefore makes sense to combine the well-regarded but not protected term interpreter with a qualification that actually has quality assurance. This could counteract the uncontrolled growth and associated devaluation of the profession. At the same time, it could provide appreciation and recognition to those that are qualified.



<sup>9</sup> This stipulation stems from a scarcely reached consensus vote for the term "interpreter in social work settings". The vote was preceded by a controversial discussion that continued at the final conference. (Accordingly, this point is taken up again in the chapter Future Outlook (4.))

## 4. Future Outlook

In order to establish professional interpreting in the social sphere across the federal state, an enormous effort is necessary. For the question concerning appropriate qualification, the present quality standards and minimum requirements help to design the structure and content of measures and thus to further develop the professional field.

In order to develop a concrete framework curriculum in terms of content and didactics, further efforts are necessary. For example, suitable teaching and learning materials should be selected or developed. Furthermore, criteria for the qualification of the teaching and examination staff responsible should be defined. Last but not least, the scope of the training measure should be determined, although this only makes sense once the foundation of a detailed curriculum has been developed.

In order to further customise the training measure, it is necessary to determine the target group and their future field of work in more specific terms. Furthermore, the quality standards should be implemented in a certain type of qualification (training, advanced training, etc.).<sup>10</sup>

In order to motivate those interested in qualifying as interpreters, sustainable financing of the qualification is required. Up to now, interpreters and language mediators are mostly self-employed in Germany. Rates and general conditions of assignments have been very different up to now. In order to strengthen the job profile and job orientation in this regard too, other quality assurance initiatives are necessary.

Due to social change, the requirements on the work of interpreters will also change in the future. In order to better meet the challenges of the job market, lifelong learning in the sense of regular training for interpreters is considered to be useful. In this respect, the providers of the training measure are asked to develop and offer formats and content. Notwithstanding the mentioned further development tasks, there is a hurdle that would have to be overcome in terms of professionalisation as the professional field develops further. Both the collected data and the consensus process and final conference

clearly demonstrated divergent role perceptions for interpreters in social work settings. Different expectations can be found on the part of language mediators or interpreters, users, players and clients. The opinions on how narrow and how wide the area of responsibility for this professional field should be are very different.



<sup>10</sup> For example, by issuing appropriate training regulations in accordance with Section 53 of the Vocational Training Act [Berufsbildungsgesetz]. In this regard, the consensus experts urgently warn against too high-level types of training measures that have too many requirements, which - mostly unintentionally - result in excluding candidates.

The decisive question is whether the tasks often included under cultural or integration mediation, which are mainly outside of the triad dialogue communication, and which are usually done independently by the mediators without the presence of a specialist, are included therein or not. Although the consensus process in this field of contention came to an

agreement towards the direction of a narrower range of tasks, a broad spectrum can be seen in the current design of the field of work. In order to be able to further professionalise and strengthen the field in the future, further discussions about the self-perception of the players and interest groups in the field of language mediation and interpreting in Germany are necessary.



## 5. Project partners

Within the framework of the consensus process, the following individuals and institutions were actively involved in the creation of the quality standards and minimum requirements.  
(The information is displayed in alphabetical order.)

Organisation	Representative
Assoziierte Dolmetscher und Übersetzer in Norddeutschland e.V. (ADÜ Nord)	Georgia Mais
Bayrisches Zentrum für Transkulturelle Medizin e.V.	Britta Lenk-Neumann
bikup gGmbH (Internationale Gesellschaft für Bildung, Kultur & Partizipation)	Varinia Fernanda Morales
Bundesagentur für Arbeit	Christina Hirsch
Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (BAGFW)	Stefan Peetz
Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer e.V. (BDÜ)	Elvira Iannone
DaMigra – Dachverband Migrantinnenorganisationen	Aida Begovic
Deutscher Berufsverband für Soziale Arbeit e.V. (DBSH)	Ruth Burchard
Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag (DIHK)	Dr. Knut Diekmann
Deutscher Landkreistag	Dr. Klaus Ritgen
Gesundheit Berlin-Brandenburg e.V.	Andrea Möllmann-Bardak
Katholische Hochschule Mainz – Fachbereich Soziale Arbeit	Dr. Britta Kalscheuer
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Sprach- und Kommunikationsmittlung (SPuK), Osnabrück	Marika Steinke
Universität Hamburg, Institut für Interkulturelle Erziehungswissenschaft	Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Ingrid Gogolin
Universität Mainz – Fachbereich Translations-, Sprach- & Kulturwissenschaft	Prof. Dr. Bernd Meyer
TU Dortmund – Fakultät Erziehungswissenschaften, Psychologie & Soziologie	Dr. Anke Hußmann
TU Dortmund – Fachbereich Kulturwissenschaften	Prof. em. Peter Conrady

## Scientific Advisory Board members

The Scientific Advisory Board met four times over the course of the project. At the meetings, the core process results and challenges were presented and constructively and critically discussed.

Organisation	Representative
Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege	Natalia Bugaj-Wolfram/Simone Haaf/Stefan Kollasch
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Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales	Barbara Schmidt
Fördern & Wohnen, Flüchtlingsunterkünfte, Hamburg	Sophia Sprenger/Moana Thomas
Deutscher Berufsverband für Soziale Arbeit e.V.	Gabriele Stark-Angermeier
Bundesverband der Johanniter	Ralf Sick

In addition to the individuals and institutions mentioned above, the development of the quality standards and minimum requirements was supported by many other people who, on a voluntary basis, brought their experience, expertise and time as interview partners, language mediators or interpreters, lecturers, discussion participants, photo models or interns to this project.

## Editorial team

Two participants of the consensus process have kindly helped to edit the manuscript:

- Dr. Britta Kalscheuer (Katholische Hochschule Mainz – Fachbereich Soziale Arbeit)
- Georgia Mais (Assoziierte Dolmetscher und Übersetzer in Norddeutschland e.V.)

## 6. Project team and funding

The project was carried out by the Research Group on Migration and Psychosocial Health at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, in cooperation with bikup gGmbH (Cologne) and Diakonisches Hilfswerk Hamburg.

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Project website:  
[www.zwischensprachen.de/standards](http://www.zwischensprachen.de/standards)

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