The National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) has sent a letter (text below) for the urgent attention of the Minister of State for Immigration The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP

Dear Minister of State for Immigration,

We at NRPSI read with concern reports in <u>The Guardian</u> **of:** *"Plans to cut the asylum backlog by sending questionnaires to refugees instead of conducting official interviews"* **with the accompanying** *"demand that claimants reply in English within 20 working days or risk refusal."*

We would have many major concerns were this to be contemplated – however, three stand out from a public policy and public interest perspective:

- **Important information would be incorrectly translated -** Notwithstanding advances in AI and Machine Translation, even in English and major European languages the frequency and severity of errors in machine translated texts is such that no public authority should contemplate its routine use, without human oversight. In world languages where there is less 'training data' (i.e. web content sucked into AI datasets) the frequency and severity of errors can be so high that professional translators would not waste time using the tools. The opposite problem can occur where there is more training data – the errors are harder to spot - but all the more problematic, including with numbers, dates and not registering the difference between a positive and a negative assertion. The risks here are very high.

- **Appeals** – Given the risks above it seems inevitable that machine translated text would be a common cause of errors and appeals, likely cancelling out any perceived or imagined savings from the move.

- **Identifiable personal data leaving the UK** – The UK Government encouraging people to use Google Translate or other online translation tools means you are encouraging them to input and send their most personal and identifiable data on a trip around the world - to servers and data processors in the USA, and other countries, with very different data protection laws and potential interest in them as individuals than the UK's. This seems wholly inappropriate from a data and privacy perspective, for people who are by definition vulnerable.

There is much more which could be said, including the importance of the use of qualified translators in high stakes contexts. But these three points at the heart of what would make this policy backfire were it to progress beyond the immediate media coverage and likely public outcry.

As we understand it, The Guardian's piece is based on a leak and is speculation. We hope you can confirm that this is the case and that you have no intention of moving in the direction the article suggests.

Yours faithfully,

Mike Orlov
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