
Interpreters Working with Children in Italy Profile, Role and Expectations

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Abstract & Keywords

English:

This paper deals with interpreting for children involved in criminal investigations in Italy. Within the CO-MINOR IN/QUEST research project (2013-2014), in order to investigate this subject a web-based questionnaire was submitted to justice professionals and police officials, psychologists, interpreters and child support workers all over Europe. Data collected from experienced Italian respondents to the questionnaire are presented to illustrate the status and (self)perception of interpreters working with children in this field in Italy.

Keywords: interpreting, children, vulnerability, criminal investigations, survey, roles, interpreter training

1. Introduction

This paper deals with interpreting for children involved in criminal investigations in Italy.[1] In order to explore this subject a web-based questionnaire was submitted to justice professionals, law enforcement officials, psychologists, interpreters and child support workers all over Europe in the framework of CO-MINOR IN/QUEST, a EU-funded research project (2013-2014).

Data collected from Italian respondents to the questionnaire is presented and discussed here to illustrate the status and (self)perception of interpreters working with children in Italy. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the answers given by interpreters about their profile, their role, their main (perceived) challenges and expectations, and their suggestions for improvement. In some cases the interpreters' responses are compared with those given by other professionals to highlight agreement or disagreement on specific issues. In conclusion some of the indications given by respondents will be proposed as possible future actions to be undertaken in this field in order to comply with the internationally recognised principle of the "best interest of the child" (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

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2. Why interpreting for children deserves special attention

There are several reasons to embark on research work on interpreting for children involved in criminal proceedings. First and foremost, there is a growing awareness that children[2] are vulnerable subjects (often in many ways) and need special safeguards and care. A second equally important reason is the growing number of migrant children arriving in Europe, who, moreover, are often unaccompanied. Interpreting for children is, therefore, a growing and challenging field of activity for today's and tomorrow's professionals, who must learn how to deal with new scenarios. Talking to children is different from communicating with adults. This can be seen in particular with infants, but it also holds true for older children (see, for example, Owens 1984/2015; Lefevere 2010; Winter 2010). And language development is an important aspect that comes into play when communicating with a child who does not speak the language of the local institutions in a legal context, especially during criminal proceedings.

The growing attention paid to this matter by European lawmakers is evident, starting with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000) under Articles 24 (The rights of the child), 20 (Equality before the law) and 47 (Fair trial), and in subsequent actions within the framework of the Stockholm Programme[3]. So far this programme has produced three directives directly relating to the rights of children: Directive 2011/36/EU on prevention and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims; Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime and, more recently, Directive 2016/800 on procedural safeguards for children who are suspected or accused persons in criminal proceedings. Directive 2016/800 in Whereas (48) acknowledges the "inherent vulnerability" of children and the fact that there may be forms of discrimination on the ground of language (65). It also recognises communication difficulties based on special needs a child may have (55). Article (20) is devoted to specific training for staff of law enforcement authorities and of detention facilities who handle cases involving children (1.), judges and prosecutors (2.), lawyers (3.) and those providing children with support and restorative justice services. This approach was already enshrined in Article 6 of Directive 2010/64 on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings, the very first EU directive in the field of justice. One noteworthy aspect is that none of these directives mentions training for interpreters, leaving the question open as to whether children's rights can be effectively safeguarded when not all the communication partners are duly qualified.

2.1 Vulnerability

The European Commission Recommendation of 27 November 2013 on procedural safeguards for vulnerable persons suspected or accused in criminal proceedings (2013/C 378/02), instead of defining the concept of vulnerability, names four characteristics that can be related to "vulnerable persons": age, mental or physical condition and disabilities (Preamble, Whereas 1). Previously, in the Green Paper on Procedural Safeguards for Suspects and Defendants in Criminal Proceedings throughout the EU (2003), the Commission had mentioned a number of potentially vulnerable categories, giving a non-exhaustive list of eight groups: foreign nationals, especially but not solely those who do not speak the language of the proceedings; children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 40); persons who are vulnerable as a result of their mental or emotional state; persons who are vulnerable as a result of

their physical state; persons who are vulnerable by virtue of having children or dependants; persons who cannot read or write; persons with refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention or other beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers; persons dependent on alcohol or drugs (Green Paper 2003, 32-34). The European Court of Human Rights in its judgements has identified an even broader number of specific groups that are vulnerable because they have suffered considerable discrimination, namely on account of their gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, mental faculties, physical disability, HIV/AIDS condition, and status of asylum seeker (Justicia European Rights Network 2013). Children, especially migrants, may fall into most of the categories mentioned above and are, thus, often subject to multi-layered, multi-factorial vulnerability[4].

3. Facts and figures about non-Italian speaking children in Italy

A look at the statistics shows the scale of the phenomenon. According to a European Commission Staff Working Document (2013), “The number of children facing criminal justice is approximately 1,086,000 across the EU, i.e. 12% of the European population facing criminal justice each year” (2013: 4). “About 1.6% of the total prison population within the EU are children. (...) These figures are unlikely to decrease by any significant amount in the coming years” (2013: 30), and non-nationals are a significant part of these children.

In September 2016, according to data published by the Department for Juvenile Justice and Alternative Measures of the Italian Ministry of Justice, 4,917 non-Italian minors (with an increasing trend since 2007; see Figure 1) were entrusted to the care of the Department’s social services, 1,407 of whom appeared in the statistics for the first time that year, with 1,205 of them under 16 years of age when they were included in the statistics for the first time (Dipartimento Giustizia Minorile e di Comunità 2016: 5). The regions of origin were roughly equally divided between Africa (35%; mainly Morocco), EU-member states (27%; mainly Romania) and other European countries (26%; mainly Albania) (ibidem: 11).

Grafico 1 – Soggetti in carico agli Uffici di servizio sociale per i minorenni negli anni dal 2007 al 2015 secondo la nazionalità.

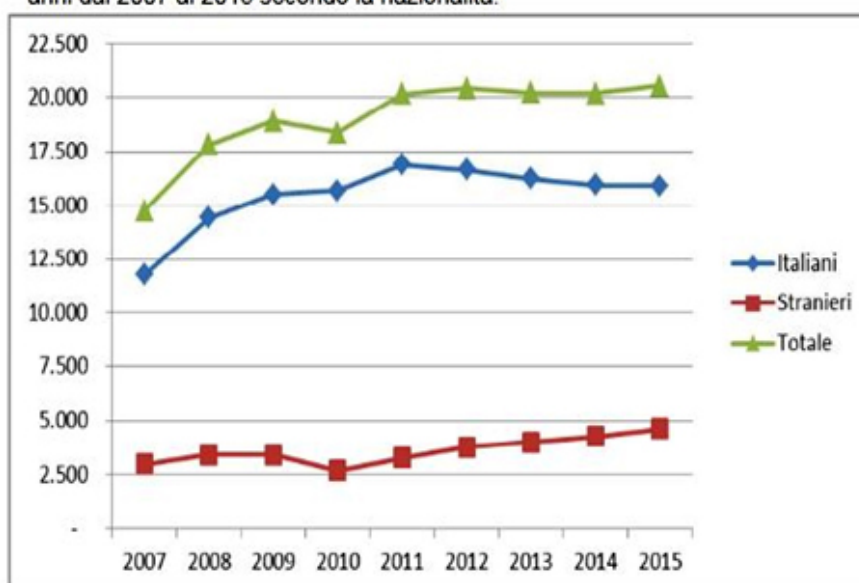


Figure 1: Minors taken care of by Childhood Social Services of the Italian Ministry of Justice between 2007 and 2015 according to nationality: Italians in blue - 15,913 in 2015, foreigners in red - 4,625 in 2015; the total figure for 2015 is 20,538 (Dipartimento Giustizia Minorile e di Comunità 2016: 9).

These figures do not distinguish between children living with their parents and the steadily growing number of so called ‘unaccompanied alien minors’. Under Italian law, this term covers all non-Italian or non-EU-nationals who, without having applied for asylum, live in the country without being assisted and represented by their parents or by another legal representative (Giovannetti 2016: 22). According to a report published by the Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI), after a slight decrease in 2009 and 2010, the number of non-Italian separated children reached 13,523 in 2014 (Giovannetti 2016: 45; Figure 2):



Figure 2: The number of non-Italian separated children in touch with or taken care of by Italian social services between 2006 and 2014 (Giovannetti 2016: 45).

Obviously the need for children to communicate through an interpreter with legal institutions using a language they are unable to understand and/or speak greatly depends on how long they have been living in the country. Following recent events in the Middle East and along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, the number of migrants arriving in Italy is soaring. Many of these migrants are children, both accompanied and unaccompanied, and consequently there is a growing need to provide them with interpreting services. These children may need interpreting in emergency situations after fleeing from their country of origin, but they also need interpreting when they are suspected or accused of having committed criminal offences, when they are victims or witnesses (for example of abuse, sexual or economic exploitation, trafficking of human beings or other crimes) and when they are involved in refugee status proceedings, international protection or asylum hearings (although asylum hearings in Italy are classified as administrative proceedings).

4. Interpreting for children: a new research focus

Although interpreting for children only became a separate focus of research quite recently, there is considerable interest in this topic with many publications. Rather than providing an exhaustive overview of the international literature, which is beyond the scope of this paper, a glimpse is provided of the main areas of investigation before proceeding with the CO-MINOR IN/QUEST survey.

4.1 Main areas of investigation

Research on educational interpreting for deaf and hard of hearing children started in the 1990s, also thanks to institutions, such as the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University and Boys Town National Research Hospital, and researchers such as Brenda Schick at the University of Colorado-Boulder (<http://www.classroominterpreting.org/>). The level of awareness of the complexity of this kind of interpreting task and the need for collaboration among all professionals involved is very high among these institutions and researchers, and is reflected in a remarkable number of publications (for an overview see Smith 2015). A second traditional field of study since the late 20th century has been interpreting in pediatric settings (for an overview see Leanza and Rocque 2015), both in North America (Kirmayer et al. 2001; Alvarado-Little 2004; Phoenix Children's Hospital 2008) and in Northern Europe (Granhagen et al. 2016; Together for Short Lives, n.d.). A growing field of interest since the 1990s has also been interpreting for children and young adults in mental health settings in Canada (Rousseau et al. 2011), the UK by a British research group (Raval 1996, 2005; Loshak 2003), and later Sweden (Jarkman 2005, 2013), Germany (Quindeau and Rauwald 2016) and South Africa (Penn and Watermeyer 2014). Migration-related traumas are frequently mentioned in this context. Detailed research has also been carried out in the field of child protection (for example, Chand 2005; Hegemann 2009; Kriz and Skivenes 2010; Norström et al. 2011; Nilsen 2015), which has been made use of in user guidelines (for example, London Safeguarding Children Board 2016). The need to assist refugee children led to the concept of “migrationssensibler Kinderschutz” (migration-sensitive child protection) developed by Teke (2016).

Last but not least, interpreting for children in legal settings is the object of a growing number of publications all over the world – from South Africa (Matthias and Zaal 2002) to the USA (Hiltz and Anderson 2003), Sweden (Keselman 2009; Keselman et al. 2010; Linell and Keselman 2010), and the UK (Pollitt and Little 2003), once again with a keen interest in migration-related aspects, such as asylum hearings.

One of the most ambitious research projects on interpreting for children so far is CO-Minor-IN/QUEST – Cooperation in interpreter-mediated questioning of minors (2013-2014) funded by the EU Commission, which also produced the first book on the topic (Balogh and Salaets 2015). The data discussed in the central part of this paper were collected as part of this research project. Other outputs of this research are Van Schoor (2013); Böser et al. (2014); Salaets and Balogh (forthcoming).

For Italy, it is extremely difficult to find reliable, up-to-date information on the language and interpreting needs of children, let alone comprehensive studies and literature on best practices. In most official documents attention to problems related to communication, language and the need for interpreting is very scarce, when not totally absent. According to the already quoted ANCI report, in 2013-14 “interviews with the minor” were the most frequently

adopted measure to safeguard unaccompanied alien children, followed by “putting them in a safe place” (Giovannetti 2016: 218-19). Problems with the activities of cultural mediators acting as interpreters in most migration contexts are presented in several studies about separated children, stating for example that “for crucial figures such as cultural mediators and ethno-psychiatrists there is no drive towards stabilisation within the service, not even towards establishing professional registers guaranteeing the qualifications required” (NET FOR U 2014: 14; our translation). Yet, understanding the alternatives offered by local services during the very first contacts is crucial for foreign children. This aspect emerges very vividly in interviews conducted within the research project PUCAFREU – Promoting unaccompanied children's access to their fundamental rights in the EU (Rozzi 2013: 63, 67). One of the conclusions of the study is that action for children carried out by mixed teams “including also cultural mediators, non-Italian educators and peer educators” proved to be extremely effective in achieving a number of goals: making contact with newly arrived children as soon as possible, informing them about their rights, possible steps towards integration and services available, creating a bond of trust and assisting these children to make informed choices (ibidem: 82).

4.2 The CO-MINOR IN/QUEST survey

Extensive research work on interpreting for children in legal settings was conducted between October and December 2013 by the CO-MINOR IN/QUEST research team. A survey was carried out via the Qualtrics Online Survey Programme, a very flexible tool which made it possible to reach professionals in different European countries in a fast, simple way. An online questionnaire, drafted in English and then translated into the languages of the participant countries (French, Dutch, Hungarian and Italian), was advertised by each partner among justice professionals and policing officials, psychologists, interpreters and child support workers, but also respondents from non-partner countries were invited to participate on the basis of personal contacts. The choice of the tool and of the distribution method proved to be successful. The questionnaire was accessed by over 1,000 potential respondents and was filled in (at least in its main parts) by 848 respondents from 16 countries (mainly Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK)[5]. The aim of the questionnaire was to provide a picture of the current situation as regards interpreting for children in the countries participating in the project. It had both closed (check boxes) and open questions for additional comments[6]. This research design made it possible to analyse the data both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The data collected from the online survey was configured directly to the Customer Relationship Management System of Qualtrics, which makes it possible to maintain a high level of data integrity and reduce errors. This programme automatically or semi-automatically identifies and, when possible, corrects errors in large data sets.

The questionnaire was designed on the basis of a literature review and a workshop involving three legal practitioners (a juvenile judge, a juvenile lawyer and a trainer in forensic interview techniques), two psychologists (one of them a forensic psychologist) and five interpreters (including one sign language interpreter). The contributions made by the different professionals were very useful in identifying issues stemming from first-hand experience in the field of questioning children that needed to be investigated. The whole questionnaire preparation process was supervised by an expert from the Eszter Foundation – a criminologist, consultant and research expert for the Hungarian National Committee of UNICEF with considerable experience in quantitative and qualitative research.

The questionnaire had an introduction explaining the purpose of the project and, after choosing their preferred language, respondents were immediately asked to select the country and region where they worked and one category out of interpreting, justice and policing, psychology and other. In the subsequent analysis the categories were reclassified into five different categories: justice and policing, interpreting, psychology, child support and other. Respondents were then asked to give their job title, their experience in working with children and the age groups of children they worked with, the frequency and type of cases (crimes) they had experience of. All respondents, apart from the interpreters, were asked whether they had received training to work with interpreters and interpreters had to indicate what type of training they had received. All respondents were asked whether they had received training to work with children and again it was possible to specify the length of training and whether it was formal training or training on the job. The next question was about experience of interpreter-mediated encounters with children. Those who answered ‘yes’ could then proceed to the second and afterwards the final part of the questionnaire. Those who answered ‘no’ were redirected to the final demographic section of the questionnaire. This section was meant to gather information about age, gender, highest level of education/qualifications, mother tongue and language combination (for interpreters) and membership of a professional organisation.

The second part of the questionnaire asked questions about the main challenges perceived by the respondent in relation to an interview with a child (in the case of interpreters) or an interview mediated by an interpreter (in the case of other professionals). The next two questions focused on “before the interview”, namely whether a briefing was provided for the interpreter and how the briefing was provided. Then the questionnaire had a part devoted to what happens “during” the interview. Respondents were asked to choose one or more answers about what is required from an interpreter when working with children. Immediately after, ten statements about the function of the interpreter were presented and respondents had to express their agreement or disagreement using a 5-point-Lickert scale. The following section was entirely devoted to the seating arrangement and asked respondents to express their preference on the basis of drawings. The last part of the questionnaire investigated what happens after an interpreter-mediated child interview takes place: is there a de-briefing and if so, how is it carried out. The last question before the demographic section was about what respondents felt should be improved in interpreter-mediated interviews with children, a totally open question.

The following section contains a detailed analysis of the answers given by Italian respondents about their perception of the interpreter's role, their opinions about the main challenges of interpreting for children and the special skills that are deemed necessary to carry out this activity successfully.

4.3 Italian respondents

In the survey, 117 Italian respondents out of 230 explicitly stated they had experience in working with children (and with interpreters, in the case of other professionals). Among these experienced respondents, 32 were interpreters (including 4 sign language interpreters), 85 other professionals (19 justice and policing professionals, 4 psychologists and 62 child care social workers). For the purpose of this paper all non-interpreters will be considered as a single group and referred to as “other professionals”. Another caveat worth mentioning for correct data reading and interpretation is that since not all respondents answered all the questions and some questions allowed multiple answers, the figures about responses discussed below can vary from case to case and the sum of the percentages sometimes exceeds 100%.

5. Focus on interpreters: profile

The first aspect to discuss is the profile of the interpreters who work with children that emerges from answers to the questions concerning gender, age, education, training in specific interpreting techniques and in working with children, training in legal interpreting, age of children they usually work with, language combinations, years of experience with children involved in criminal proceedings and type of crimes.

On the basis of the answers provided by the 32 interpreters who responded to our questionnaire it is possible to draw an average profile of an interpreter who works with children involved in criminal proceedings in Italy. The interpreter is generally female (92% of our sample), aged 41-54 (out of 26 respondents, 73% were aged 41-54, nobody under 30 and only 4 over 54 years of age) with a high level of education (almost 70% of respondents had a Bachelor's degree and over 50% a Master's degree). In our sample 21 (81%) were Italian native speakers, two were Arab native speakers, together with one Italian sign language, one French, one Russian and one Ukrainian native speakers. The language combinations of the interpreters in our sample mainly included Western European languages: English, French, German and Spanish, followed by Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian and Italian Sign Language.

As far as training in specific interpreting techniques and subjects is concerned the highest percentage (60%) had received training in sight translation; less than half of our sample stated that they had received training in legal interpreting and in consecutive interpreting. Another question enquired about specific education or training to work with children. All respondents answered this question, but only 3 out of 32 had received some specific training in working with children.

When asked about their experience with children, 7% of respondents said they had worked with children less than one year, 77% said they had 10 years or more experience and 16% had 4-9 years of experience. The following question concerned the number of encounters with children interpreters had been hired for in the previous 3 years: 46% of respondents said between 1-4 encounters, 27% said over 40 and 27% 5-20 encounters. As for the age groups of the children they had worked with, 52% declared they had experience with children aged 11-14, 96% with children aged 15-18, 30% with children aged 7-10 years and 3% with children aged 0-3.

In terms of crime typology, the two major offences were sexual offences and child abuse or neglect, while the category 'Other' was mainly related to migration issues.

5.1 Functions of the interpreter when interpreting for children

Respondents were presented with ten statements about the interpreter's function and asked to express their degree of agreement/disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale. They had to express their degree of agreement/disagreement on two statements about support, two statements on expectations about translation, five statements on different types of possible initiatives by the interpreter, and finally whether the interpreter should give an opinion or not. The respondents about the functions of interpreters were 27 interpreters and 80 other professionals, with the answers of the two groups compared. The answers were grouped together in three broader categories: agree, neither agree nor disagree, and disagree – a simplification compared to the original scale with the aim of making the information more easily accessible. Respondents also had the opportunity to comment on each statement. One general aspect emerging from these comments was that "neither agree nor disagree (at least for interpreters) often meant "it depends on the situation".

The first two statements were about supporting one party during the interview: either the child or the interviewer. Concerning Statement 1: "*The interpreter supports the minor through his/her interpretation and initiative*" (Figure 3) most respondents of both groups expressed disagreement though in different percentages: other professionals (91%) were far more opposed to this statement than interpreters (67%).

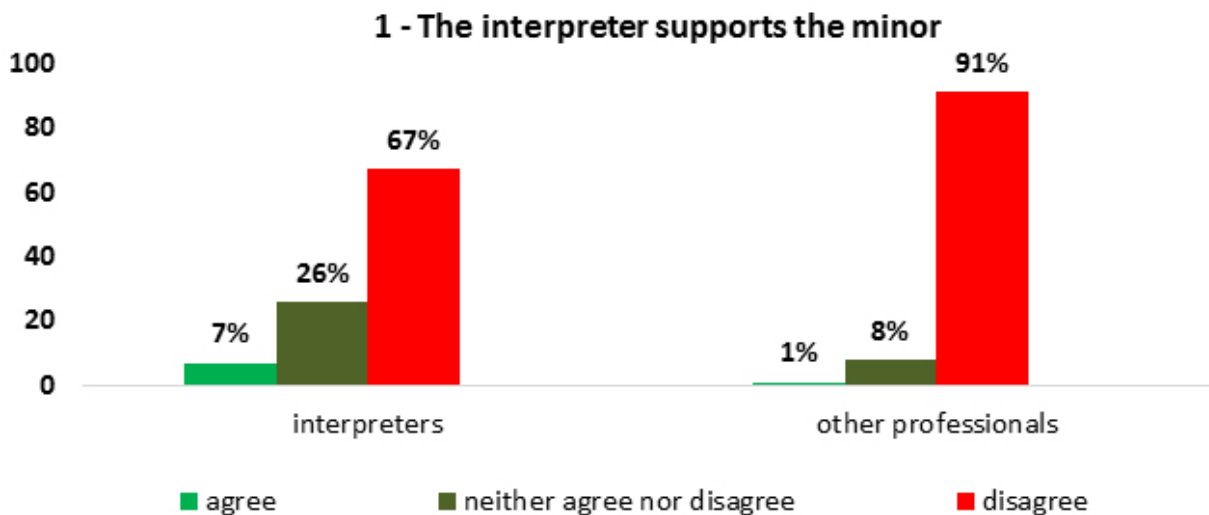


Figure 3: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about the possibility of the interpreter supporting the child during the interview.

When it comes to supporting the interviewer - Statement 2: "*The interpreter supports the interviewer's purposes through his/her interpretation and initiative*" (Figure 4) the situation changes. Most interpreters still disagreed (63%), but only 36% of other professionals disagreed, while 58% of them would like the interpreter to support the interviewer's purposes.

2 - The interpreter supports the interviewer's purposes

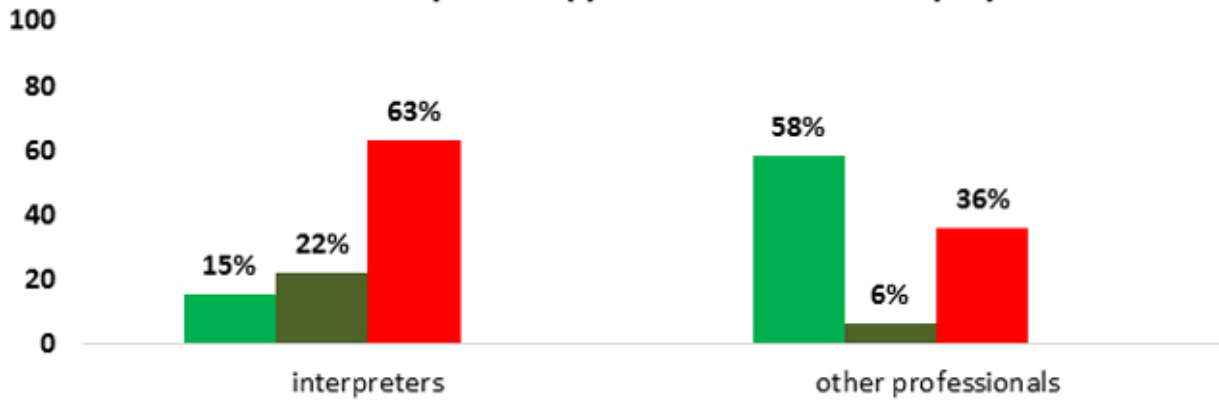


Figure 4: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about the possibility of the interpreter supporting the interviewer during the interview.

The second group of statements was about interpreting literally and interpreting faithfully, starting with Statement 3: *"The interpreter interprets literally"* (Figure 5). Here again there was some disagreement between the two groups, since the majority of other professionals (63%) wanted the interpreter to interpret literally, while interpreters mainly did not want to interpret literally (41%).

3 - The interpreter interprets literally

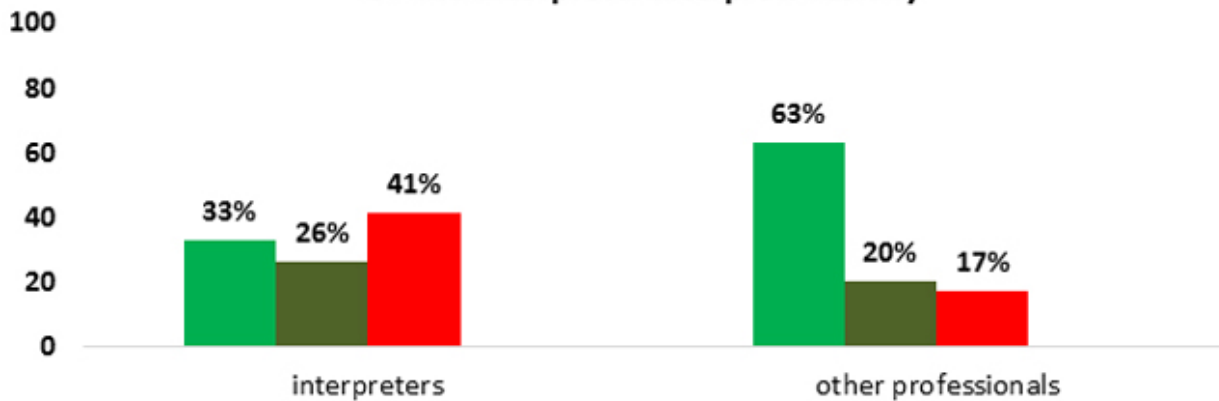


Figure 5: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about literal interpretation.

When it comes to faithfulness - Statement 4: *"The interpreter interprets faithfully"* (Figure 6) - both groups (96% of interpreters and 85% of other professionals) largely agreed that an interpreter should interpret faithfully. This suggests that other professionals tend to identify literality in interpreting with faithfulness, while interpreters do so much less.

Interestingly, one professional (belonging to the justice and policing professions) commented that she did not understand the distinction made between literal and faithful, and concluded that *"translation should be faithful to what the child wants to express"*.

4 - The interpreter interprets faithfully

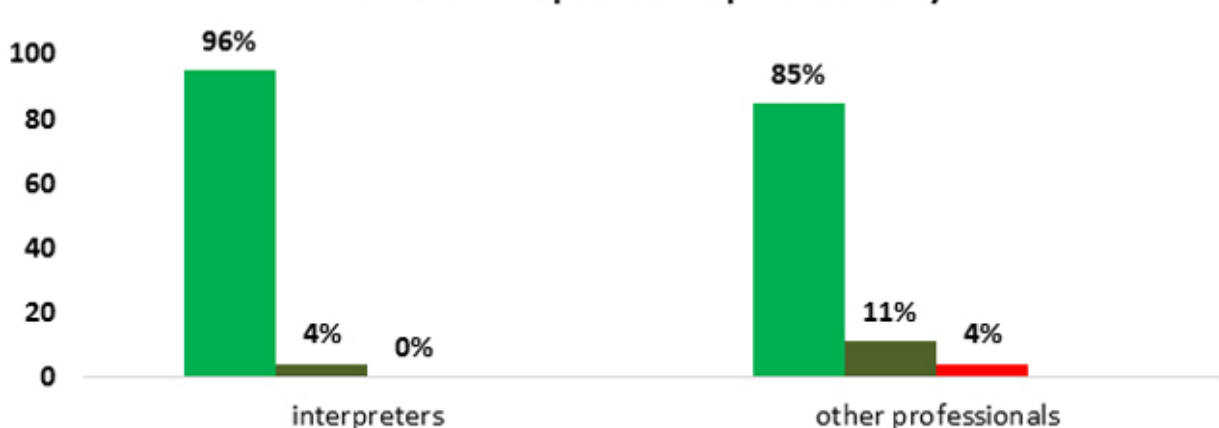


Figure 6: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about faithful interpretation.

The following group of five Statements (5 to 9) was about the interpreter taking initiatives, in particular:

- to explain social-cultural differences (Figure 7)*
- to explain technical terminology (Figure 8)*
- to adjust the language to the level of the minor (Figure 9)*
- to put the minor at ease (Figure 10)*
- to keep the communication flowing (Figure 11).*

In this case the opinions were quite clear-cut and very much in line for all five statements: between 61% and 89% of respondents in both groups agreed that the interpreter should indeed take all these initiatives (and, therefore, also responsibility for it) while only between 0% and 15% disagreed.

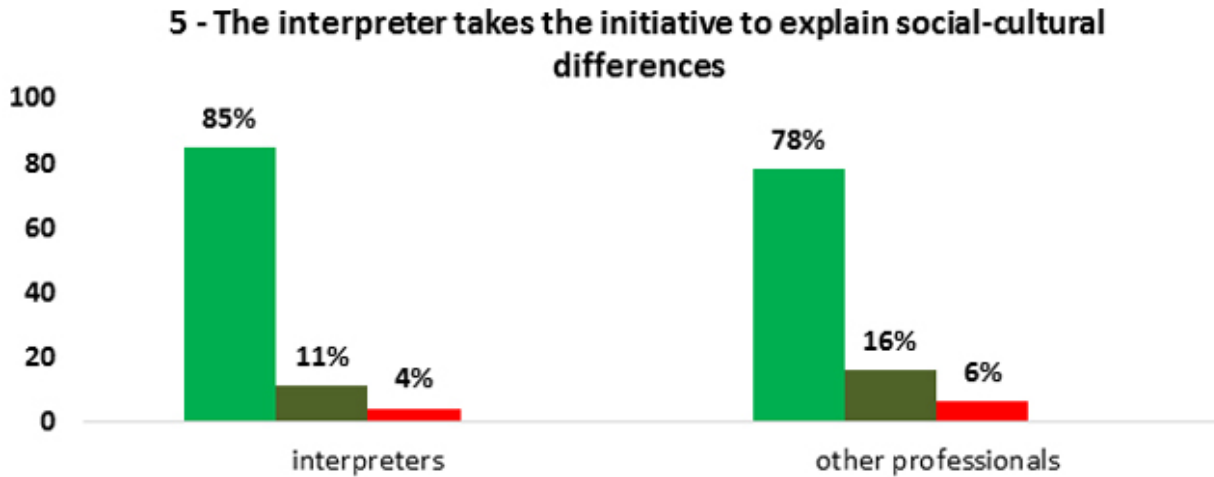


Figure 7: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about the interpreter’s initiative to explain social-cultural differences.

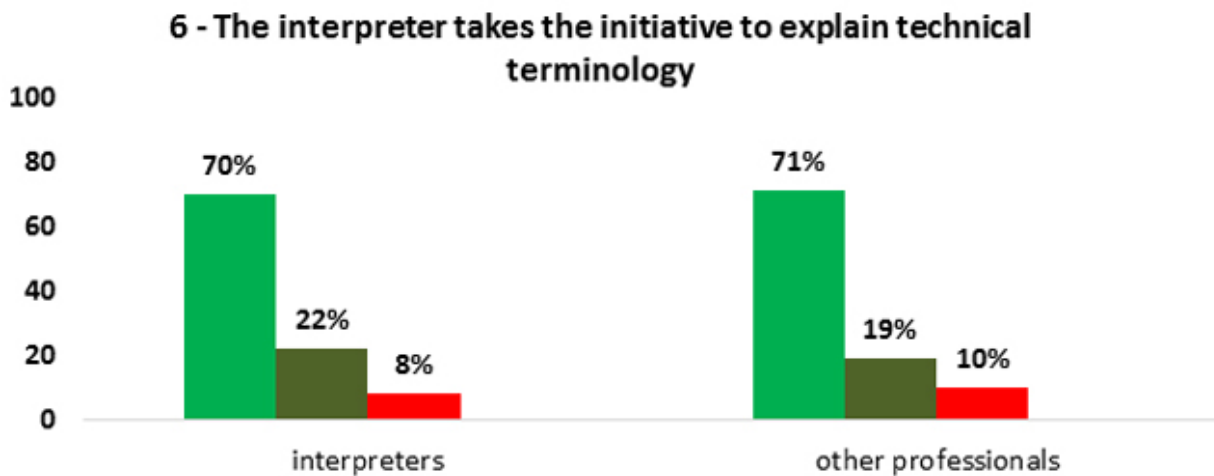


Figure 8: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about the interpreter’s initiative to explain technical terminology.

7 - The interpreter takes the initiative to adjust language to the level of the minor

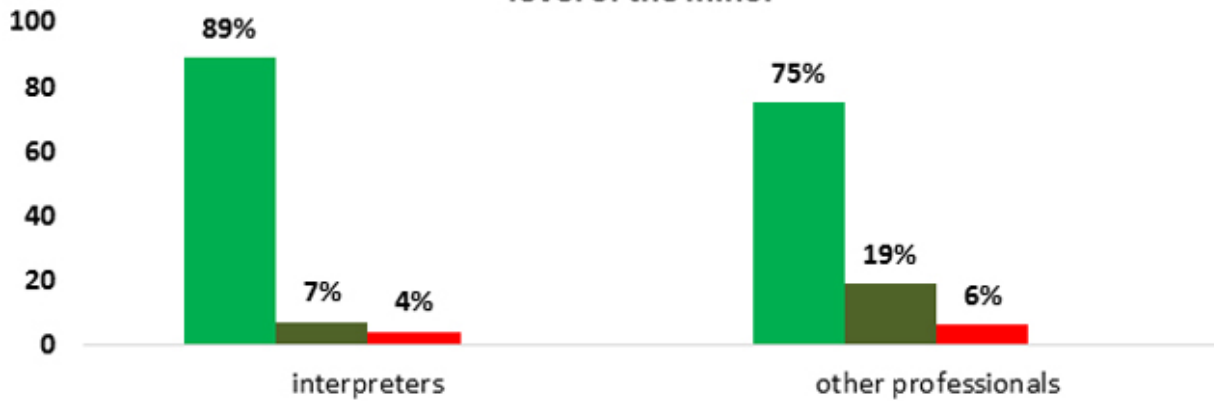


Figure 9: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about the interpreter’s initiative to use a child-friendly language.

8 - The interpreter takes the initiative to put the minor at ease

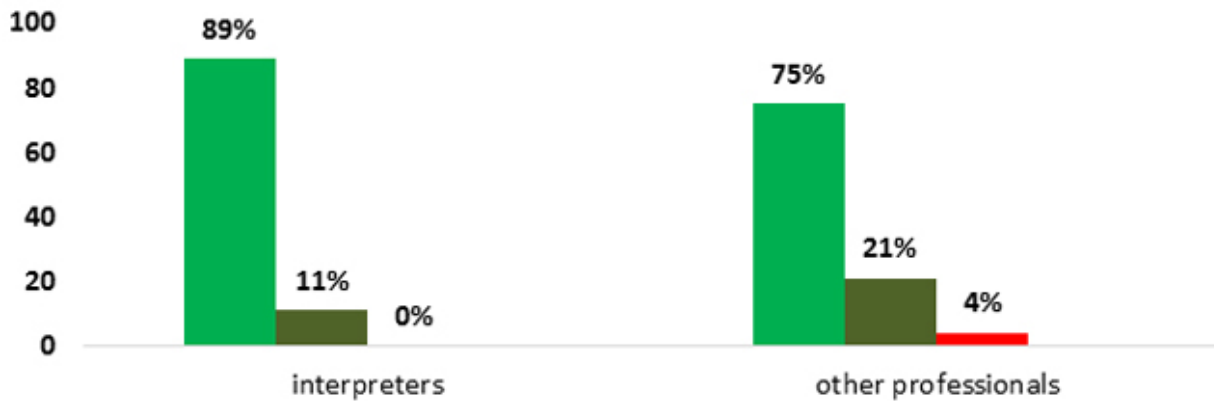


Figure 10: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about the interpreter’s initiative to put the child at ease.

9 - The interpreter takes the initiative to keep the communication flowing

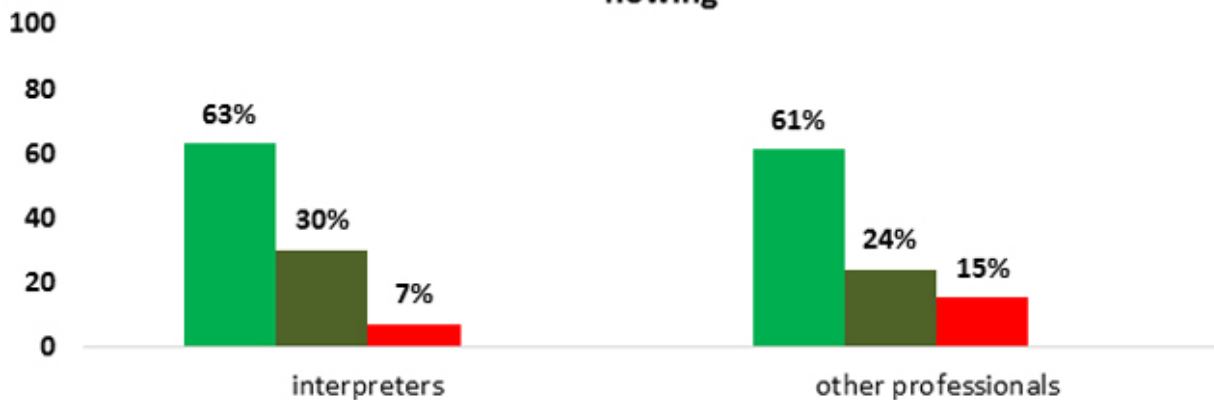


Figure 11: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about the interpreter’s initiative to keep the communication flowing.

In other words, other professionals expect interpreters to undertake many actions that might instead be considered part of their tasks. Explaining technical terminology or adjusting the language to the cognitive and language ability of the child are a case in point, with Article 20.1 of Directive 2016/800 identifying this as a responsibility of the staff of law enforcement authorities. Interestingly, however, the answers show that interpreters too feel obliged to accomplish all of these tasks. In all cases but one (technical terminology; Figure 8) they feel even more obliged than the other professionals. This is certainly a point that deserves further reflection and investigation.

As regards Statement 10: “*The interpreter gives his/her opinion on the case*” (Figure 12) both groups expressed almost the same percentage of disagreement (63% and 61% respectively), thus showing some sensitivity to the issue of neutrality. Nevertheless, almost 20% of other professionals would like to have the interpreter’s opinion, and 30% of interpreters do not rule out the possibility of giving their opinion, at least in principle.

10 - The interpreter gives his/her opinion on the case

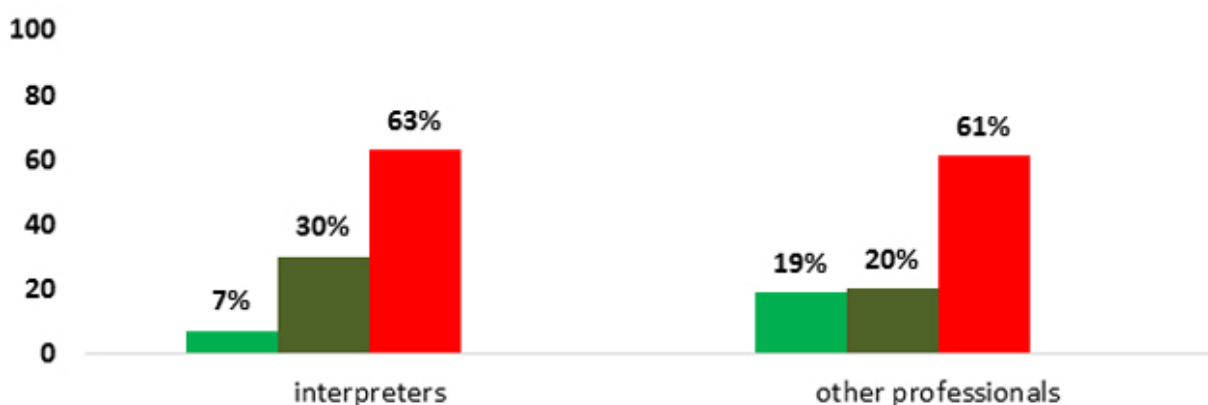


Figure 12: Opinions of interpreters and other professionals about the interpreter expressing his/her opinion on the case.

5.2 Main challenges in interpreter-mediated interviews with children

Interviewing a child who does not speak the language of the investigation or proceedings is usually a multi-party communication event. Participants generally include at least the interviewer, who may be a representative of the law enforcement agency or a juvenile judge, a psychologist, a social worker, an interpreter and the child. It is, therefore, a complex interaction because of the different professionals involved, their perception about their own role and the role of the other participants, the dynamics of rapport building, working in two different languages through an interpreter and, last but not least, the issue of trust.

Some of these aspects were presented to respondents as potential challenges and they were asked to choose one or more among the following items: 1. *Working with other professionals*, 2. *Working with the child*, 3. *Handling the interpreting process*, 4. *Other*.

According to the data collected, the interpreters in our sample considered working with other professionals and working with the child as rather problematic (which may be well expected), but on the whole these two aspects ranked only second and third (with 41% and 48% respectively). What instead was seen as the main challenge, is handling the interpreting process, mentioned by 51% of the 27 interpreters who responded to this question. Since they are professional interpreters with experience in this domain, this could be related to the specificity of this particular situation; but, on the basis of the answers about the interpreter’s functions mentioned above, this result might also be put in relation to the number of initiatives the interpreter is supposed to take, both in her/his eyes and in those of the other professionals. A closer look at the interpreters’ specifications about their choice confirms this interpretation of the data.

Two interpreters’ comments are particularly enlightening about the interpreters’ perception of the challenges when working with children:

“Sometimes it is necessary for the interpreter to simplify concepts and language”

“It is always very difficult to combine language mediation and the need for psychological sensitivity”

The first comment reflects the idea that the interpreter feels responsible for adapting other professionals’ language to the child’s linguistic and cognitive developmental stage.

The second comment highlights psychological concerns, an issue that is recurrent in comments on several points of the questionnaire and, indeed, appears to be a specific difficulty in interviews with children.

Other professionals were asked to select what they considered the main challenges when working with an interpreter. They could pick one or more of the following options: 1. *Interpreter’s poor understanding of interview techniques*, 2. *Interpreter’s lack of neutrality*, 3. *Interpreter’s insufficient cooperation*, 4. *Other*.

Other professionals who responded to the question about the main challenge(s) concerning interpreting when interacting with a child in legal settings were 83. They mentioned first of all the interpreters’ poor understanding of interview techniques (52%) and lack of neutrality (33%), but under the category ‘other’ (39%) they added many other challenges they specified in 23 comments. The most frequently mentioned aspects pointed mainly to interpreters’ lack of skills or knowledge, in particular: insufficient knowledge of the criminal justice system, lack of psychological knowledge (both child psychology and handling emotional aspects of the situation) and insufficient accuracy in translation. The last point can be related to the high number of respondents who identified lack of neutrality on the part of the interpreter as a main challenge. Since other professionals do not trust the interpreter to be neutral, they believe that this is reflected in the interpreting performance. As a consequence, one might expect that trust in interpreters also suffers or at least is not that solid as it should be in a group of people who supposedly work together to protect the best interest of the child.

On the whole, all these comments point to a strongly felt need for training for both groups or, better still, joint training.

5.3 What other professionals require from interpreters

One question was addressed only to other professionals and was aimed at enquiring about special characteristics an interpreter should have in order to work with children. Respondents could select one or more characteristics they want interpreters to have among the following: 1. Same gender as the minor, 2. Previous experience with minors, 3. Previous experience with the same case, 4. None, 5. Other.

By far the most frequent answer was experience, mentioned by 85% of the 80 respondents. Once again, however, under the category 'other' many other requirements were mentioned, and they partly overlap with the challenges already discussed: knowledge of the criminal justice system, knowledge of psychology, (inter)cultural knowledge, relational skills, and ability to work in a team. It is not known whether the interpreters and other professionals who responded to the questionnaire work together regularly and for this reason the complaints expressed by other professionals cannot be directly referred to our interpreters' sample. But as mentioned in section 5 above, less than 10% of interpreters in our sample had some specific training in working with children, and less than 50% of them declared they were trained in legal interpreting and in consecutive interpreting. There is definitely a lack of specialised skills that are necessary in order to work in this field. So once more the need for specific training for interpreters emerges from the survey. On the other hand, other professionals should not just point their fingers at interpreters. If they want them to develop relational skills and be able to participate in teamwork, as stated in the questionnaire, they should share their knowledge about interviewing techniques with interpreters, encourage and become involved in joint training, be aware of role boundaries and not expect the interpreter to be a 'jack of all trades'. They should also be prepared to recognise the professional status of interpreters, be ready to place them on an equal footing with other professionals, and try to gain a better understanding of the complex task of interpreting. This is well reflected in the following comment by one interpreter who expressed her frustration about the lack of understanding among other professionals of what interpreting is about: "Police officers are not always cooperative towards interpreters. After all, they only have to translate...".

5.4 Suggestions for improvement

One of the last questions for both interpreters and other professionals was: "What do you personally think is needed to improve interpreter-mediated encounters with minors?" The aspects most frequently mentioned by interpreters included: having a briefing with other professionals before the interview, having the opportunity to meet the child before the interview, receive support from other professionals, and having training for all parties involved. The responses provided by other professionals partly overlap: having a briefing with the interpreter, need for experienced interpreters, need to work with the same interpreter in order to have continuity and be able to build teamwork and, last but not least, training for all parties involved. These items are not listed exactly in their order of frequency, but for interpreters the single most frequently mentioned aspect which could improve interpreter-mediated encounters with children was briefing, for other professionals training (for more details see Amato and Mack 2015).

Comments from interpreters highlight their desperate need to have information about the case and the child before the interview in order to prepare, to know what to expect and to have context to be able to make sense of what is being said. Interpreters should be given a chance to acquire the necessary terminology for the case at hand, but also feel free to accept an assignment if they know they can cope with the case psychologically or turn it down if they feel that it is going to be too stressful for them. Other professionals mentioned training as a priority, which is in line with the complaints about the interpreter's lack of experience, knowledge and skills they expressed when asked about specific requirements (see 5.3). Other professionals also said, however, that they prefer to work with the same interpreter if possible, and this suggests they feel the need to build a rapport with the interpreter and would be ready to work in a team. This would most probably increase trust and cooperation, something interpreters also demand.

6. Concluding remarks

Rather than drawing our own conclusions, it is more interesting to hear the voice of our respondents about how to meet this (humanitarian) challenge. One comment by an interpreter highlights the need for specific training for both other professionals and interpreters in order to protect the best interest of the child:

(...) moreover police officers should be trained, not only to deal with children, but also to trust interpreters' skills (...) to find a common approach in order to make the child feel secure. Consequently also interpreters should be trained to act within the boundaries of their task

One of the other professionals wrote:

Training of both other professionals and interpreters: mutual knowledge, knowledge about the child's history and background, agreed interview method and goals as well as an exchange of opinions after the interview

This single statement summarises almost all the sensitive issues when working with children in criminal proceedings: a) need for training on an extensive range of topics for all professionals involved, including interpreters (and we would add: possibly also joint training); b) knowledge, as exhaustive as possible, about the child; c) shared knowledge about interviewing techniques and the goals to be achieved (in other words a briefing with the interpreter); and, last but not least, d) a de-briefing with the interpreter.

We fully agree with the comments quoted above and hope this survey helped to identify some urgent needs in the area of interpreting for children and provided useful indications about actions to improve the situation in Italy in order not only to appropriately train interpreters in the future, but also, and above all, to protect the best interest of the child in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For this reason we are very happy that a CO-MINOR II project is already on the way and hopefully will start catering for these needs.

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Notes

[1] Sections 1, 2, 4.2, 4.3, and 5.2 to 5.4 by A. Amato; sections 2.1 to 4.1, 5, 5.1, and 6 by G. Mack.

[2] In practically all international law texts a child is a person under 18 years of age.

[3] The Stockholm Programme is a five-year plan (2010-2014) on justice and home affairs in the EU member states. It "defines strategic guidelines for legislative and operational planning within the area of freedom, security and justice in

accordance with Article 68 TFEU.“ (Official Journal of the European Union 2010/C 115/1, 4.5.2010, Art. 1., last paragraph).

[4] For a more detailed discussion on children and vulnerability in legal contexts see Virág (2015).

[5] For a more detailed description of this part of the research see chapter 4 in Balogh and Salaets (2015: 175).

[6] All translations of comments by respondents quoted in the following are ours.

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