

# What public-service agents think interpreters should know to work with gender violence victims. The ‘Speak Out for Support’ (SOS-VICS) project

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## Abstract

The academic community is showing keen interest in Public Service Interpreting (PSI) due to its importance in ensuring fair treatment and human rights’ protection in an increasingly mobile world population. The importance of good interpreter training and provision of professional services is therefore an essential requisite for ensuring quality language mediation. PSI in gender violence (GV) settings is one such service that needs close attention. Communication of public service agents with foreign victims in the different areas (courts, police, forensic medicine, etc.) and stages of GV assistance involves specific features, and therefore the need for specialised training. Speak Out for Support (SOS-VICS) is an EU funded project that has created resources to provide specialised training for interpreters assisting GV victims. The project first ascertained the communication needs of all stakeholders (service providers, victims and interpreters) and then prepared a set of resources aimed at enhancing such communication. This paper addresses service providers’ perceptions of the training needs of interpreters and presents the main topics raised, such as specific knowledge on GV and of the field (legal, medical, etc.), understanding of the gender perspective or management of ethics, trauma and stress issues.

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Keywords: Public Service Interpreting (PSI); Gender Violence (GV); Violence Against Women; Community Interpreting; Victims

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## Resumen

*Qué deben saber las/os intérpretes para trabajar con víctimas de violencia de género según los profesionales de los servicios públicos. El proyecto ‘Speak Out for Support’ (SOS-VICS)*

La comunidad académica viene mostrando un gran interés por la interpretación en los servicios públicos (ISP) debido a su importancia a la hora de garantizar el tratamiento justo y la protección de los derechos humanos en un contexto de creciente movilidad a nivel de la población mundial. Por tanto, la importancia de contar con una buena formación y con una buena provisión de servicios profesionales es un requisito fundamental para asegurar la calidad de la mediación lingüística. La ISP en contextos de violencia de género (VG) es un servicio que necesita especial atención. La comunicación entre agentes de los servicios públicos y víctimas extranjeras en diferentes contextos (juzgados, policía, medicina forense, etc.), así como en diferentes momentos de la atención en VG, implica características espe-

cíficas, y de ahí surge la necesidad de contar con formación especializada. Speak Out for Support (SOS-VICS) es un proyecto cofinanciado por la UE que ha creado recursos para impartir formación especializada a las/os intérpretes que asisten a víctimas de VG. Primero, el proyecto identificó las necesidades de comunicación de todas las partes implicadas (agentes, víctimas e intérpretes). Posteriormente, se preparó un conjunto de recursos dirigidos a facilitar la comunicación en estos ámbitos. El presente artículo aborda las percepciones que los prestadores de servicios públicos tienen acerca de las necesidades de formación de las/os intérpretes, para después presentar los principales temas mencionados por los agentes, como el conocimiento específico sobre VG y sobre el campo de especialidad (jurídico, médico, etc.), la comprensión de la perspectiva de género o la gestión de los asuntos relativos a la ética profesional, el trauma y el estrés.

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Palabras clave: Interpretación en los servicios públicos (ISP); violencia de género (VG); violencia contra la mujer; interpretación social; víctimas

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## 1. Introduction

Gender violence (GV) as a form of violence against women is a global violation of human rights that takes place across continents, countries and cultures. In the European Union, the number of female GV victims continues to increase year after year (FRA 2014). This has led to a response from the EU governing institutions, which in 2012 approved *Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012, to establish minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA1*. This Directive, which addresses the protection of all victims of crime, includes protection of GV victims and should have been transposed into the national legislation of all EU Member States by 2015 (Hertog 2015). Article 7 of the Directive is specifically devoted to the right of victims to interpreting and translation if needed, under the quality standards set out by other EU legal instrument, i.e. *Directive 2010/64/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings*. Consequently, Member States must provide quality translation and interpreting services in order to comply with the mandates of both Directives. The creation of specialised resources for training interpreters working in GV settings is, thus, essential for ensuring the protection of victims' rights.

Spain, which accounts for high GV levels in its population, is bound by such legal provisions as a Member State of the European Union. The 2011 Gender Violence Macrosurvey (*Macroencuesta de Violencia de Género*) carried out in Spain indicated that 1,769,763 women (10.1% of the female population) in Spain have suffered GV at some point during their lives (CIS, 2011: 22). Findings are even more alarming in the case of foreign women wherein 469,317 (20.9%) suffered GV at some time during their lives and 130,241 (5.8%) were GV victims during 2011. The report highlights that the prevalence of GV among foreign women is twice as much as in Spanish

women and furthermore adds that of every 100 women who suffered GV in Spain during 2011, about 85.5% were Spanish nationals while 14.5% were foreigners (CIS, 2011). These figures and further research (Amnesty International 2007, Vela Díaz 2012) highlight that the fact that women are 'foreigners' increases their vulnerability and likelihood of suffering GV.

The Spanish Administration also reacted by implementing measures and devoting services, human resources, and materials to combat this widespread violation of human rights. However, interpreters have not been included as part of the Spanish comprehensive protection strategy for victims, and neither are they required to have the specialised training for working with GV victims that is mandatory for service providers. Therefore, GV victims who do not speak Spanish or any of the other co-official languages are unable to effectively avail of the services offered by Spanish Administrations due to language and cultural barriers that have not been adequately taken into account (Molina Gutiérrez 2006, Amnesty International 2007, Toledano & Fernández 2012, Fernandes del Pozo 2014).

Professional linguistic mediation is needed not only for such services to be accessible to foreign victims (Lucero García 2015) but also to increase the efficiency of the current scant resources placed at their disposal. However, unqualified and ad hoc interpreters often perform linguistic mediation tasks, which negatively influences the efficacy and efficiency of the services provided (Polzin 2007, Antón García 2014).

In the midst of this context, the 'Speak Out for Support' (SOS-VICS) was born in 2011 thanks to the co-funding of the Criminal Justice Programme of the European Union. The objective of the SOS-VICS project was to address this problem in the EU context and more specifically in Spain. Its three main objectives were to create specialised training materials for interpreters in the field of GV, a best practices guide for agents working with interpreters, and audio-visual material to inform victims about their rights, including their right to top-quality interpreting and translation. Therefore, comprehensive fieldwork was conducted based on the following: interviews with GV victims, questionnaire surveys of both agents and interpreters (Del Pozo *et al.* 2014a, 2014b), and focus groups and interviews with agents.

This paper discusses the results of two focus groups with agents and experts in GV held in Vigo (Spain). The overall aim of these focus groups was to analyse the communication needs of all agents involved in assisting GV victims (in the legal-police field, including judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police, forensic doctors and psychologists, as well as in the health & social fields, including social workers, psychologists and women associations), and to ascertain the contents and abilities they identified as essential for interpreters working with such victims.

The definition of the expression 'gender violence' is crucial in this research and needs to be explained before describing any results. The SOS-VICS project incorporated the 'gender violence' concept referred to in Directive 2012/29/EU, which includes all types of violence against women (rape, human trafficking, prostitution, domestic violence, etc.). However, the Spanish national legislation currently understands

the term ‘gender violence’ strictly as violence between a man and a woman who have or have had an emotional/sentimental relationship. Spanish legislation provides for specialised courts, prosecutors, judges, police, lawyers, etc. and professionals working in the field to address GV issues in this restricted sense. Surprisingly, interpreters have not been contemplated in this scenario and therefore the absence of any specialised training for them.

Since this study was carried out in Spain, most professionals who participated were specialised in GV from the Spanish legislation point of view and not necessarily in the other types of GV contemplated in international legislation (such as rape, human trafficking, prostitution, forced marriage, etc.).

## 2. Sampling and Methodology

The qualitative research method used was the focus group. A focus group is ‘a group discussion on a particular topic organised for research purposes [...] guided, monitored and recorded by a researcher (sometimes called a moderator or facilitator)’ (Gill *et al.* 2008: 293), or, in other words, ‘a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data’ (Kitzinger 1995: 299). This section provides details of participants in the two focus groups held in the framework of the SOS-VICS project, describes the activities designed and implemented and how results were processed (Hale & Napier 2013).

### 2.1. Sample

Participants were selected based on their positions within institutions or organisations and willingness and possibility to attend the focus groups. The intention was to have representatives from the different fields that intervene in assisting GV victims in order to detect the overall needs and to reach consensus on the proposals put forward (Basch 1987; Berg & Lune 2004; De Zeeuw 2001; Ibáñez 1979; Morgan 1998; Pask 1979).

There were a total of 29 participants from different fields. Table 1 lists the participants in the two focus groups:

Table 1. Participants in the focus groups

Field(s)	Position	Autonomous Region	Sex
Medicine	Family physician	Galicia	Female
Psychology	Psychologist from specialised GV public unit	The Canary Islands	Female
Psychology	Forensic psychologist from the Legal Medicine Institute	Galicia	Female

Field(s)	Position	Autonomous Region	Sex
Psychology	Therapeutic psychologist working in a women's shelter and also in human trafficking and prostitution victims' Association	Galicia	Female
Psychology	Psychologist at a local women's rights information centre	Galicia	Female
Psychology-Social work	Director of a public emergency shelter for GV victims	Galicia	Female
Social work: Non-profit organisation	Social worker, member of Gender Commission of Social Workers' Professional Association and member of the NGO 'Doctors of the World'	Galicia	Female
Social work	Social worker from a public emergency shelter for GV victims	Galicia	Female
Social work – Academic	Social worker and psychologist. University lecturer in Social Work, Gender and Equality Policy.	The Canary Islands	Female
Non-profit organisation: Medicine	Health worker at human trafficking and prostitution victims' Association	Galicia	Female
Non-profit organisation	Founder of a GV foundation devoted to help GV victims and divorced mothers	Andalusia	Female
Non-profit organisation: Social work	Social worker from a GV victims' Association	Galicia	Female
Non-profit organisation	President of a GV victims' association	Galicia	Female
Non-profit organisation: Law	Jurist and researcher from Amnesty International	Madrid	Female
Interpreting- Academic	Public-service interpreter (English-Spanish), lecturer at Conference Interpreting Master Program	The Canary Islands	Female
Interpreting-Academic	Public-service interpreter (English & Portuguese-Spanish), academic coordinator of a University Community Interpreting and Translation Program	The Canary Islands	Female
Interpreting-Law	Court and sworn interpreter (Arabic-Spanish), member of the Spanish Association of Court and Sworn Interpreters and Translators	The Balearic Islands	Female
Interpreting: Non-profit organisation	Interpreter (English-Galician), social activist and feminist	Galicia	Female
Police	Police inspector, Head of the Family Assistance Services (S.A.F) of the Spanish National Police Force (C.N.P.)	The Canary Islands	Female
Police	Police inspector, Head of the Family Assistance Services (S.A.F) of the Spanish National Police Force (C.N.P.)	Galicia	Male

Field(s)	Position	Autonomous Region	Sex
Police	Chief of Surveillance & Assistance Services for GV Victims from Local Police Force Department	Galicia	Male
Forensic medicine	Forensic Doctor, Head of the Clinical Section of the Legal Medicine Institute	Galicia	Female
Forensic medicine	Forensic Doctor of the Legal Medicine Institute	Galicia	Female
Forensic medicine	Forensic Doctor of the Legal Medicine Institute	The Canary Islands	Female
Law-Academic	Director of the European Institute for Research and Assistance for victims of crime	Galicia	Female
Law: Non-profit organisation	Lawyer, member of the Spanish Female Bar Association and member of human trafficking and prostitution victims' Association	Galicia	Female
Law: Non-profit organisation	Lawyer and member of GV victims' Association	The Canary Islands	Female
Law	Gender Violence Judge	Galicia	Female
Law	Public Prosecutor	Galicia	Female

Participation in the focus groups was voluntary and through invitation.

## 2.2. Methodology

The focus groups were held on two consecutive days and participants were divided into two groups according to their professional field (socio-psychological and legal-police). The socio-psychological group met during the first session and the legal-police group met during the second session. The following group activities were conducted on the two days:

Figure 1. Activities carried out during the focus groups

Morning	Afternoon
<input type="checkbox"/> Welcome & Instructions	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual reading of survey questions
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual questionnaire	<input type="checkbox"/> Public discussion
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus group discussion	
<input type="checkbox"/> Public presentation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Roundtable discussion	

As described in Figure 1, morning and afternoon sessions were held with the two groups. The objective in the morning session was to get first-hand knowledge of how each professional group worked with GV victims, especially with those who did not speak any of the official languages in Spain. Special attention was paid to communication obstacles and to any solutions implemented. During the afternoon session, the objective was to discuss the contents of the questionnaire to be prepared for agents (another pillar of the project's fieldwork). The results from the afternoon sessions are the subject of a future paper and therefore are not included herein due to space restrictions.

Five different activities were carried out during the morning session. In the first activity (Welcome & Instructions), the project coordinator welcomed participants and explained the day's schedule. There was a short presentation of the SOS-VICS project and participants were asked to introduce themselves. Information provided to participants during this first activity was kept limited and concise to avoid bias in their answers and contributions. Participants were then divided into groups, as follows:

Table 2. Breakdown of participants in the socio-psychological focus group by profession

Participants	Number
Family Physicians	1
Psychologists	5
Therapeutic Psychologists	3
Forensic Psychologists	1
Directors of Victims Emergency Centres	1
Social Workers	3
NGOs & Associations	5
Interpreters <sup>2</sup>	3

Table 3. Breakdown of participants in the legal-police focus group by profession

Participants	Number
Police	3
Forensic Doctors	3
Lawyers	3
Judges	1
Prosecutors	1
Interpreters	1 (+ 3)

In the second activity, the attending participants were grouped by profession to give them an opportunity to discuss things from the point of view of their particular

profession (physicians, social workers, police, etc.). A form containing open-ended questions was handed to them, the objective being to make them think individually about the questions, write down their answers and then share and discuss the same with the rest of the group and provide a consented common response. The questionnaire was as follows:

Table 4. Individual questionnaire

Name:
Position/institution:
<b>FIRST PART</b>
<i>*Please read the following questions carefully and answer all of them individually. Do not hesitate to ask the SOS-VICS staff if you have any doubts about the content or meaning of the questions.</i>
a) Please indicate the activity you carry out when assisting GV victims:
b) Please provide details on the communicative situation between GV victims and the staff at your institution (how does the victim arrive at your institution, where is she received, what type of encounters are possible [interview, assessment, etc.], what documents are usually used [forms, reports, etc.], what protocols are followed, what kind of procedure does the victim follow, etc.)
<b>SECOND PART</b>
c) When you receive a foreign GV victim that cannot speak any of the official languages in Spain:
c.1.) Is there a special protocol?
c.2.) Is this protocol part of an official document?
c.3.) What does this protocol establish?
d) Please describe the problems you faced when dealing with a foreign GV victim (language and/or cultural problems, lack of knowledge of available resources and institutions, etc.)
e) When you worked with the help of an interpreter:
e.1.) Did the interpreter get paid?
e.2.) Was the interpreter trained in translation and interpreting?
e.3.) Were there any problems while interpreting?
e.4.) What do you think interpreters should know to be able to work at your institution or in the GV field (legislation, in-house rules, documents, objective of the encounters with victims, terminology, etc.)?

After filling in the individual questionnaire, each group was asked to share their thoughts and answers and agree on the best ones. They then wrote down their con-



sented responses on large sheets of paper (A2 posters), which were then displayed on the walls for the other groups to read and improve their own poster by adding or deleting material.

Each group then chose a spokesperson, who presented the results and the conclusions using the posters they had previously prepared. Participants were asked to jot down any questions or comments they wanted to make during the next activity. This was followed by a roundtable discussion in which there was an intense debate on the several issues related to each group's presentations and answers.

Participants were requested to describe the way in which they worked with victims in their respective professional environments and to comment on their function within the GV assistance process. They were asked to talk about their experiences in relation to communication, language and interpreters. Each group had a moderator, who intervened whenever necessary to redirect the debate towards communication with victims via interpreters. This was because participants frequently got engaged in parallel debates on GV victims' assistance services and related problems. The exercise highlighted the lack of coordination between some services and institutions in Spain, as pointed out by the participants. Tasks carried out by professionals varied depending on the Autonomous Region and place they worked. GV budget policy was observed to be crucial, since the budget is usually not sufficient to cater to the needs of victims.

Furthermore, most participants stated that they had never worked with professional interpreters, let alone interpreters specialised in GV, and they had no idea about the training or hiring process of the interpreters they worked with.

### **3. Results**

The final results of these focus groups are shown in Tables 5 and 6 below. Due to the size limitations of this paper, we have only included answers to questions under c) d) and e) (see Table 4), which refer to communication with foreign victims via interpreters.

#### **3.1. Answers to questions under section c)**

The questions under section c) are the following:

c) When you receive a foreign GV victim who cannot speak any official language in Spain:

- c.1.) Is there a special protocol?
- c.2.) Is this protocol part of an official document?
- c.3.) What does this protocol establish?

The answers given by agents are shown in Table 5:

Table 5. Answers to questions under section c) 3

Answer	Professional Groups	Total
There is a specific protocol for foreign victims	Ps, ER, Po, L	4
There is no specific protocol for foreign victims	SW, Ps, Ph, NGO, Po, FD, L	7
The protocol is to call an interpreter	SW, J	2
The protocol is to use a public telephone-interpreting service	ER, NGO	2
We contact a colleague from work that speaks a vehicular language	SW, NGO	2
The victim is accompanied by someone who helps her to communicate	SW, Ps, NGO	3
We contact volunteers that speak the language of the victim	SW, Ps	2

Most participants stated that there is no specific protocol in their services to assist foreign victims who do not speak the official languages. The second most common response was that there is a specific protocol for foreign victims, however, no respondent specified whether this protocol included the possibility to call an interpreter, save for a member of the Po group from the Spanish National Police Force, who mentioned a specific internal procedure for calling an interpreter (whenever needed) as part of a general protocol. Only members from the SW and J groups indicated that the protocol itself was to call an interpreter, along with members from the ER and NGO who stated that the protocol was restricted to using a public telephone-interpreting service. The rest of the participants mentioned that when faced with a language barrier, they used non-professional interpreters to communicate (colleagues speaking a vehicular language, persons accompanying the victim, or volunteers who claimed they spoke the language of the victim).

### 3.2. Answers to questions under section d)

Section d) includes the following question:

d) Please describe the problems you faced when dealing with a foreign GV victim (language and/or cultural problems, lack of knowledge of available resources and institutions, etc.).

Table 6. Answers to questions under section d)

Answer	Professional Groups <sup>3</sup>	Total
Victims' mistaken preconceptions of agents and their functions	SW, NGO, Po	3

Answer	Professional Groups <sup>3</sup>	Total
Victims' sense of disorientation	NGO, FD, Pr	3
Victims' unawareness of the resources and institutions available to the victims	SW, Ps, NGO, Po, FD, L	6
Victims' unawareness of the rules	L	1
Victims' ignorance about the need for forensic doctor exploration of victim	FD	1
Victims' ignorance about confidentiality of some data	FD	1
Some institutions unaware of the resources available to victims	NGO	1
Victims' unawareness of the protection available in their country of origin	Po	1
Victims' unawareness of their rights	Ps, NGO, Po, L	4
Victims' mistrust towards agents and institutions	SW, Ps, NGO, Po, FD, L, J	7
Mistrust of the agents towards victims	Ps	1
Victims' information distorted or mediated by the environment	SW, Ps, NGO	3
Over-participation by persons accompanying victims (interruptions, contributions, assessments, etc.)	SW	1
Linguistic barriers	SW, Ps, ER, Ph, NGO, Po, FD, L, J, Pr	10
Cultural barriers	SW, Ps, ER, Ph, NGO, Po, FD, L, J	9
Xenophobia of some victims towards others	SW, Ps	2
Victims' disciplinary problems when living in shelters or emergency homes	SW	1
Lack of support from victim's surroundings	SW, Ps, NGO	3
Absence of social support for victims	NGO, L	2
Victims' dependence on abuser (emotional, economic, etc.)	SW, Ps, NGO, L	4
Re-victimisation	SW	1
Interruption of process (absence of victim, return to abuser, etc.)	Ps	1
Victims' fear of being expelled	Ps, J	2
Family members depending on the victim	Ps	1
Problem to identify oneself as victim	Ps, Po	2

Answer	Professional Groups <sup>3</sup>	Total
Victims' fear of being subject to extortion (case of human trafficking victims)	Ps	1
Victims' situation of isolation	Ps, NGO, Po	3
Victims' dependence on drugs (human trafficking victims)	Ps	1
Victims' psychiatric problems	FD	1
Victims' sizeable emotional deterioration	Ps, NGO	2
Need to assess attitudes of professionals	Ph	1
Victims' illegal administrative situation	NGO, Po	2
Lack of coordination between professionals	NGO	1
No prevalence of victim's interests	NGO	1
Lack of victims' support by institutions	NGO	1
Professionals unable to empathise with victim's situation	FD	1
Victims' fear of what may happen to the aggressor	Po	1
Victims' fear	FD	1
Victims' shame or discomfort	FD, Pr	2
Multiple discrimination towards victims	L	1
All difficulties shared with Spanish victims	L	1
Modest background of foreign victim	J	1
High incidence of GV in foreign women	Pr	1
No complaint made by victims	Pr	1
Economic motivation hinders investigation of cases	Pr	1
Victim's desire to resolve case ASAP	Pr	1

The answers to this question were heterogeneous and varied according to each person's experience with foreign GV victims. The most common answers were language (10) and cultural barriers (9), which clearly indicates the need for assistance from someone to eliminate these barriers. On the subject of language barriers, participants stated that the main difficulties encountered were related to: informing victims about the professionals' role (Po); explaining which aspects of the court statement were most important (L); using psychological therapy (Ps); and translating all relevant documents of the procedure (FD), which is crucial since victims often refuse to sign documents they do not understand (Po). These language barriers also gave rise to frus-

trated communications among professionals and victims (Pr). As far as cultural barriers are concerned, Ps pointed to non-verbal language, myths, concepts and gender stereotypes as the main obstacles encountered when addressing victims, and J mentioned religion as a specific problem faced when dealing with a foreign GV victim.

The most remarkable communications barriers were ‘mistrust of victims towards agents and institutions’ (7) and ‘unawareness of victims about the resources and institutions available to them’ (6) – these two answers somehow show that victims often have no prior information on services and agents provided by public administrations. This can be clearly linked to the language barrier since even when victims are able to overcome ‘mistrust towards agents and institutions’ they are still unable to access the resources and institutions placed at their disposal.

Other problems described by participants mainly involved victims’ personal feelings (such as shame, fear, sadness, etc.), the victims’ environment (aggressor’s and/or relatives’ influence, lack of economic independence, isolation, etc.), problems related to the lack of support from public bodies and institutions, and paucity of adequate information on the different phases of the assistance process for GV victims in Spain.

### 3.3. Answers to questions under section e)

The questions under section e) were the following:

e) When you worked with the help of an interpreter:

e.1.) Did the interpreter get paid?

e.2.) Was the interpreter trained in translation and interpreting?

e.3.) Were there any problems during interpreting?

e.4.) What according to you should interpreters know to be able to work at your institution or in the GV field (legislation, in-house rules, documents, objective of the encounters with victims, terminology, etc.)?

Table 7 summarises the answers to questions e.1.), e.2.), e.3.). Answers to question e.4.) and related to interpreter training needs are shown in Table 8 below.

Table 7. Answers to questions under sections e.1.), e.2.), and e.3.)

e) When you worked with the help of an interpreter:		
e.1.) Did the interpreter get paid?	Professional Groups	Total
Worked with interpreters paid by other institution	SW, ER, NGO, FD, L, J	6
Worked with interpreters paid by their institution	Po	1
Worked with unpaid interpreters	SW, NGO, Po, L	4
Unaware of whether interpreters were paid	Ps, FD	2

e.2.) Was the interpreter trained in translation and interpreting?	Professional Groups	Total
Unaware whether interpreters had any training in translation and interpreting	SW, Ps, ER, NGO, Po, L, J	7
Worked with untrained interpreters	Po, FD, L	3
In some cases, interpreters had training in philology (did not specify language)	SW	1
Worked with trained interpreters	FD	1
e.3.) Were there any problems during interpreting?	Professional Groups	Total
Interpreter took a long time to arrive	L	1
Lack of training	L	1
Lack of specialised training	L	1
Impossibility of assessing interpreter's language level	L	1
Excessive summarising	SW, L	2
Non-facilitating attitude	L	1
Interruption of victim's discourse	SW	1
Lack of interpreting service in all stages of the process and assistance services	SW, Po	2
Lack of emotional control	SW	1
Emotional involvement with victim	SW, ER	2
Formed an opinion about the victim	SW	1
Expressed opinions about the victims or about her story	SW	1
Chatted with victim	Po	1
Advised victim on what to do	SW, Ps, Po	3
Reproached victims for their situation	SW, Ps	2
Added extra information to the conversation	SW, Ps, NGO	3
Victims' lack of knowledge about the role/tasks of professionals	SW	1
Lack of gender perspective	SW, L	2
Lack of empathy with victim	NGO, Po	2
Lack of knowledge of cultural differences	SW	1
Lack of knowledge of Gender Violence	SW, NGO	2

Lack of command of languages spoken	SW, Ps, Po	3
Lack of knowledge of dialects spoken	Po	1
Use of general online translation tools, such as <i>Google Translate</i>	Po	1
Modification of interview due to interpreting constraints	FPS, FD	2
Impossibility of accurate evaluation due to language mediation	FPS, FD	2
Lack of fidelity to victims' discourse	Ps	1
Loss of non-verbal information	FD	1
Lack of knowledge of basic legal concepts	ER, J	2
Lack of knowledge of specialised terminology	Po	1
Need to explain concepts, procedures or terms to the interpreter	ER, Po	2
Lack of familiarity with informative documents for victims	Po	1
Procedures became long as a result of interpretation	Po	1
Sex of the interpreter	Po	1
Same interpreter for victim and aggressor	L	1
Information transmission from aggressor to victim and vice-versa	L	1
Need to repeat questions	J	1
<b>Other answers</b>	<b>Professional Groups</b>	<b>Total</b>
Had never worked with an interpreter	Ph, NGO	2
Used non-verbal language	NGO	1
Showed affection and support	NGO	1
Used online automatic translation tools and dictionaries	NGO	1

With respect to question e.1.) ('Did the interpreter get paid?'), most participants said that they had worked with interpreters who were paid by other institutions (6), while the rest had worked with unpaid interpreters (4). The only exceptions were the members of the Po group from the Spanish National Police Force, who had worked with interpreters paid by their institution, as well as some members of the Ps and FD groups, who were unaware of whether interpreters working with them were actually paid. Those who worked with unpaid interpreters often mentioned that these were mainly volunteers, such as relatives, friends (SW, NGO, Po) and even other victims

(NGO). As explained herein below, some groups (SW, NGO) pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of working with non-professional and untrained interpreters, although their comments were mostly related to the impact such interpreters had on the victim's behaviour (and not so much on the quality of interpreting).

When asked whether the interpreter was trained in translation and interpreting (question e.2.), most participants were unaware of whether interpreters had any training in translation and interpreting (SW, Ps, ER, NGO, Po, L, J). Other participants mentioned working with untrained interpreters (Po, FD, L), and only two persons said that interpreters had training in philology (SW, who did not specify the language) or that they had worked with trained interpreters (FD). These results show that most agents were not aware of the level of education and training of the interpreters they had worked with, although in some spontaneous conversations they mentioned that they expected them to be fully trained for their job, as the public administration is the one responsible for hiring interpreters.

With respect to question e.3.) ('Were there any problems during interpreting?'), the answers given by participants are really imprecise and heterogeneous. The problems most frequently mentioned were that interpreters would advise the victim on what to do (SW, Ps, Po), added extra information to the conversation (SW, Ps, NGO) and did not master the conversation languages (SW, Ps, Po), which was considered as a clear sign of unprofessional interpretation. Participants also pointed out excessive summarising (SW, L), lack of availability of interpreting service during all stages of the process and assistance services (SW, Po) –e.g. interpreters were available during the trial but were unavailable for the prior interview between lawyer and victim (SW), or were unavailable for telephone follow-up (Po)–, emotional implication of the interpreter with the victim (SW, ER), reproachful attitude towards the victim for their situation (SW, Ps), lack of gender perspective (SW, L) and empathy (NGO, Po), and lack of knowledge on gender violence (SW, NGO), basic legal concepts (ER, J), procedures and terms (ER, Po).

Other participants highlighted the impact of linguistic mediation in their own work, such as having to modify their interview procedure due to interpreting constraints (FPs, FD) –where there was a special need for more structured interviews instead of non-structured interviews (FPs)– or that they were unable to carry out deep forensic evaluation due to lack of proper linguistic mediation (FPs, FD).

Other problems spotted by participants were connected with the interpreter's attitude, interpreter's lack of knowledge or skills or with other practical issues. Regarding the interpreter's attitude, participants mentioned a non-facilitating attitude (L), interruption of victims' discourse, lack of emotional control, judging victim (SW), chatting with victim (Po), lack of fidelity to victims discourse (Ps). Regarding the interpreter's lack of knowledge or skills, participants highlighted lack of training (L), lack of knowledge of specialised terminology and lack of familiarity with information documents for victims (Po). As for the practical issues raised, they were mainly focused around issues that the interpreter took a long time to arrive (L), that proce-



dures became longer due to interpreting, that the sex of the interpreter was an issue, especially in the case of Muslim women (Po), and that using the same interpreter for victim and aggressor (L) may also be problematic. Some agents added additional oral remarks, which were not recorded in their written answers, with regards to the advantages and disadvantages of working with non-professional interpreters. As for the advantages, agents mentioned that if the non-professional interpreter was someone whom the victim trusted, victims used to feel more at ease and less vulnerable, therefore fostering a better communication environment. However, agents agreed that, in general, victims did not feel at ease when having to speak in front of non-professional interpreters, since their behaviour and actions often inhibited the victim and interfered with communication, as reflected in Table 7.

Answers to question e.4.) ‘What according to you should interpreters know to be able to work at your institution or in the GV field (legislation, in-house rules, documents, objective of the encounters with victims, terminology, etc.)?’ were used to create a new table (Table 8 below) containing items linked to interpreter training. They were broken down into knowledge/skills in order to get an overall picture of the results and to decipher the training needs. The groups that mentioned the knowledge/skills are also shown in order to get an idea of the frequency of answers.

Table 8: Items linked to interpreter training

Item	Knowledge/ Skills	Professional Groups	Total
Revising stereotypes (GV)	S	SW, Ps, FPs, NGO,	4
Revising one’s capacity to perform task	S	SW	1
Gender/gender perspective training	K	SW, Ps, FPs, Ph, NGO, L	6
Gender violence training	K	SW, Ps, FPs, Ph, NGO, Po	6
Training and practical GV experience under supervision of specialised professionals	K/S	SW, NGO	2
Knowledge of aid and services available to victims	K	SW, L	2
Knowledge about the role of professionals and the procedures to attend GV victims	K	SW, Ps, FPs, Ph, NGO, Po, L, Pr	8
Familiarisation with the usual forms and documents involved	K	SW, Ps, FPs, FD	4
Familiarisation with the forms and documents in the country of origin	K	FD	1
Knowledge of legislation, basic legal concepts in GV and victim’s rights (updated)	K	SW, Ps, FPs, ER, NGO, Po, FD, L, J, Pr	10
Emotional self-control and management	S	SW, Ps, FPs, Po	4

Item	Knowledge/ Skills	Professional Groups	Total
Establishment of a communication code with the agent	S	SW	1
Internal rules of the centre	K	SW	1
Inclusion of prostitution as GV	K	SW	1
Cultural differences	K	SW, Ph, FD	3
Context and barriers of immigrant populations	K	SW	1
Human rights training	K	SW, NGO	2
No interruption	S	FPs	1
No simplification	S	FPs	1
No 'interpretation', just translation	S	FPs, Po	2
No adding own clarifications	S	FPs, NGO	2
No identification with victim	S	FPs	1
No provision of advice to victim	S	Ps, FPs	2
Accuracy, exactness, precision and literal wording in form and content (use of same register and vocabulary, literal reproduction of wording of both parties)	S	FPs, NGO, FD, L, Pr	5
Knowledge of the aim of the interview	S	FPs, Ph	2
Knowledge of the work methodology	S	FPs	1
Knowledge of specific terminology (even though it is not used with victim)	K	FPs, Ps, NGO, Po, FD, L, Pr	7
Facilitation	S	Ps	1
Empathy	S	Ps, Ph, NGO, FD, L	5
Knowledge of expectations	S	Ps	1
No-modification of questioning style	S	Ps	1
Awareness of resources available to victims	S	Ps	1
Creation of a trustworthy environment for victim	S	Ps, Ph, FD	3
Woman interpreter (especially in case of sexual aggression)	S	Ps, NGO	2
Non-verbal language	K/S	Ps, FPs	2
Respect and non-judgemental behaviour towards victim	S	Ps, FPs, FD	3
Training in communication techniques	K/S	Ph	1

Item	Knowledge/ Skills	Professional Groups	Total
Assertiveness	S	Ph	1
Prior meeting between interpreter and victim	S	Ph	1
Training in carrying out personal interviews	S/K	NGO, Po	2
Translation of emotions	S	NGO, FD	2
Respect of silence	S	NGO	1
Active listening	S	NGO	1
Perceive victims as an equal	S	NGO	1
Objective involvement and sensitivity, without being over protective	S	NGO, Po, FD, L, Pr	5
Interpreter who is a GV survivor (preferable)	S	NGO	1
No interpreter in common for both victim and aggressor	S	NGO	1
Knowledge of the role/tasks of an interpreter	K	Po	1
Protocols	K	Po	1
Knowledge of repercussions of the facts in the victim's country of origin	K	Po	1
Simple explanation of what the agent is saying	S	Po	1
Professional accreditation	-	Po	1
Same interpreter throughout the process	S	Po, FD	2
General knowledge of anatomy and legal-medical terminology (including psychiatry)	K	FD	1
Objectiveness during information transfer	S	FD	1
Confidentiality	S	FD	1
Discretion	S	FD	1
Capacity to determine whether the victim's words are true or invented and whether culture or mother tongue is playing a role, or whether victim is contradicting herself	S	FD	1
Note taking during interviews	S	FD	1
Sight translation (of forms, tests, etc.)	S	FD	1
Matching sex and age of interpreter	S	FD	1
Interpretation without visual contact	S	FD	1
Perception and extraction of cultural elements that determine conversation dynamics	S	FD	1

Item	Knowledge/ Skills	Professional Groups	Total
Adaptation of interview in cultural setting, with the help of interpreter	S	FD	1
Presentation of interpreter and explanation of his/her function, professionalism and confidentiality	S	FD	1
Explain that interpreter will leave the room if victim prefers intimacy during physical examination, and a brief explanation on what it involves and what victim should do after examination (if victim follows recommendations)	S	FD	1
Knowledge of the working languages	K	L, Pr	2
Familiarisation with the work environment	K	L	1
Avoid use of same interpreter for both victim and aggressor	S	Pr	1
Prior meeting with agent	S	Pr	1

A sizeable number of professional groups (10) agreed that training interpreters to work with GV victims should include an updated knowledge of legislation, basic GV related legal concepts and victim’s rights. The next most common response was that interpreters should know the roles performed by agents attending victims and the procedures followed (8 professional groups), knowledge of specific terminology used (7 professional groups) and training in gender, gender perspective and gender violence (6 professional groups). Participants (4 professional groups) also mentioned that interpreters should be familiar with the documents and forms used in GV settings in their respective fields.

As far as skills are concerned, 5 professional groups mentioned empathy while another 5 groups mentioned objective involvement and sensitivity as key skills interpreters must have when dealing with GV victims. They also pointed out the importance of fidelity, accuracy, precision and literal reproduction as key elements when working with agents that assist GV victims, such as in the case of forensic medicine where the victim’s condition and testimony are assessed from the point of view of both content and form.

Participants likewise highlighted the importance of discussing personal GV stereotypes (4 professional groups) during interpreter training, as well as the importance of interpreters knowing and managing the possible emotional impact of victim’s statements (4 professional groups) on themselves and of their intervention as communication professionals.

The remaining skills and knowledge included in the table were mentioned by at least 4 groups but this does not mean that they are less relevant. Each group highlighted the areas they felt should be included in the future training of such interpreters,

in accordance with the work performed with such victims in their respective fields and depending on their knowledge of the subject of interpreting.

## 4. Conclusions

One of SOS-VICS' objectives was to create resources to train interpreters to work with GV victims and therefore the focus groups concentrated on obtaining information that could then be used to create training materials for interpreters who work in GV settings.

The first conclusion is that the methodology used was effective and the results were useful for the purpose of the focus groups and for the project's goals. All professional groups understood instructions properly, performed their role adequately and provided the required result. Level of detail and precision of responses varied according to amount of time spent by each participant on preparation prior to the focus group meeting. Some participants came prepared while others did not but all of them participated actively in the research process. A combination of individual responses and group debate facilitated the achievement of consensus and discussion of issues that some groups of agents had not even considered.

The second conclusion that can be drawn is that most agents indicated a lack of a specific protocol for dealing with foreign GV victims not speaking the language, and that whenever it existed, it was limited to specifying how to contact an interpreter. The protocols did not specify how to determine the victim's language, or how to work with interpreters, nor how to explain the interpreter's role and tasks to victims. Therefore, it appears that despite the high presence of foreign victims, Spain still does not have the specialised protocols required for working with victims who do not speak Spanish (or any of the co-official languages in Spain).

The third conclusion is that the agents providing assistance to GV victims have a limited knowledge about interpreters and their functions and this is conditioned by whether they have worked with interpreters before. The lack of regulation and acknowledgement of the interpreter figure in Spanish public services hampers this situation furthermore and results in unqualified and untrained persons performing the functions of a professional interpreter. Furthermore, the situation also creates professional misrepresentation or intrusiveness, which systematically endangers procedural warranties and the rights of victims, and can negatively influence their personal situation (Knapp-Potthoff and Knapp 1987). After analysing the difficulties encountered by agents when working with interpreters contained in the responses to section e.3) of the questionnaire, the majority concluded that non-professional persons performing interpreter functions not only hinder the work of true professionals and their communication with victims but also modify victims' messages and interact with them beyond their linguistic mediation task.

Furthermore, most agents are unaware of the role of interpreters and so are unable to identify behaviors that differ from the normal professional code of conduct

and therefore have no idea of what to expect from an interpreter<sup>4</sup>. Thus, when faced with cultural and linguistic shortcomings when communicating with foreign victims, agents tend to:

- Ask interpreters to perform tasks that go beyond the scope of their profession (cultural mediation, social work, advocacy, etc.).
- Be suspicious of interpreters and their interaction with victims (linguistic isolation of agent).
- Interfere with the interpreter's tasks (not let them take notes, not let them ask for clarifications, deny access to case documents, deny communication with interpreter, etc.).

All participants stated that interpreters should be well versed in specific terminology related to the different fields in order to be able to work in GV settings. Table 8 highlights the different items that agents considered essential to work in GV settings. There are also satellite aspects of GV (such as emotion management or training in cultural differences) and still others related to general PSI and to job specificities in each field of assistance: police, court, social work, NGOs etc. Agents highlighted that interpreters should know the work done in each GV assistance stage as well as the purpose of each encounter. For instance, the facilitating attitude and active listening that is so typical in the social field and in victim's associations is completely different from the distant attitude and absence of visual contact required in other fields such as forensic medicine and forensic psychology.

The results from the extensive fieldwork have been used to create interpreter training resources for the SOS-VICS project, which include a manual and a website for interpreters and a good practice guide for agents involved in providing assistance to GV victims on how to work with interpreters and are available at no cost on the website<sup>5</sup>.

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## Notes

1. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012L0029&from=EN>
2. The group of interpreters was comprised of 3 persons and they participated in a different activity. They were present during both focus group meetings: A 4th interpreter attended only the legal-police focus group. These participants answered questions that were later included in a Delphi survey for interpreters (Dalkey, N., & Helmer, O. 1963; Landeta 2006; Linstone, & Turoff 1975).
3. Key: SW (social workers), Ps (psychologists), FPs (forensic psychologists), Ph (physicians), FD (forensic doctors), J (judge), Pr (prosecutor), Po (Police), L (lawyers), NGO (NGO and associations), ER (emergency centre).
4. For an extensive review on dialogue interpreting in institutional settings, see Baraldi & Gavioli, 2012. Also see Meyer 2006 and Pöchhacker 2000.
5. All of these materials are available on the SOS-VICS website: [www.sos-vics.org](http://www.sos-vics.org).