

ΙΟΝΙΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ
ΣΧΟΛΗ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΣΤΙΚΩΝ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ
ΤΜΗΜΑ ΞΕΝΩΝ ΓΛΩΣΣΩΝ, ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΔΙΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑΣ



***Interpreting and children in refugee transit zones:
The Greek case***

ΠΤΥΧΙΑΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ

της

Μαρίνας Μαλίνη, ΞΔ2016042

Επιτροπή Εποπτείας:

Δρ Στέφανος Βλαχόπουλος, Καθηγητής

Δρ Αναστάσιος Ιωαννίδης, Επίκουρος Καθηγητής

Κέρκυρα, Σεπτέμβριος 2024

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Abstract

Interpreters play a pivotal role in facilitating communication within refugee transit zones, where access to essential services relies on accurate interpretation. In Greece, a key entry point for refugees into Europe, interpreters face numerous challenges, including inadequate training, emotional and cultural complexities, as well as logistical constraints, mainly when working with vulnerable populations. This thesis delves into these communication barriers, focusing on child refugees. Based on qualitative interviews with NGO representatives, a government consultant, and an interpreter, alongside a literature review, the study highlights the need for enhanced training and support systems, identifying critical areas for improvement. Finally, the analysis of the present paper sheds light on the mediating role of interpreters in safeguarding child refugees' rights, urging policy reforms at multiple levels to better address their needs and ensure their protection in transit zones.

Keywords: *Interpreting in humanitarian contexts, child refugees, child brokering, refugee transit zones, cultural mediation, emotional resilience, interpreter training, policy reforms.*

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INTRODUCTION

The refugee crisis remains one of the most significant humanitarian challenges of the 21st century, whereas Greece represents a critical access point for populations seeking safety and asylum in an effort to escape conflict and violence (International Organisation for Migration, 2021). Unaccompanied minors, being one of these vulnerable groups, particularly at risk, emphasise the importance of effective communication so that vital services can be obtained and their protection ensured (UNHCR, 2020). Interpreters play a crucial role in bridging this communication gap, especially in situations that seem to be emotionally charged (O'Reilly & De Jong, 2019). Their role extends beyond translation, requiring linguistic skills, emotional resilience, and cultural awareness, allowing them to engage with the challenges in refugee contexts effectively (Fuchs & Gießler, 2018).

The most important reasons leading us to choose this specific topic were various. First of all, our academic journey at the Department of Foreign Languages, Translation, and Interpreting of the Ionian University has fostered a deep understanding of the intricate dynamics of interpreting in crisis settings. Moreover, previous research in the field of forensic translation has also revealed common facts, such as individuals demonstrating heightened sensitivity whenever they come across issues that involve children. As a result, this finding also enhanced our need to keep exploring the relationship between the human and psychological factors of translators and interpreters. Growing up in a bilingual environment with migrant parents and grandparents provided early exposure to the nuances of informal interpreting, which later sparked an even higher interest in studying related matters. Last but not least, the fact that we participated during a previous semester in the ReTrans project (*Working with Interpreters in Refugee Transit Zones: Capacity Building and Awareness-Raising for Higher Education Contexts*) further solidified the focus of our research, providing firsthand insights into the unique obstacles interpreters encounter when working with vulnerable populations.

The arrival of a large number of refugees in Greece in the past years has created a high demand for achieving effective communication, and Greece offers a notable example of the situations in refugee transit zones, especially regarding the difficulties that interpreters encounter. For instance, inadequate specialised training, as well as the

emotional toll when they have to handle traumatic cases, are more than evident when working with vulnerable groups, such as minors. Furthermore, in this context, the phenomenon of *child brokering* has emerged, raising significant ethical concerns as regards the emotional burden placed on these children.

This thesis focuses on Greece's refugee transit zones and, more specifically, on child refugees and interpreters' communication barriers. Through the extract of important conclusions obtained from interviews that were conducted for the ReTrans project, as well as the review of related literature, the study aims to highlight the necessity for enhanced training and support systems, as well as the pivotal role of interpreters in safeguarding the rights of child refugees. In Greece, huge steps are already being noticed towards this direction, as initiatives such as the establishment of the Migration and Asylum Observatory and the Interpreter Registry mark these improvements, yet more targeted reforms are still needed to cover the significant gaps that exist and are prevalent.

1. The role of Interpreting in refugee contexts

1.1 Interpreting in humanitarian contexts

Interpreting in humanitarian contexts is fundamental to crisis response, since access to essential services hinges on effective communication. Refugee transit zones pose unique challenges, and the role of interpreters here goes beyond mere translation, as it requires a comprehensive skill set encompassing cultural mediation, emotional intelligence, and practical problem-solving abilities. Refugees in these zones often confront multifaceted legal and administrative processes which demand precise communication, which is vital for them to exercise their rights effectively (Tipton & Furmanek, 2016).

Adding to these difficulties, the humanitarian setting introduces layers of emotional, cultural and logistical complexities. Interpreters engage in linguistic mediation, address cultural divides, and manage the emotional demands inherent in such environments. They act as neutral communication facilitators, bridging the gap between refugees and vital services (Inghilleri, 2017). Nevertheless, interpreters often need to manage

challenging power dynamics, which can potentially affect their impartiality and hinder communication effectiveness.

Numerous interpreters are selected primarily for their language proficiency, although needing at the same time having been trained formally in interpreting techniques and being aware of complying with established professional standards (Biondi & Blume, 2021). This lack of formal training represents a noticeable obstacle, for instance, in cases such as asylum interviews and medical consultations, as miscommunication can have severe consequences. Furthermore, the urgent need for structured support systems and appropriate training programmes is evident, allowing the professionals to be as prepared for their responsibilities as possible.

1.2 Challenges in Refugee Interpreting

The field of interpreting in the context of refugees presents inherent challenges which transcend language barriers. It is common for interpreters to operate under and experience intense emotional stress, as they have to actively listen to and transfer traumatic stories of vulnerable populations, especially those of children. Thus, it is a matter of emotionally charged interactions, requiring both linguistic accuracy and a deep sense of empathy to convey faithfully their experiences.

The inconsistent quality of interpreting services is one of the most critical issues highlighted, leading to misinterpretations or omissions of crucial details, which may impact refugees' outcomes. In Greece, refugees speak various languages, including Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Somali, and Lingala, meaning that the linguistic variety can also intensify these issues. Authorities and NGOs may struggle to find qualified interpreters who are fluent in these languages, particularly in rarer dialects, and this can lead to delays regarding the obtainment of essential services.

Moreover, interpreters commonly experience burnout and vicarious trauma due to repeated exposure to distressing stories.^{refe} The inadequacy of emotional support intensifies these challenges, making it clear that comprehensive training programmes should focus, among others, on linguistic skills, emotional resilience, and cultural sensitivity (Baistow, 2015).

1.3 Child Brokering and its implications

In refugee settings, the prevalence of child brokering has become increasingly common, arising usually from the rapid acquisition of the host country's language by children, who serve as de facto informal interpreters. Despite the fact that this practice may fulfil immediate communication needs, it imposes burdens on children, who now have to embrace adult roles and handle tasks that are typically beyond their cognitive and emotional capacities (Orellana, 2009). These circumstances blur traditional family roles, as these minors are called to face substantial duties.

Child brokering can be considerably associated with long-term psychological effects, such as increased stress levels, exposure to traumatic content, and emotional strain, all being able to impact children's mental health and development negatively (Al-Ali & Koser, 2020). Children who are tasked with interpreting duties may encounter heightened anxiety, mainly in cases of complex situations. Serious concerns regarding the appropriateness of placing vulnerable minors in these kinds of roles are being emphasised, raising ethical dimensions.

The significance of child brokering within the refugee crisis is evident, especially in settings like camp clinics and administrative proceedings where the presence of professional interpreters is limited (Tibi et al., 2020). However, the reliance on children to get involved in high-stakes environments jeopardises communication integrity (Orellana, 2009).

Targeted efforts to tackle the issue of child brokering must concentrate on ensuring that professional interpreters are available in any necessary situation. It might be a temporary solution to addressing communication barriers, but it risks placing children in unsuitable roles for which they are neither trained nor equipped. Cooperation among service providers, NGOs, and authorities is vital to mitigate interpreter shortages and reduce dependence on children as intermediaries, thereby safeguarding vulnerable minors from potential lasting psychological effects, as well as ethical dilemmas.

1.4 Interpreting services in Greece's Refugee Transit Zones: Challenges and initiatives

Since the onset of the refugee crisis in 2015, Greece has been at the epicentre of it, acting as a crucial entry point for refugees who are fleeing conflicts in regions such as Syria and Afghanistan. This resulting wave of arrivals has managed to place immense pressure on the country's infrastructure, particularly within refugee camps and transit zones. In these circumstances, interpreting services are essential for facilitating access to vital resources, including medical treatment, psychological support, and legal aid.

The rising demand for interpreters reveals one significant factor, namely the limitations of the current system, as many interpreters who work in Greece are refugees themselves and have been recruited for their language skills, yet they lack formal training, particularly in languages such as Pashto, Dari, Somali, and Amharic, which are not covered by Greek educational institutions (Vrachimi-Skouteris, 2019; Tipton, 2017). This reliance on inadequately trained interpreters often tends to result in inconsistent service quality, especially during critical interactions where the consequences of inaccuracies can be profound.

Organisations such as METAdrasi have become instrumental in filling these gaps. They have achieved to establish a network of interpreters across refugee camps and public institutions. Although METAdrasi has made significant progress in providing training and support to interpreters, issues regarding their availability and quality still remain. The Greek government has introduced several initiatives to enhance the professionalism of interpreting services, including the 'Migration and Asylum Observatory' and the 'Interpreter Registry' (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2024). Their goal is to centralise the recruitment process of interpreters, strengthen the measures related to quality control, and ensure that they meet the requisite standards for working with vulnerable populations. Despite these initiatives, many interpreters require additional support, particularly in rural or hard-to-reach areas, where the reliance on remote interpreting continues to increase.

Despite the fact that remote interpreting can serve as a practical solution for logistical challenges, it also presents further obstacles. Technical difficulties, including unreliable

internet connections and the impersonal nature of remote communication, can impede effective interactions, especially in sensitive situations where building trust is paramount (Kyriakopoulou, 2022). Vulnerable groups, especially children, may struggle to cooperate and engage fully with remote interpreters, thus highlighting the necessity for improved infrastructure and training to ensure that remote interpretation is a more viable, as well as an effective alternative.

The persistent prevalence of the phenomenon of child brokering in Greece also emphasises the need for systemic reforms in the availability and quality of the services interpreters should provide. Subsequently, focused investments in interpreter recruitment, training programmes, and emotional support systems are required in order to create a sustainable and effective interpreting service that adequately meets the needs of refugees, particularly children.

2. Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research methodology is applied to explore the role of interpreters in refugee transit zones in Greece, mainly concentrating on the challenges they face and the strategies needed to improve their performance when working with vulnerable groups, in our case, with children. The qualitative approach provides an in-depth understanding of personal experiences and systemic issues, offering a valuable and thorough exploration of the challenges interpreters navigate in high-pressure humanitarian contexts.

This research used and collected primary data through semi-structured interviews, which were conducted as part of the ReTrans project (*Working with Interpreters in Refugee Transit Zones: Capacity Building and Awareness-Raising for Higher Education Contexts*). The interviews we chose to focus on and used as material for our current thesis were conducted with a professional interpreter, three NGO representatives, and a government consultant, all of whom have considerable experience in managing or delivering interpreting services in Greece's refugee transit zones. Conducted between October and November 2022, they allow participants to share their firsthand insights into the challenges and complexities of interpreting in refugee contexts. The selection of participants was intentionally based on their direct

involvement in refugee services, providing an in-depth view of interpreters' unique obstacles, including training, emotional resilience, child brokering, and logistical challenges.

Implementing a semi-structured interview approach provided a framework that allowed the integration of structured questions and open-ended exploration, enabling participants to express their experiences and focus on relevant research themes. This methodological approach was essential for obtaining rich qualitative data, contributing thus to a thorough understanding of the challenges faced by interpreters from multiple perspectives within the refugee system.

Moreover, the collection of secondary data was facilitated by a review of existing academic literature, reports from international organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and publications from NGOs like METAdrasi. The literature review provided a broader context for understanding the specific challenges faced by interpreters in Greece, positioning the study's findings within the established broader landscape of interpreting in humanitarian settings. In addition, the review facilitated the identification of critical gaps in current policies and practices, helping us guide the recommendations of this study.

For the analysis of both the interview transcripts and the literature review data, thematic analysis was adopted, allowing us to identify recurring themes and patterns across the different data sources, thus providing a structured framework to explore the principal challenges faced by interpreters in refugee settings. This method highlighted the interrelated nature of issues such as emotional resilience, cultural sensitivity, and child brokering while also enabling a comparison of the specific experiences of interpreters in Greece with those in the broader international context, revealing both unique challenges and shared characteristics.

Regardless of the rich insights that were gained from the qualitative methodology concerning interpreters' challenges, there are certain limitations that must be acknowledged. Since the study's focus emphasised on Greece and its refugee transit zones, this means that it might not be possible to associate the findings with other contexts. In addition, despite time and resource constraints, the integration of both

primary and secondary data underlined important issues, such as cultural sensitivity, emotional resilience, and specialised training. In summary, the methodological approach that was adopted for this research permitted a detailed exploration of the multifaceted nature of interpreting in refugee contexts. The combination of firsthand insights and the review of existing literature contributed to a comprehensive understanding of interpreters' challenges, as well as essential transformations needed to assist and support them in their pivotal roles.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Background of the interviews and the ReTrans project

The ReTrans project (*Working with Interpreters in Refugee Transit Zones: Capacity Building and Awareness-Raising for Higher Education Contexts*), an EU-funded (Erasmus+) initiative, was developed with the aim to enhance the training and awareness regarding interpreters in humanitarian and transborder migration contexts. The project addresses the specific needs of interpreters working in these susceptible and challenging environments and has been instrumental in influencing the current thesis by granting access to the opinions of key stakeholders involved in interpreting services and refugee management.

The interviews mentioned above used for our present paper were conducted between October and November 2022 and included five participants in total, namely three NGO representatives, one government consultant, and one professional interpreter, each with significant experience obtained from working in Greece's refugee transit zones. They were selected precisely for this reason, meaning their direct involvement in refugee services in Greece and their ability to provide insights into recognising current gaps and areas that need to be improved.

The interviews were semi-structured, as already mentioned, and the interviewees' diverse backgrounds and experiences contributed to a multifaceted view of the interpreting landscape in Greece. NGO representatives highlighted the day-to-day logistical and operational challenges of interpreter deployment across various settings, and the government consultant addressed current policies and initiatives to support

interpreters, while the interpreter's perspective added depth to understanding the psychological demands and ethical issues involved in this role.

A primary theme arising from the interviews was the importance of emotional resilience, cultural sensitivity, and empathy when working in high-stress environments. As one interviewee explained, emotional resilience is critical when *facing unknown situations*, adding that interpreters need *calmness* and *humanity* to handle the extreme circumstances they often encounter in refugee settings.

The interviews focused overall on several core matters, including the recruitment and training of interpreters, the challenges interpreters face when working with children, particularly in emotionally charged interactions, and the phenomenon of child brokering, where children act as informal interpreters in the absence of professional services. Another key theme mentioned was the reliance on remote interpreting services, which poses unique challenges as regards the maintenance of communication quality.

3.2 Interviewees' background and perspectives

The participants' personal narratives connected the theoretical frameworks with the practical application, emphasising the need for reforms to improve interpreting services in Greece's refugee transit zones. Each interviewee brought forward unique insights that collectively formed a comprehensive picture of the current state and conditions.

Mr. Efstratios Balomas, an NGO representative from METAdrasi, who holds the position of field officer in non-formal education, is tasked with ensuring the availability of interpreters and addressing the difficulties related to recruiting and training in the framework of educational contexts. He focused on the logistical challenges, including, especially in rural areas, also pointing out that finding interpreters for rarer languages and dialects can often be challenging, leading to directly having an impact on the consistency and quality of the available interpreting services offered to refugees.

Mrs Claire Pavlaki is a consultant for the Greek Ministry of Migration & Asylum. She elaborated on the governmental efforts and initiatives to enhance the professional

standards of interpreting services, emphasising the importance of comprehensive policies to ensure that interpreters receive adequate training and ongoing support. Her insights on remote interpreting were invaluable, discussing, among others, the shortages of trained interpreters and the challenges of providing consistent services across various regions in Greece.

In addition, two representatives from METAdrasi mentioned the organisation's commitment to interpreter training and challenges related to the informal practice of child brokering, emphasising practical challenges and the psychological toll on interpreters as well. Lastly, Mrs Kyriakopoulou, a professional interpreter, shared her firsthand perspectives as regards interpreter's everyday challenges, especially in refugee settings, highlighting the importance of developing support mechanisms while reflecting on her personal experiences.

Thus, all viewpoints revealed vital areas needing improvement, including specialised training and better support systems, helping us shape the recommendations outlined in our study and highlighting the need for reforms in order to improve the interpreting services available and provided for refugees in Greece.

3.3 The role of interpreters in Refugee Transit Zones

Interpreters play a massive role in refugee transit zones, since they are responsible for bridging linguistic and cultural gaps between refugees and service providers. It is not only about mere translation but about encompassing cultural mediation and emotional support as well, particularly when working and dealing with vulnerable persons, such as unaccompanied minors. Having access to vital services, such as legal, medical and psychological assistance is facilitated by interpreters who work under immense pressure in such environments.

Moreover, one aspect also revealed through the interviews is the fact that cultural sensitivity is crucial in these kinds of interactions. As one interviewee noted, *cultural aspects play a huge role [...] the interpreter must also know some things about the religion, habits, and customs of the person called upon to interpret*, reinforcing the notion that cultural competence is as important as linguistic competence.

When engaging with traumatised populations, particularly children or even unaccompanied minors, whose experiences often intensify the psychological demands, interpreters encounter profound emotional challenges, as revealed by one interviewee: *I have not happened to interpret children, and to be honest, I do not know if I could bear it, now that I think about it.* This admission highlights the emotional toll that interpreters may face as they must convey emotionally charged communications. The pressure to remain neutral and professional in these situations compounds the emotional burden they are called to carry (Inghilleri, 2017).

3.4 Challenges in Refugee Interpreting

The challenges interpreters face in refugee transit zones are numerous and encompass emotional, logistical, and systemic dimensions. These challenges are most evident when dealing with minors, who might struggle to express their own story and experiences, further complicating the interpreters' role. A foremost issue is the inconsistent quality of interpreting services, which is often a result stemming from the recruitment of interpreters who have received limited or non formal training. Interpreters in Greek refugee camps are frequently selected based solely on their language skills, leading to communication breakdowns, especially during high-stakes situations, for instance, during asylum interviews or medical consultations.

A recurring issue that was raised in the interviews refers to the scarcity of interpreters who are specifically trained to work in such environments, mainly with children, as well as the shortage of female interpreters. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that child brokering imposes significant pressure on children, especially on an emotional level, while affecting the information's accuracy. Ethical concerns have also been mentioned, stressing the need for reforms in order to limit or eliminate the reliance on children to act as interpreters. It is worth mentioning that an NGO representative noted in one of the interviews that *it [child brokering] has happened many times. Mostly teenage students, who have a better level of English, take on the task of interpreting, but for straightforward things*, highlighting the phenomenon of "child brokering", where minors, often bilingual or multilingual, take on the role of informal interpreters for their parents or other adults. This practice pushes children into adult roles that exceed their emotional and cognitive capacity (Orellana, 2009), blurring the boundaries

between parents and children. The shortage of professional interpreters in Greece may compound the issue, turning child brokering into a prevalent phenomenon.

According to an NGO representative, the following statement: *I consider it very important that the NGO educates the interpreters on child protection. That should be mandatory for everyone who comes into contact with children*, reinforces the importance of educating interpreters on child protection as well, as interpreters must be aware of the ethical and psychological challenges involved. According to an NGO representative [...] *at the beginning of the refugee and migration crisis, I can assure you that there was a difficulty in finding interpreters. Even then, because people who spoke specific languages were urgently needed, they were not hired as interpreters or translators. They were hired as cultural mediators, who, in addition to the duty, the task of interpreting, also had the task of helping people, other colleagues understand a little about the cultural background of the people they came into contact with*, underscoring the initial gap and how exactly organisations use(d) to employ cultural mediators instead of qualified interpreters. This observation reflects the broader challenge of addressing the lack of formally trained interpreters in refugee contexts, and even more so when working with children.

Remote interpreting has also become increasingly prevalent, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, it does offer flexibility, yet remote interpreting services have several limitations on the other hand, including poor internet connectivity, background noise, as well as the impersonal nature of the interactions, hindering the quality of interpretation. Often facilitated through digital platforms, phone or video calls, it offers a temporary solution to interpreter shortages, allowing for greater adaptability in emergent situations. The interviews also noted that while remote interpreting has benefits, it should not replace face-to-face interaction, especially in emotionally charged situations involving vulnerable individuals, like children, as they might struggle to trust someone or fully engage in these settings. The absence of personal contact can limit the interpreter's ability to understand non-verbal cues, which is critical for effective communication.

The interviews revealed various potential solutions; the most prominent and repeated one is the need for enhanced training programmes that include cultural sensitivity, emotional resilience, and child protection. The interviewees also highlighted the importance of gender balance in interpreter recruitment, particularly in situations involving female refugees and children. Last but not least, child brokering, though sometimes inevitable, must not be considered a default solution. Instead, investments in interpreter recruitment, training, and technological support for remote interpreting services are crucial for the quality improvement and accessibility of interpretation in refugee contexts.

3.5 Comparative analysis: Greece vs. other contexts

The challenges and obstacles that interpreters face in Greece's refugee transit zones share similarities with those in other humanitarian contexts. Nonetheless, Greece's geographical position, serving as a primary entry point for refugees into Europe, exacerbates these difficulties. Greece's interpreter infrastructure remains underdeveloped, mainly due to the overwhelming influx of refugees since 2015, whereas countries like Germany, Sweden, Canada, and Australia have more established asylum systems and significantly invested in interpreter training programmes, which focus on cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed approaches.

The issue of child brokering, although present in refugee contexts worldwide, is particularly acute in Greece due to a lack of trained interpreters. In comparison, countries like Canada and Australia have implemented robust interpreter training and certification frameworks, emphasising the importance of trauma-informed care and emotional resilience, ensuring that interpreters are well-prepared to work with vulnerable groups.

Countries like Sweden and Canada have also established more advanced technological infrastructures aiming to facilitate remote interpreting services. In contrast, Greece encounters challenges that are related to inconsistent internet connectivity and a lack of training for interpreters in remote settings. The challenge of using remote interpreting services in sensitive situations is evident, as highlighted by the government consultant:

It is difficult for a minor, especially in a precarious situation, who may have experienced trauma or abuse, to feel comfortable talking and opening up over the phone. Greece still needs to invest in aligning with international best practices, training, and technological infrastructure.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study has highlighted the diverse challenges that interpreters face in refugee transit zones, especially within the Greek context, while emphasising their critical role in bridging communication divides and protecting the well-being of child refugees. A major finding is the current system's gaps in training, emotional support, policy development, and service consistency. Although notable and meaningful improvements in some sectors, more efforts are needed to ensure that interpreters are adequately equipped to address the refugees' needs, regardless of age, in high-pressure situations.

Moreover, interpreters' role in bridging the gap between refugees and the services they need is essential, but it can be quickly overshadowed by numerous challenges, including limited training, cultural complexities, and emotional strain. The inconsistency in the quality of interpreting services intensifies these challenges, as does the high demand for interpreters fluent in rarer dialects and the reliance on child brokering, functioning as an informal solution for interpretation needs. Tackling the related challenges necessitates a coordinated effort from governments, NGOs, and international bodies to implement changes that improve the quality and protect both the rights and the welfare of refugees.

It is also imperative to start investing more in technological infrastructure to address the increasing reliance on remote interpreting, prioritising, for example, the focus on providing stable internet connections, ensuring privacy during interpreting sessions, and offering training to help interpreters navigate remote environments effectively. Providing interpreters with the tools and skills necessary to maintain high service standards even under challenging conditions can significantly enhance the quality of remote interpreting.

In addition, one of the most significant factors, if not the most significant, is the psychological one. It is essential to establish psychological support mechanisms for

interpreters to help them cope with the emotional toll and the pressure they experience while working in such humanitarian contexts. Access to counselling services, support groups, and regular debriefing sessions can alleviate the stress associated with this demanding work. Once they are provided with the means to manage their emotional health, it will be easier for them to maintain the appropriate quality of interpreting services that must be delivered to refugees.

The effective cooperation of governmental bodies, NGOs, international organisations, and educational institutions is another vital aspect for addressing interpreters' challenges in the concerned zones. Thus, additional effective training programmes can be created, support systems developed, and joint financial and other efforts can, in addition, lead to comprehensive policies ensuring that interpreters are well-supported and their work adheres to international standards.

Furthermore, a strategic long-term approach is necessary to confront the challenges interpreters face, including immediate measures, such as expanded training and support services, sustainable initiatives promoting continuous professional development, regular assessments of interpreting services, and adaptability to evolving needs within the refugee context. As Ioannidis (2016) mentions in his doctoral dissertation, ongoing education is a crucial professional obligation for interpreters to maintain and improve their skills. This strategy will foster a resilient system that will be capable of effectively responding to future crises and ensuring the ongoing enhancement of interpreting services.

A robust and diverse skill set is required for effective interpreting in humanitarian settings. According to Darwish (2012), an ideal professional linguist should possess linguistic proficiency, discourse analysis skills, intercultural competence, communicative ability, and strong translation skills. These competencies align closely with the demands of interpreters working with refugees, where cultural and linguistic knowledge must be nuanced. Vlachopoulos (2014) further emphasises the need for interpreters to understand specialised terminologies and ensure accurate cross-cultural communication. This aspect is specifically relevant in the refugee context since interpreters must overcome linguistic barriers and cultural and legal complexities. In summary, to effectively address these challenges, a multifaceted strategy must be

followed that will include policy reform, investment in training and infrastructure, and increased cooperation among all stakeholders involved in refugee services. In this way, Greece will be in a favourable position of being able to strengthen its interpreting services, protect populations in need, and foster a human response to the ongoing crisis.

APPENDIX

1.

00:00-02:10

Good evening. My name is Eirini and I am a fourth-year student at the Department of Foreign Languages, Translation and Interpreting of the Ionian University. My university participates in the ReTrans program, which is implemented with the support of European Union's Erasmus+ program. Some words about the program: It aims to raise awareness among higher education institutions about interpreting in the field of cross-border migration and to create innovative teaching materials for training qualified interpreters. At the same time, the interpretation needs will be identified, as well as any problems. In addition to the Ionian University, universities from Austria, Slovenia and the Republic of North Macedonia also participate in the program. This interview will take approximately 15 minutes and parts of it may be used to create training material in either podcast or vodcast format. Due to your experience on working with refugees and migrants, your participation in the process would be valuable to us. Before we start, I would like to ask you to state that you have taken note of the data protection documents' content and you know that your personal data may be used by the university exclusively for the purposes of the ReTrans program, through video recording. Also, I would like to inform you that, if you wish, the university has the possibility to alter your voice and/or image. I am at your disposal for any clarification and thank you in advance for your time. So, let's get started. First of all, I would like you to tell me a little about yourself. Which agency do you work for and in which position?

02:11-03:10

Alright. Well, I have been working at the refugee camp in Lesvos since 2015. I have seven years of experience in population mobility, and I first started when the migration and refugee crisis in Greece was just beginning. I am currently working in non-formal education as a field officer for an NGO (METAdrasi). I have been working there for the last four years. We offer support courses in Greek, English and mathematics to refugee or migrant children or asylum seekers in general, either as remedial teaching, if these children are registered in public school, or we prepare them to enroll in public school.

03:11-03:16

Are there any adults in this program or do you educate only children?

03:17-04:16

Adults were added last year. It's a different program and it's mostly about integration. We only provide them with Greek lessons and when they build a certain level in the Greek language, they are also provided with prevocational training on a weekly basis, which helps them acquire some skills such as how to look for a job, where to look for a job, how to make their curriculum vitae. So, if they move from the first point of integration, which is Mytilini or some other Aegean island, to the mainland or abroad, they have some basic skills to be able to start their...professional journey.

04:17-04:22

Your work is really important. Does your service work with interpreters?

04:23-05:00

The organization I work for has a very important interpretation department, perhaps one of the first...no. It is one of the first departments created in this NGO. However, the specific program in which I work, the educational one, does not offer its own interpretation services, which means that for any action we need, we request interpreters on a daily and weekly basis, so that a specific schedule for their tasks comes out.

05:01-05:07

You mentioned that you request interpreters. Who provides you with interpreting services? How do you find...

05:08-05:38

The same organization. The same organization does. The NGO itself has an interpreting department. However, since there are no interpreter positions in the education budget, we apply for interpreters internally through the organization and, based on the week's schedule, they try to cover our needs.

05:39-05:45

Do you know if there has ever been any difficulty concerning the recruitment of interpreters?

05:46-06:48

I don't know about the current organization, but because I have been human resources manager in the past, at the beginning of the refugee and migration crisis, I can assure you that there was a difficulty in finding interpreters. Even then, because people who spoke certain languages were urgently needed, they were not hired as interpreters or translators. They were hired as cultural mediators, who in addition to the duty, the task of interpreting, they also had the task to help people, the other colleagues, to understand a little about the cultural background of the people they came into contact with.

06:49-06:56

Do you know if the interpreters you worked with in the past had any training in interpreting?

06:57-07:33

I can't be absolutely sure. I can only say that the majority of them have no training in interpreting. They have not studied at any university. They most likely speak their mother tongue and, because at some point in their lives they were also beneficiaries and have now been assimilated into Greek society and not only - also from other Western countries, they came to work in this field from 2015 until today. But the majority certainly have not received university education, yes.

07:34-07:42

Nor any seminar, any other educational program offered by the NGO you work for?

07:43-08:12

Yes, this particular NGO provides a seminar which comes out every... I think two or three times a year. After this course there are some exams and if someone has passed the exam, they can be given further training and, obviously, a job.

08:13-08:26

In the event that an interpreter or cultural mediator cannot be found, do the children take on the role of interpreter to help their parents? Has anything similar happened?

08:27-09:00

It has happened many times. Mostly teenage students, who have a better level of English, take on the task of interpreting, but for very simple things. Things that the teachers, who are qualified and have received university education, consider and judge can be communicated through the child to the parent, as no important part will be lost in interpretation.

09:01-09:07

How do you deal with minors who do not speak the language? Do they first have to learn the language?

09:08-09:45

Many of the children do not speak Greek at all, so the teachers now have excellent experience in teaching Greek as a second language. They start with phonics to teach the alphabet. After that, we try to teach them Survival Greek, something very important so they can interact in their daily lives either inside or outside the refugee camp and at the same time help their parents, until they go to the public school. From there on we provide them with remedial teaching based on the public school syllabus.

09:46-09:57

I see. What qualifications do you think interpreters should have in order to communicate with refugees and migrants, especially when it comes to minors?

09:58-10:46

First of all, I consider it very important that the NGO educates the interpreters on child protection. In my opinion, that should be mandatory for everyone who comes into contact with children. Apart from that, the interpreter, whether he is in contact with children or not, should know where the interpretation part stops and not take initiatives that do not come from the person who needs the interpretation. That is, if I want to talk to a parent, the interpreter should interpret exactly what I say, without adding or omitting something, or assuming what I meant.

10:47-11:04

Based on your answer, I would like to ask you: Are the interpreters available to you generally objective or do they show bias in favor of one side, specifically in this case the side of children, as they are a particularly sensitive group?

11:05-11:49

No such thing has come to my attention. However, because we are talking about a school and indeed we are talking about children, many times the interpreters do not have an exact picture of what...what goes on in a school. Thinking that these interpreters might be having asylum interviews during the day or might be working at the UN High Commission for various bureaucratic matters, school is just an interesting change of routine. So yeah, no such thing has come to my attention, to be honest.

11:50-12:00

What are the problems you usually face with interpreters, either in the classroom or in general?

12:01-13:19

Because the population we deal with speaks more than one language, there are times when there are meetings of either parents or meetings with the community in general and the interpreters may only speak Greek or just English, which means we spend too much time in interpreting. Because at one time we translate into...we speak in Greek then we speak in English, time is given to simultaneously interpret (consecutive interpreting) and in all languages. So, you know, that can be a bit disorganizing also for the one who actually speaks and manages the discussion. Also, I would personally say that finding an interpreter is not always very easy, because he is occupied with tasks which may many times be considered much more important than non-formal education.

13:20-13:42

You highlighted that communication is very important. Was there ever a case where the communication was not effective due to some linguistic inability, not of the refugee but of the interpreter, i.e. not having sufficient knowledge of the refugee's language or Greek, thus an issue surfaced?

13:43-14:30

It hasn't happened to me because in the organization I work for, as I mentioned, interpreters go through a diagnostic test before they take up duties. However, I can tell you that there are difficulties when interpreting is not done in person but remotely over the phone. Many times, because the refugee camp is not, let's say, the best working environment, interpreting via call may not work because there is no signal, because it's too windy, or let's say, it cannot be done via internet because there are constant power outages, or the WiFi connection is unstable, and this all creates difficulty in the process of teaching.

14:31-14:47

Do you use remote interpreting services often?

14:48-15:14

Almost daily. Mainly over the phone and rarely via Skype, and this because it can be something very trivial, i.e. we want to communicate with the child about something, so there is no need for the interpreter to come in person, because he will have to travel a distance inside the camp. If it's something insignificant, which can be done over the phone, that's how we do it. Otherwise, there is also on-site interpreting, but as I said, it is a little more difficult to have those services.

15:15-15:32

Now I would like to ask you: Are there any religious, moral, cultural or gender issues that affect language communication? That is, should girls prefer female interpreters or should boys prefer male interpreters?

15:33-15:59

No, we haven't encountered any. It's never happened in all these years, and it's been a long time, so my years of work can be an objective factor. This has not happened at all, neither from the children's side, nor from the interpreters' showing, let's say, favoritism towards boys or girls according to their gender.

16:00-16:10

So, in general you would say that the interpreters are not biased in favor of any side either in favor of the refugees or in favor of the Greek authorities.

16:11-16:41

As for the Greek authorities, I cannot know because, as I mentioned, we are exclusively involved in education, so we have no contact with other fields. But no, we haven't faced any religious, racial, or gender issues of any...kind, however it's called.

16:42-16:55

Finally, I would like you to tell me what your suggestions would be for improving the interpreter-mediated interaction with refugees/migrants?

16:56-18:27

Alright. First of all, I would like to mention that many NGOs, which are not Greek but mainly from the Netherlands, use several beneficiaries to interpret and this often does some harm to the beneficiaries themselves, because they often employ the so-called adolescent group, that is 16 to 18-year-old adolescents, with the result that these children have a lack of education. Because these organizations, in all likelihood, together with the voluntary work experience, which they offer, may also give out things to people, let's say jackets, raincoats, or even some coupons, which they can redeem in some supermarkets. So, I judge that, in addition to pulling these children out of school, intentionally or not, these children also have some expectations that, leaving the camp they can work as an interpreter or something similar. So, it's something that I'd like to point out and we've seen it happen over the years, those of us who work in the field. In terms of your question, I'd like you to repeat it for me if you could.

18:28-18:41

Yes, of course. What would be your suggestions for improving the interpreter-mediated interaction with refugees/migrants?

18:42-20:32

I think the interpreters should be university-educated, if you ask me, because they might at the moment be, let's say "lucky" enough to speak these languages we need, however we understand quite often, not with all interpreters, but anyway with a majority of them, that they fall behind in some areas in terms of professionalism or the interventions they

may make. So, I consider this very important. All... all my colleagues have at least a bachelor's degree and most of them a master's degree, and the interpreters do not have any degree. One seminar is not enough to learn, to practice this profession, and in a daily life of many years you come to realize that somehow these colleagues lag behind. They lag behind and I don't say that in a negative way, I say it as a colleague. There's that, and I would also say that I would like to see more female interpreters. Not that it doesn't happen. I realize it's a tough job, I'm just pretty sure, again, that the majority in these positions are men.

20:33-20:40

Very interesting. Those were my questions. Thank you very much for your contribution.

20:41-20:42

Thank you.

20:42-20:55

It is important for the university and the program that we also have your consent in writing. So after our video call ends, I'll send you the data protection documents.

20:56-21:37

Alright. I should say that I would like my voice and possibly my image too to be altered. I think that the interview was, you know, extremely interesting, because we have never been asked about matters related to interpretation, and interpretation is of great importance in the part of our daily life all these years. Because everyone talks about the refugee issue, but we have never been asked about issues of this kind, I was particularly interested.

21:38-21:39

We'd like to thank you too.

21:40-21:41

Have a good day.

21:41-21:46

That's what we want to achieve. We try to identify problems in order to cause changes in the field. Have a good day.

21:47-21:48

Thank you very much.

21:49-21:54

Thank you too.

2.

02:36 - 02:43

Could you talk to us about your professional status and the institution you work for?

02:45 - 03:30

I am currently working at the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum in the service that deals with unaccompanied minors, that is, the Service for the protection of unaccompanied minors. I am an advisor to the Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors. That is the purpose of this meeting. In the past I have worked in the field for several years, I have worked with interpreters. In particular, there is no direct use of interpreters in our Service at the moment because it is not a Service aimed at the public. However, background and general knowledge of the context can help.

03:31 - 03:42

Is your service adequately prepared to provide interpretation services to refugees and migrants?

03:44 - 04:23

Our Service does not provide interpretation itself at the moment. Through its cooperation with other bodies, it can provide interpretation and is ready to provide it when needed. Also, through a 24-hour telephone line that we have, we cooperate with other bodies that provide interpretation. Our Service is under the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum. Thus, programmatic contracts or any tender comes down to one contractor. That contractor will cover the ministry and its services as a whole.

04:26 - 04:44

You talked about the partnerships and projects you coordinate. Through these programmes do you only hire certified interpreters to communicate with refugees and migrants?

04:45 - 04:51

Can you clarify what you mean by certified interpreters. Certified from which body?

04:52 - 05:01

By certified I mean people who have got a degree, who have received a university education and have attended seminars on interpretation.

05:02 - 05:12

When you say university educated, do you mean graduates of the Ionian University, another university or any university specializing in interpreting?

05:13 - 05:15

I mean a university that specializes in interpreting.

05:17 - 07:10

The majority of interpreters currently in the field and in civil society organizations are certainly not graduates of the Ionian University. A very small proportion of these interpreters are Ionian graduates and they cover French. There are only a few cases. First of all, it should be said that the population we serve, and the refugee population speaks languages that graduates of the schools in Greece at least do not cover. Farsi, Dari, Somali Urdu. So, we are talking about different languages that are not covered by universities in Greece. If we are talking about general seminars, one institution that provides certification in a wide range of seminars is METAdrasi. However, METAdrasi is not an educational institution, it is a civil society organization and has a very large number of people who do interpretation. The Ministry of Immigration and Asylum has until recently had cooperation with METAdrasi. I used to work for METAdrasi in the past and it does have a full course in interpreting. But I do not think it is formally among the accredited bodies. Interpreters receive certification from METAdrasi. However, METAdrasi is not a certified body by an educational institution. Beyond that, organizations have some interpreting seminars and some seminars on basic child protection and vulnerable groups. These are the seminars and the framework that is in place.

07:11 - 07:42

Right, so I understand that you work with interpreters who have some certification, for example from METAdrasi, people who have attended some seminars. But in case you don't have access to these interpreters either, can you use an interpreter who has no kind of training, for instance a person who just knows the language?

07:43 - 09:02

We in particular as the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum can only cooperate with the entity that has an open invitation to cooperate with the Ministry. Until recently we have been working with METAdrasi. Now the operator will change and we are in the transition phase. So no. As the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors we also work with our partners, who often have interpreters themselves. Some of them may have been trained in METAdrasi, some of them have received training from the agency. So the provision of the service is again not done automatically by us, it is done by the civil society organizations who have trained their staff. We don't have a contract with the worker, we have an agreement with the organization as our partner in a project. I don't know if it's clear. The employee is not directly ours. It is the organization for which we will determine whether they generally meet criteria for us to partner with. So yes to answer that, but it is a generally more complicated issue.

09:03 - 09:28

I understand it is a more complex issue, you were quite understanding and thank you for the clarification. You spoke before about some telephone services if I remember correctly. So, you may be working with a program or entity that offers either telephone or online interpretation services?

09:29 - 09:36

What do you mean online, through a call with the Teams program or through Zoom?

09:37

Yes, exactly!

09:38 - 10:31

No, we don't use an online program, what is in place is a national tracking mechanism where any minor citizen and generally any person who identifies a child or the child can call us and request housing. That is children who are homeless. In these cases, again, METAdrasi covers the interpretation but it may need to be covered by the agency that locates the child. So, in that case, interpretation can be done either in person because we will locate the child and go and pick them up from where they are to take

them to a safe setting or interpretation can be done over the phone. METAdrasi has the right equipment to answer your previous question.

10:32 - 10:56

Thank you very much for this addition. With regard to telephone interpretation, do you think it ensures the best possible outcome to meet the needs and requests of minor refugees? Are there any technical difficulties that may hinder this communication?

10:57 - 11:55

Sure, first of all, it is very difficult for a minor, especially in a precarious circumstance, who may have been abused, who is a vulnerable case to talk and open up on the phone. So certainly in addition to the technical difficulties that there may be some noise in the conversation at some point, the interpreter may not be in a stable place. We usually ensure with those circumstances especially if we know we're going to do some action. In any case, it is very difficult for the beneficiary to do the action over the phone. It is very difficult let alone for a child who may even in person not feel comfortable and may have difficulty with the interpreter. There we have to take other parameters for gender. Whether a girl who has been abused or a man prefers the interpreter to be a woman for instance and that makes it even more difficult on the phone.

11:56 - 12:31

Right, you talked about the parameters that you take. Depending on the situation of the person you are addressing you can also let the interpreter know in advance how they will handle a case. Perhaps the interpreter receives some psychological support to get in touch with these people who have experienced very difficult circumstances?

12:32 - 15:23

Okay, the second question was the parameters if I understand correctly and the update. It is not always possible to inform in advance because we cannot always know how the person next to us will open up. So if we are talking about a situation of receiving a minor, we may not know that ourselves. If we do know and we are going to do a planned action with the child, then yes, we will inform the interpreter shortly because of the confidentiality issues, with what concerns them about the interpretation. Because especially with unaccompanied minors it is very sensitive data that we handle. So in

this case, whatever information is helpful for the interpretation, for example, if the child comes from a village in Afghanistan and speaks with a very heavy accent, we can say so that the interpreter can take into account whether he or she can respond. That is the case if we know about the action, and it is already planned. But that is not always easy in our field in the sense that it can be very immediate actions that need to be taken. If the child is in distress there is not always time. Or also if we know it is a very vulnerable situation, we can ask the child to tell us which interpreter they feel comfortable with to do the action, that is whether it will be a man or a woman not a particular person. So, if she is a girl and it is something very sensitive, we can ask her. This also applies to asylum and asylum interviews. The person is asked if they agree or even if they want to. That is the first part. As far as supervision is concerned, that is the responsibility of the body that has the interpreters. Because we, as I mentioned, do not have a contract with the interpreters, we are now in a transitional phase. We will subsequently have an agreement with a company as the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum, but we are not taking care of that. If you ask me personally, I don't know if it makes sense, it should. But again, from my experience I will say that interpreters should be in the supervision of a team and not individually as interpreters. What do I mean? We have centers for unaccompanied minors that we supervise where there are interpreters. Interpreters should not be supervising separately from the team of staff as a whole. Because this is also something that arises in our sector. You may have heard this in other interviews. It should be part of the team and not isolated to something different.

15:24 - 16:22

Right, you emphasize the importance of cooperation, of foresight, of preparation often in a short period of time because we understand that circumstances do not always allow for interpreters to act very early because they do not know the case they may face. In the case of refugees and migrants, there are incidents that take place from one moment to the next. You mentioned some rare languages such as Farsi, Urdu. When you have these cases and you have to meet with children who speak these languages do you get in touch with interpreters who speak these languages or do you often not find interpreters who speak these languages?

16:23 - 17:55

I would like to clarify that these languages are not rare in our population. Of the two and a half thousand unaccompanied children we have, maybe 50% speak Farsi. For our population these languages are not rare, they are the languages we work with. For example, Farsi, Urdu and Arabic. For us more rare languages are Somali. But for us more rare languages might be English and French. Because of the African countries we also have French-speaking children. That's why when we talk about interpreters and that's why I told you from the beginning about the certification from the university, we are talking about interpreters who are probably not Greek, they will be third country nationals. There are times depending on the period when we may have fewer interpreters in some languages and some languages scarcer like some dialects of Africa. It may be Legala, Tigrinya, Abara. All these may be rarer to have an interpreter who is accredited as you mentioned and trained and who is a Greek speaker. Usually these are English-speaking interpreters, but these are the languages we work with.

17:56- 18:42

You said that there are some people from the same refugee and migrant community who do the interpreting because sometimes there is no interpreter who knows the language. When this happens have you noticed if there is any problem during the interpretation, are the requests of the refugees being met or sometimes problems arise because there is no person to control this communication because they do not know the language?

18:43 - 20:40

When I say community members, I don't mean that those living in a refugee facility are officially interpreting for others. They are third-country nationals who work for an institution and take on this task. Now whether the practice you mention is being done atypically is another matter. Our Service cooperates with employees who have received a form of seminar training, but it is not informal interpreting. For example, if someone knows Urdu, I stop him and do an action with a child. This is a practice that is good not to exist. It can arise. I will not say it has never arisen in the field, but it is something informal and it is not considered interpreting that is a facilitation. Certainly, very few practitioners know Arabic, Farsi so they understand what is being done and what is being translated. It is a fact of course that after working in the field for a while one can tell when an interpreter is responding to what is being said and by the reaction of the person being acted upon and by the length of what is being said. For example, the

duration of what he says can be translated and take a minute, it can take two minutes while I have spoken for ten seconds. You can sense when the interpreter is intervening and usually the goal is to train professionals to work with interpreters.

20:41 - 21:05

That is our goal and we are very glad that you understand it too. In this regard, I would like to ask you whether you are being offered funds for the recruitment and training of interpreters to improve the conditions for the provision of interpretation.

21:06

By this question do you mean the funds offered by the Greek state?

21:08

Exactly

21:10 - 21:50

There are funds from Europe and national resources for that sector. But those resources are mainly directed towards the provision of the service itself, because they are national resources. The training part is usually for the body providing the service. That is, it will make a contract with a body to provide the service, not to train it. There are small European programmes that are about training.

21:51 - 22:16

Again, we come back to the importance and the need for multi-sectoral cooperation to achieve the best possible outcome. I would like to thank you very much for this interview. Your help has been invaluable to our research.

22:17

Take care, I wish you good luck!

3.

0:01:29-0:01:40

Hello, we are OK, you have my permission, and we have no problem, you don't need to change my voice or cover my face, we are OK.

0:01:41-0:02:04

Great thank you very much. So, we can begin with the questions. Firstly, I would like to ask you: for which institution do you work and what is your job there.

0:02:04-0:02:26

Good, so for the past 3,5 years I have been working for a non-governmental organization Metadrasi, it is a Greek NGO. I began working as a teacher and at present I work as a scientific officer: we basically coordinate groups of teachers.

0:02:026-0:02:30

And were you a teacher for children or adults?

0:02:30-0:02:37

For both, mainly for children aged 6-17 years old.

0:02:37-0:02:44

And do you know if your institution works with interpreters?

0:02:44-0:03:07

My institution has a separate interpreting department, which is one of the first departments that was set up by the NGO and it has its own training program, so that we can use those interpreters either for educational purposes or for various other reasons like interviews, for the Ministry of Migration, etc.

0:03:07-0:03:11

Could you tell us how you find those interpreters?

0:03:11-0:03:52

Yes, the truth is that every year, twice a year to be precise, some training programs, some seminars take place, for which there is an open call and anyone interested can

participate in them. Some admission requirements have to do either with their linguistic proficiency in their native language and in English or in Greek. Based on the language demand some calls for some jobs are announced but for someone to get hired they have to go through a training program, where they will get trained on various matters.

0:03:52-0:04:01

Do you know if these people that are interested in that job have any previous training in interpreting?

0:04:01-0:04:26

To be honest, I have not been involved with the interpreting matters, I have just worked with many interpreters. From what I know it is not necessary. Some of them yes, have worked for other organizations, they have some previous experience, but that is not necessary. Many of them have nothing to do with interpreting or have a degree in another field.

0:04:26-0:04:34

I see. And generally, do you face any problems with their recruitment or are the processes easier thanks to this department?

0:04:34-0:05:17

The truth is that everything is much easier because they go through this training program that I think lasts for 2-3 months, but I am not 100% sure about the duration. There they have discussions and are trained on a broad spectrum. From the way they should speak, some codes of conduct, on issues of working with other organizations and institutions, the protection of their confidentiality, because, for example, we don't share their names in front of the refugees, they have some communicative codes, there is a whole background.

0:05:18-0:05:25

I see. And are there any cases where you don't have any interpreters at your disposal?

0:05:26-0:05:40

Yes, this happens quite often, at least in the field of education this is a very common phenomenon. Most of the time the asylum interviews are prioritized so interpreters are absorbed mostly there.

0:05:41-0:05:51

When you don't have any available interpreters, especially in the field of education, how do you deal with this problem?

0:05:52-0:06:35

To be honest, such cases are quite hard because very frequently either the kids or their parents don't know English at all, so communication is hard. If we are at the camp and there aren't any available interpreters at that moment, we try via telephone interpreting from our headquarters, where we might find someone and have a remote interpretation. If we still can't find a solution, we try other means like Google Translate, something like that, with a few words that we might know in their native language, a few English words that they might know and that is how we manage to communicate.

0:06:36-0:06:41

Would you say that online or telephone interpreting is of high quality?

0:06:42-0:07:19

The truth is that real-life interpreting is much better, because there is interaction at the present moment. People communicate directly with the interpreter, who does not express their own opinion but functions as a mechanism that facilitates communication. On the contrary, things get harder when working via telephone interpreting, because if there is more than one person that you have to talk with at the same moment, a communicative gap is created, you have to wait a lot, because here are the headquarters and interpreters are used, therefore, for several occasions as well, so everything is tougher. Sometimes, we might also have no signal. We can face many different problems.

0:07:20-0:07:40

You mentioned the objectivity of the interpreters and I would like to ask you specifically about the cases, where minors are involved, especially in school classes, do you think

that in those cases interpreters are objective, or do they discriminate in favor of the kids, as they are a sensitive group?

0:07:41-0:08:35

In general, I would say that they are objective. Objectivity is prescribed by the code we use and follow as an organization and is a key part of our education program that I mentioned before. And generally, interpreters are treated not as someone who expresses their own opinion but as a mechanism that facilitates communication. That is why we try not to share the interpreter's personal information or get them involved with the refugees in any other way, so that there won't be any further interconnection and at the same time we don't make their job harder. Therefore, we try to promote objectivity. Of course, we must admit that in some minor cases involving underage children, yes, there might have been a lack of impartiality in favor of them, because they might have needed something more, a bit more attention,

0:08:36-0:08:54

If supposedly there is a family with children, where the kids know English or even Greek and the parents don't and you don't have any available interpreters, do the kids take over the role of the interpreter to help their parents?

0:08:54- 0:09:22

Yes, this happens very often. This happens a lot especially in school environment for the kid's registration or the parent's briefing. It also often happens that children who do not belong to the family might take over the interpreter's role as a last resort in case they know the family's mother tongue or some English.

0:09:22-0:09:33

I see. In general, you try to make sure that unaccompanied minors always have an interpreter, as you already said, right?

0:09:033

Yes.

0:09:34-0:09:47

Based on your experience what qualifications do you think interpreters that communicate with refugees or migrants should have, when minors are involved.

0:09:47-0:10:35

Objectivity, for sure. I understand that many times this might be difficult, because we have to do with people of the same culture, who speak the same language, they might even be distant relatives, close relatives, we can't know that. However, objectivity is definitely very important, because when we discriminate in favor of someone, at that moment we understand that things get harder for everyone. In conclusion, for me professionalism is also another qualification, objectivity, and respect, which is also very important. Especially when we have to do with kids, the interpreters should respect the procedures, the fact that right now we are in a school environment, and they are helping us provide a specific purpose. I think that is all.

0:10:35-0:10:41

I see. And what would you say are the most common problems you face when working with interpreters?

0:10:41-0:11:38

The most common? Although it is not them to blame, there is not much availability because they work for other organizations as well, based on the needs the institutions have at that time, they are diffused to those institutions based on their needs. Availability is one problem. Other than that, what I have personally faced are cases of interpreters that deviate from the protocol that they should follow. Interpreters are committed to interpret what we they are told and not to make personal additions or just say the gist of what was said, they have to deliver a word-to-word interpretation. However, they take the initiative sometimes and are not objective, so there are cases of discrimination either involving children or adults. I think those are the most basic problems I have come across.

0:11:39-0:11:39

Do you think there are cases where communication would not be achieved because of the interpreter's linguistic insufficiency meaning that the interpreter didn't know Greek or the language of the refugee?

0:11:39-0:12:33

Yes, there are such cases. For example, we often have to deal with dialects, with people who speak in a dialect. So, we understand that things get more difficult there, because the interpreters may know the main language, but all too often not the dialect. So, that is a difficult situation, because if the refugee comes from a village of Afghanistan, for example, this has happened to us, or a village of Ethiopia, where they speak their own dialect and the refugee doesn't know any other languages, we have faced such situations, where there is a gap, either in individual phrases or words or generally there is a total inability to understand everything that we are trying to explain to them.

0:12:33-0:12:51

Okay. I would like to ask you two more things: do any religion-, gender-related, ethical, or cultural issues come up that influence the communication? For example, women prefer women interpreters and vice versa.

0:12:52-0:13:47

To be honest, what we have noticed is that sometimes, when we go, for example, to brief the parents about something and we have a male interpreter with us, we notice that if they call us to get inside the house, for example, he will not come in. Or if the mother of the family shows up and sees that the interpreter is a man, she will wear a headscarf. There are such cases. However, we have not dealt with something very intense, because we on our part try in sensitive situations, when for example we have brought a doctor to talk about some gynecological issues, such things, we understand on our own the whole situation, so we choose for example in this case a female interpreter. So, we don't make room for the situation to get harder and awkward.

0:13:47-0:13:59

Very well. And now, my last question: besides objectivity, do you have other suggestions for the improvement of the communication of the refugees and the migrants with the help of an interpreter?

0:13:60-0:14:41

The truth is what I have noticed lately is that there is a new migration wave for which we don't know the languages. Let's say that lately we see many people from Ethiopia

that speak dialects, from Congo, and this has as a result that there is a lack of available interpreters, and this makes things harder. For example, Tigrinya is very common lately, Amharic, there are some dialects, some languages for which we don't have any availability and surely, we need time to find and train new interpreters and make this whole situation familiar to them. There is such a gap, meaning we don't have available interpreters for all the languages.

0:14:41-0:14:58

I see. These were the questions that I wanted to ask you. I would like to thank you once more that you were willing to take part in the interview and I think we are ready.

0:14:58-0:14:59

Great, thank you too.

4.

01:48-01:58

We can start with the first question. The first question I would like to ask you is whether you are a professional interpreter or you practice interpreting as a part-time profession.

01:59-02:05

Yes, I am a professional interpreter and I have been trained in this field.

02:06-02:11

What training have you received in terms of interpreting?

02:12-02:25

I attended a training course for interpreters.

02:26-02:46

In order to work as a translator or interpreter and work with refugees/immigrants, does one have to be certified, and have received training?

02:47-03:49

Not always. I was lucky to attend a seminar organised by a large Greek Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). This NGO provided interpreting to asylum services so it was necessary for the interpreters to be properly trained, but in smaller organisations, it is not necessary. They ask for people who know the language well, the latter go through interviews and then they hire them. Of course, if you have attended seminars, or you have a relevant degree, that would be considered a qualification, which they also mention in the notices for interpreters. But in order to work in large and international organisations, they require you to have attended a course or, even better, to have a degree.

03:50-04:02

Do you think that the training one receives is sufficient to be able to communicate with refugees, institutions, and national authorities?

04:03-04:47

It depends on what kind of training the interpreter has received. This particular seminar was sufficient. Certainly, it is not comparable to university courses but it included the essentials that an interpreter needs to know. However, these seminars do not teach you the language. If you don't know the language well or if you are not a native speaker there is a problem that this seminar cannot solve.

04:48-05:01

I'd like to ask you now that we've talked about native speakers, have you seen people who are native speakers providing interpretation services without being trained? Do you observe this incident?

05:02-05:44

Yes, there are small organisations that have taken on different projects hiring interpreters; they are not looking for interpreters who are trained, but for people who know certain languages. We see it mostly with rare languages, it's hard to find interpreters who speak some very rare languages used in Africa. So, they have to find someone to interpret.

05:45-06:03

Then I would like to ask you how did you start your profession? You mentioned that you have received training for interpreting. In the future, do you think that you could receive further training to develop your own knowledge of the profession?

06:04-06:28

For sure, we must constantly evolve. I've seen additional seminars that university professors offer so I've thought about attending them. We're not missing anything if we learn something new.

06:29-06:59

From everything you have learned through the seminars, have you applied it in the process of interpreting with refugees? Do you think that this process of learning, and the seminars help the interpreter and the process of interpreting for refugees?

07:00-07:02

I did not understand the question well.

07:03-07:17

Has the knowledge you have gained from the seminar helped you, is it applicable to the interpreting process and do you think it could be improved?

07:18-08:02

Is it obvious that you apply in the field what you learn in the seminar or in the interpreting courses. Without this seminar, it is difficult to be able to work and provide interpreting in asylum services or interpreting in asylum interviews. So, obviously it is necessary, we are talking about asylum and such procedures. In other organisations, they ask for interpreters to do briefings, so it's not as demanding a framework.

08:03-08:22

The next question I would like to ask is whether there was anything that you, as an interpreter, learned from the process of interpreting with refugees that you didn't know before, something that you didn't learn in the seminar, but you found out in the interpreting process.

08:23-09:06

Sure. In the seminar, they just teach us theory, what to do, what not to do, and what to avoid, but in the field, you learn everything. If you only learn theory and you don't apply everything you've learned, you don't move forward. You learn, for example, when you put on the vest or the tag and go into the camp or the asylum service. All this knowledge is partly acquired in the seminar, you are talked to, you are informed about what you should do, what you should not do, and how you should behave, but you only really learn and understand when you apply everything you learnt.

09:07-09:22

A next question is whether there was ever a factor, an event or an incident that prevented the smooth flow and progression of the interpretation.

09:23-10:21

Normally there should be no obstacles since the interpreter is just a voice. They are in the room, but no one is looking at them, no one is paying attention to them because the conversation is between the two other people and the interpreter knows before they

enter (the room) that they are just a voice. So, they can't let anything get in the way, and they can't be emotionally charged or affected by other things. That also depends on the refugee. If they start shouting or are angry and crying, that will obviously create difficulties.

10:22-10:36

In this context, I would like to ask you, before the interpretation, do you, as an interpreter, receive a briefing from the governmental institution on the situation or do you just enter the room and then you hear the case for the first time?

10:37-11:29

In interviews for asylum services, no, we do not receive any information. Only if you are a bilingual interpreter or speak more languages, you are told what language you are going to speak and the gender of the person. Beyond those two pieces of information nothing else. In other programs like mental health, ten or fifteen minutes before the beneficiary comes in they explain to you if there are any difficulties, if they have any problems so you know how to behave. The same thing happens in educational programs, but in the asylum process definitely not. There should be no contact with the beneficiary.

11:30-11:49

The next question is what role does culture play in the whole process, that is, in community interpreting does the religion, customs and traditions of the beneficiary somehow influence the process based on your experience?

11:50-13:23

Based on my experience no, I have not dealt with people who did not want me because I was from a particular country, or spoke a particular language. They don't know my identity anyway, they don't know where I'm from, they just listen to me and see me - lately even with a mask - and I facilitate communication. Nothing has stopped me. But I know of other colleagues where there is a cultural problem between Iran and Afghanistan. In both countries, they speak Farsi, but there are some people from Afghanistan who understand an interpreter comes from Iran by their accent. They speak the same language but their accents are somewhat different. When they understand that

the interpreter is from Iran, they say no, we want an interpreter from Afghanistan. This has been observed. It can happen. It also happens between Pakistan and India, where refugees prefer an interpreter whose mother tongue is Urdu and not Indian. It hasn't happened to me, but I know it can happen.

13:23-13:39

Another question is whether you inform the interviewee of any cultural misunderstandings that might exist. Do you notice anything like that?

13:40-14:05

In the asylum services no, you have no right to either explain, ask questions or solve problems, it is not your role. If the interviewer wants to explain it, you just interpret what they say. You cannot solve intercultural problems.

14:06-14:24

When it comes to the skills an interpreter possesses, it is certainly excellent knowledge of the language. Are there other skills that you think an interpreter should possess?

14:25-15:16

They definitely need to be neutral; it is a skill that is not easy and the interpreter improves it with time. Also be calm because in this field, especially when working with refugees, we hear so many difficult cases that you never imagine you will hear, perhaps nowhere else but in the asylum service. So all this requires composure and stamina.

15:17-15:31

The most common form of interpretation, I suppose, is face-to-face. But does interpretation happen to be available by telephone for example or online?

15:32-16:47

Yes, it does. Especially during the pandemic, interpretation in other programs was done through the internet, via zoom and other applications. Updates were done through Whatsapp as most refugees have Whatsapp. But at the asylum facilities, there is a so-called teleconference room where interviews, briefings and recordings are done over the phone. There is another case where interviews are done remotely when the

beneficiary is far away or the person in charge of the asylum service cannot be accompanied by the interpreter. In such cases, the interviews are conducted remotely.

16:48-17:06

Do you mainly work with children, women, or men? Does an interpreter approach these two genders differently and is there a different approach to children because of their sensitive age?

17:07-19:22

This is a big issue. To answer the first question, I mainly work more often with men because they constitute the majority of refugees. It's always based on the working language, for French most refugees are men from African countries. But there are also many women, victims of violence and torture, we must not forget that. I mostly interpret for men and in terms of treatment and approach, there is no difference. We have discussed this with the people in charge, there should be no different treatment, especially with children, because when they see an interpreter who speaks their language they feel a sense of familiarity, they approach them more easily, and this is of course not very helpful both for the interpreter or for the person responsible, there is no impartiality and somehow a relationship is created between the interpreter and the child. This is avoided, it is not easy at all as you know that you see a child who is having a hard time, you want to talk to them, they speak your language and sometimes they may be struggling and want to feel someone close to them. But that unfortunately or fortunately -I don't know- is not allowed. We cross the line when a relationship is established between the beneficiary and the interpreter.

19:23-19:43

Has it ever happened that you had to interpret into a language through a third language, i.e. if there had to be another interpreter to assist in the process?

19:44-21:06

I personally haven't done that but I know other interpreters who are English speakers and speak rare languages such as Aramaic. They do not speak Greek and because they are needed in the asylum services they interpret in English and there is also an English interpreter in the room who interprets from English to Greek. But they don't prefer this

as it takes too much time and delays the interview. Thus, they always prefer Greek-speaking interpreters in Greece.

21:07-21:22

Is there any difficulty that you consider the greatest and have you encountered in the interpreting process?

21:23-23:00

I would honestly say that employees in public institutions are not very well trained and do not know how to use interpretation. Many times, the doctors at hospitals look at me and talk about the refugee in the third singular person, "tell them, "explain to them" and it creates a huge confusion, you feel like they're looking at you and asking you. One time the doctor was looking at me and telling me what to convey to the refugee. You understand that there is great difficulty and every time I have to remind that I am only a voice, I can neither help nor explain, I am just interpreting what you are saying into another language. It is not always easy. It is quite a big difficulty.

23:01-23:06

Do you consider that public bodies receive neither proper training nor any training at all?

23:07-23:40

Not at all, they receive no training. Especially doctors in hospitals. In the camps maybe they are better educated due to their experience and because they are in a context that has taught them how to use interpretation. But in public institutions, it's not easy at all.

23:41-23:50

Should public institutions receive some training to learn what an interpreter does and how they facilitate the process?

23:51-23:59

Of course, and I believe that this could be done by the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum in cooperation with other bodies.

24:00-24:05

Do you believe that there could be improvement in terms of interpreting conditions for both the interpreter and the refugees?

24.06-24.22

I would say that the institutions and the employees in the public sector should be trained because that would make the process much easier for both the beneficiaries and for us, the interpreters.

5.

00:01

Good afternoon, Mr. Kyriakopoulou.

00:02

Good afternoon.

00:03-00:29

My name is [...] and I am a fourth-year student of the Department of Foreign Languages, Translation and Interpreting of the Ionian University in the specialization of interpreting, which participates in the ReTrans program (Working with Interpreters in Refugee Transit Zones: Capacity building and awareness-raising for higher education contexts) which is implemented with the support of the Erasmus+ academic program of the European Union.

00:30

I see.

00:31-01:01

The aim of the project is to raise the awareness of higher education institutions regarding the issue of interpretation in the field of migration of humanitarian, cross-border migration and to assist them in the training of appropriate interpreters through the creation of innovative teaching materials. In particular, the project aims to develop digital educational tools that will take into account the needs of all those involved in this field, such as you, representatives of state authorities, refugees and migrants.

01:02

I see.

01:02-01:43

Apart from the Ionian University, the programme involves universities from Austria, Slovenia and the Republic of North Macedonia. Due to your experience and collaboration with refugees and migrants, your participation in this process is very useful to us. Before we begin I would like to ask you to state that you are aware of the

content of the personal data protection documents, that you are aware that this data may be used by the university, exclusively for the purposes of the ReTrans program and that you consent to provide us with this interview by means of video or audio recording. Do you consent?

01:44

Yes, of course, I consent, yes, yes.

01:46-01:56

All right, so we'll start with the interview. I would like you to present yourself and your experience as an interpreter.

01:57-02:30

Well, I have been working as an interpreter for the past 7 years, for the previous 7 years I had also been working as a translator. I did not study [interpreting] at the Ionian University, at the Ionian University I only studied translation, and interpretation later in private school. I have worked in the field of... I have probably worked with the UNHCR when it was the refugee crisis in Greece, that is four years ago I think, five. In this context I have made interpretations regarding the refugee issue and from there I will also draw on the information I will share with you.

02:31-02:34

Good, can you tell us your working languages?

02:35

English and French.

02:36-02:48

Very well, then... As you said you are a professional interpreter you have received training and you practice the profession... Are you a full-time or part-time interpreter?

02:49-02:53

Yes, yes, full-time, it's been full-time for many years.

02:54-03:02

Yes, do you think one must be a certified translator or interpreter to work with refugees and migrants?

03:03-03:25

Certified you mean to have studied in a school or specifically a certification concerning the terminology e.g. for the refugee issue? Because if we're talking about certification, do we mean a degree? Then yes, I definitely believe either a translator or an interpreter should have a degree, be trained on it in order to be able to give a correct result.

03:26-03:33

Let's say abroad there are sworn translators and interpreters, this does not exist in Greece, as you said there is this differentiation.

03:34

No.

03:34-03:37

What do you think is appropriate to get the interpretation right?

03:38-04:05

Here we have the Ombudsman, if I know well, which is a specific seminar which is followed by people who want to work in this field. I don't know, I don't have the knowledge to tell you the truth, about the training they do there, I can't judge. But I think that as for any profession, yes, there must be an education, there must be a study behind it. You can't just do it out of nowhere.

04:06-04:17

Do you think that in Greece the interpreters who are involved in this field, with refugees and immigrants, are sufficiently trained?

04:18-04:34

I think there's been some pretty good work done in the last few years. Okay certainly at first it was something unprecedented both for Greece and for the rest of the countries, so maybe it was a little more complicated, a little hastier. But surely now I believe it has a flow, it has order.

04:35-04:54

You told us that after your translation studies you studied interpreting so you have been properly trained. Apart from that, have you attended other seminars or have you trained in order to perfect the techniques and profession of interpreting further?

04:55-05:14

No. Apart from my interpreting studies, I did not do anything specific about it. Other seminars of course, numerous about the work, terminology, extra knowledge, that's right. But the rest you learn on the job. I don't think I needed anything extra or I would have done it.

05:15-05:18

Evidently the experience offers many things on this.

05:19

Yes.

05:20-05:36

Either from seminars or from your experience, these skills that you have earned what they are and how you apply them in your everyday life and in a second time believe them could make the process of learning interpreting more effective?

05:38-06:13

Skills we use in everyday life, definitely composure. To be a good interpreter I believe you need an Olympian composure, which you certainly also have for your daily life. You can't be a nervous person and become a good interpreter, I believe. Also certainly improves your memory, interpretation. The fact that you have to remember a lot of facts, a lot of information to say at that time. I'm sure it'll improve your memory as well a little bit. Beyond that, the second thing you asked me was how can it be improved?

06:14

These skills how they can help in learning, education yes.

06:19-06:39

How do they help with the training? They certainly give a better result. The more you exercise your composure, the more you practice your memory, surely you will be a more and more good interpreter. This is of course a personal matter for everyone. Others have it in their character, others need to work on it a little bit more, but it certainly helps.

06:40-06:50

Okay. Is there anything that you personally have learned from your experience in the field with the refugees, that is, on the job, that you did not know before?

06:52-07:31

Yes. I didn't know how "tough" I could be. Tough in quotation marks, of course. Because this was a very, very soul-crushing process, very emotionally charged, and if I had let myself go, I would have just cried all the time, the job would not get done. So somehow I'm going to protect myself, to be "tougher", to say that now we're working, we're going to be sad for what's going on later. Yeah, I didn't know that I could have that kind of mental reserve, of composure, of being "tough"? I do not know.

07:32-07:41

Yes, understandable, and maybe it's connected to the next question. Has there ever been a factor that has prevented the smooth development of interpreting in such an environment?

07:42-00:47

Factor... Yeah, we were all crying. Is that considered a factor? Yes.

07:48-07:49

Meaning bad psychological mood?

07:50-08:41

It was one of the first jobs I'd done and I didn't know what it would be like. The refugee I was interpreting for was telling us what she had gone through to get to Greece from Syria. She was crying herself; I was crying and the audience that was below, that is, it was a very difficult situation. On the one hand I was happy to be able to help these people tell their story, but on the other hand it was very violent what was going on in

my soul, in my heart, I don't know. It was very tiring mentally, so, yeah, surely smooth interpreting is not when everyone cries in the room. The message came across okay, though. We did it. And after that I went in psychologically prepared for it. That I'm going to face that there.

08:42-09:00

So, yes, we understand that it's a soul-crushing process, and we need to be prepared for that. What role do you think culture (religion, customs, traditions) plays in community interpreting and how can you facilitate intercultural communication as an interpreter?

09:01-09:53

They play a huge role. We are from different cultures, the interpreter must also know some things, about religion, about habits, about the customs of this person who is called upon to interpret. Because it is not only a "cultural event" that "ah this man has a different religion from me". It affects their lives every day and when it comes to a refugee who is in such a vulnerable emotional situation at the time, you have to respect these things. You can't insult them, even unintentionally; of course, we're not going to do this thing on purpose. But they certainly need to have studied issues that concern them before, issues that they consider more important than we do, this is good for them to feel a little more comfortable in the difficult circumstances they are going through.

09:54-10:21

I see. So you said that you must have done your research studied before, so in such an environment you inform the interviewee, let's say that there is for example an institution representative, of any intercultural misunderstandings that may arise due to the different refugee/migrant culture? That is, before the interview if you inform them about it.

10:22-10:51

This I had done because the body had suggested it, I did not think it myself to tell you the truth, which indeed the first times I did this job it had not crossed my mind. But I was told by the organization that I have to mention certain things and to make the

interviewee more comfortable, as we said before and me as well. Because it was a weird situation for me, too. But it all came out right. It all came out smoothly, all right.

10:52-11:04

What additional skills do you think are required by an interpreter in addition to mastering the language? We said before memory and composure, for example.

11:05-11:42

Memory of calm and a little humanity in these specific cases because we face a situation that for us is unknown, I hope it remains unknown and we should not forget that the person we have before us is going through a very difficult time. Especially on the refugee issue, it's something that we know from television, we are all surely informed, we all have an opinion, but to see it happen in front of you, it's a stark difference, it's completely different, it hits you and it hits you very differently, so a certain sensitivity is needed, definitely needed.

11:43-11:45

Theory and practice are different for sure.

11:46-11:47

Yes, clearly.

11:48-12:04

When interpreting with refugees and migrants, do you work primarily with women, with men or with children and there is some difference, are there strategies you follow for how to communicate with each of them differently?

12:05-12:40

I have not happened to interpret children and I don't know if I could bear it to tell you the truth now that I think about it. With women and men I've talked to, no, I didn't have to do anything different. All the people I talked to were very kind; despite all the difficulties they had been through, just trying to make it easier for us to feel more comfortable and the audience listening to them, which was fantastic. But no such difference existed in the understanding. I can't say that.

12:41-13:00

In this I wanted to ask something from the other side of yours as an interpreter who is a woman. Have you ever noticed that there was a difference with how you were treated, or let's say if a refugee or immigrant didn't trust you because you are a woman or a woman to talk to you more easily because...

13:01-13:17

No, no. Not at all. Not at all, just what I told you before, they made us feel comfortable. Weirder, shall we say, I've felt when I travel to the Middle East where they look at me strangely than at the time of the interpretation, yes.

13:18-13:26

Have you ever interpreted from one language to another through a third language, what we in interpreting call relay?

13:28-13:37

Relay I have done but not in the context of refugee interpretations, there I was directly with the person I had beside me I did not have to do such a thing.

13:38-13:42

So this was never the case.

13:43

No.

13:44-13:46

Thank you very much, Mr. Kyriakopoulou, for your answers.

13:47-13:51

Thank you too. And good luck completing your program.

13:52

Thank you very much.

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