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Abstract: Access to higher education remains a major challenge for asylum seekers and refugees, who face multiple structural, legal, economic and linguistic barriers in host countries. At the same time, the increase in applications for international protection in Spain—particularly in Andalusia as a key entry point to Europe—has generated a growing demand for interpreting services in asylum contexts. This need is especially critical when communication involves languages of lesser diffusion, for which there is a significant shortage of professionally trained interpreters.

Based on a series of research projects conducted since 2017 by members of the Interglosia research group at the University Pablo de Olavide (Seville), this article analyses the current state of interpreting practices in international protection settings in Andalusia. Empirical data obtained through interviews with reception centres reveal the widespread use of *ad hoc* interpreters, insufficient training in interpreting techniques and professional deontology, and serious risks for the quality of communication and the protection of asylum seekers' rights. These findings point to a clear mismatch between existing Translation and Interpreting curricula in Spain and the actual needs of the asylum sector.

In response to this gap, the article presents a pioneering pilot training course in public service interpreting for asylum seekers and refugees working with languages of lesser diffusion. Designed and implemented by the University Pablo de Olavide in collaboration with Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge, the course aims to enhance professional standards in asylum-related interpreting while facilitating refugees' access to higher education and supporting their social and professional integration.

Key words: Asylum seekers, refugees, public service interpreting, languages of lesser diffusion, higher education access, international protection contexts

1. Introduction

Access to higher education remains one of the major challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees in contemporary migration contexts, due both to the structural barriers affecting these groups and to the limited capacity of higher education systems to adapt to

their specific circumstances and educational trajectories. Although higher education plays a crucial role in processes of social, economic and professional integration, available data indicate that only a small proportion of young refugees can enrol in university studies, revealing a profound inequality of opportunities.

At the same time, the sustained increase in applications for international protection in Spain—particularly in Andalusia, one of Europe's main maritime entry points—has generated a growing demand for interpreting services across the different stages of the reception system. Interlinguistic and intercultural communication thus becomes a key element in ensuring effective access to fundamental rights in administrative, legal, healthcare and psychosocial settings. This need is especially pressing when languages of lesser diffusion are involved, as the availability of professionally trained interpreters for these languages is often extremely limited or non-existent.

Several research projects carried out by members of the Interglosia research group at the University Pablo de Olavide (Seville, Spain) have highlighted the precarious nature of interpreting services in international protection contexts, as well as the lack of specific technical and deontological training among those who perform interpreting tasks. These shortcomings have direct consequences for service quality and for the protection of asylum seekers' rights. At the same time, this situation contrasts with the considerable linguistic potential of many asylum seekers and refugees, who speak languages scarcely represented in Translation and Interpreting degree programmes, yet face significant obstacles in accessing higher education and formal training.

Against this background, this article examines the need for higher education institutions to develop targeted training responses that both enhance the quality and professionalisation of interpreting in international protection contexts and facilitate access to higher education for asylum seekers and refugees. To this end, the article presents and contextualises a pioneering training course in interpreting with languages of lesser diffusion, designed and implemented by the University Pablo de Olavide in collaboration with Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge (Seville), as an innovative experience in knowledge transfer, social engagement and educational inclusion.

2. Barriers to Refugees' and Asylum Seekers' Access to Higher Education

According to Anas (2025), only 7% of young refugees worldwide have access to higher education. This figure clearly illustrates the significant access gap faced by refugees and asylum seekers, which is the result of a combination of interrelated structural, legal, economic and educational barriers, among which the following stand out:

- Documentation and recognition of prior qualifications. Due to the circumstances under which many refugees are forced to flee their countries of origin, they often lack official certificates of secondary or higher education, or these qualifications are not recognised by the host country, preventing enrolment in higher education programmes (Gardi, 2021).

- Bureaucratic requirements and complex admission procedures. A lack of clear and accessible information regarding higher education systems, application processes, deadlines and eligibility criteria in host countries frequently hinders refugees' ability to navigate university admission pathways (UNESCO, 2022).
- Legal restrictions linked to migration status. Asylum seekers may be excluded from certain programmes or scholarships that require specific residency or legal conditions (ESU, 2024).
- High tuition fees and the associated costs of higher education—such as housing, learning materials and transport—particularly given refugees' limited access to employment opportunities and financial support (Presti, 2025).
- Scarcity of scholarships or targeted financial aid schemes specifically designed for refugees (Anas, 2025).
- Interrupted educational careers. Many asylum seekers are forced to discontinue their education at primary or secondary levels during displacement, resulting in gaps in knowledge and skills that affect both university admission and academic success (Gardi, 2021).
- Differences between educational systems in countries of origin and host countries (UNESCO, 2022).
- Language barriers. Insufficient proficiency in the host country's language may restrict access to information about educational opportunities and negatively affect academic performance once enrolled (ESU, 2024).
- Lack of support networks and social capital—including mentors, academic advisors or peer support groups—limits refugees' ability to develop and pursue higher education aspirations (ESU, 2024).
- Stigma and structural discrimination, which in some contexts intensifies these challenges and can negatively influence both access to university education and integration within academic environments (Lambrechts, 2020).

These barriers do not operate in isolation but rather accumulate and reinforce one another, deepening educational exclusion and significantly reducing refugees' chances of accessing and succeeding in higher education.

3. Context of Asylum in Spain and Andalusia

In 2024, Spain became for the first time the second country in the European Union with the highest number of applications for international protection, registering a total of 167,366 applications. This figure confirms a steady upward trend since 2012 and reflects a significant shift in Spain's asylum landscape over the past decade (CEAR, 2025).

Most asylum applicants originate from Latin America, with Venezuela and Colombia leading the statistics and accounting for more than 63% of all applications submitted in 2024. Among the ten most common non-Spanish-speaking nationalities are Senegal, Morocco, Mauritania and Mali. Notably, Mali recorded the sharpest increase, with a rise of 700% in the number of applications lodged during this period (CEAR, 2025).

Paradoxically, while the number of applications has continued to grow, the number of resolutions has declined, with a 27% decrease compared to the previous year. Moreover, the proportion of positive decisions has also fallen, with only 18.5% of applications receiving a favourable outcome in 2024. In practical terms, this means that only one in ten asylum applications was approved that year (CEAR, 2025).

Andalusia constitutes one of the main entry points for migration into Spain, alongside the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands, Ceuta, Melilla and parts of the Mediterranean coast. Most arrivals occur by sea, with 18,224 arrivals recorded by maritime routes compared to 939 by land (UNHCR, 2025). As a result, the Andalusian coastline has become one of the principal maritime routes for migrants and refugees seeking access to Europe.

3.1. International Protection in Spain and Andalusia

International protection is defined as the right of individuals to seek safety outside their country of origin when fleeing conflict or persecution that threatens their lives on grounds such as race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (CEAR, 2018).

In Spain, the right to asylum is recognised as a fundamental human right at both international and national levels. It is enshrined in international instruments such as Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 New York Protocol, as well as in domestic legislation, including the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and the Ley de Asilo of 2009.

The Spanish reception and integration system for asylum seekers is administered by the Ministerio de Trabajo, Migraciones y Seguridad Social (Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security) and is structured into three phases. The reception phase, lasting the first six months, includes accommodation, healthcare, schooling, employment-related training and Spanish language classes. This is followed by the integration phase, which may extend up to twelve months and focuses on promoting autonomy, employment and access to housing. Finally, the autonomy phase may last up to eighteen months and provides occasional or sporadic support (Migraciones, 2017).

4. The Need for Interpreting in International Protection Contexts

At all stages of the reception and integration system, effective communication is essential. In this process, interpreters play a decisive role. The accurate rendering of details and nuances in an applicant's life narrative can directly influence the outcome of an asylum application and may, in some cases, become a matter of life or death. Interpreters are therefore crucial both in everyday situations—such as accompanying asylum seekers to medical appointments, municipal registration procedures or school enrolment—and in highly complex contexts, including psychological care, legal preparation, and asylum interviews conducted by the police, where experiences marked by fear, shame or guilt are recounted (Martín-Ruel, 2021a).

European legislation—such as Directives 2011/95/EU and 2013/32/EU, as well as Regulation (EU) No 516/2014—and Spanish legislation (Ley Orgánica 4/2000 and Ley de Asilo 12/2009) explicitly recognise the right to the assistance of an interpreter and to translation and interpreting services in international protection procedures. In fact, reception organisations in Spain are allocated specific budget lines to cover these services.

However, current legislation does not specify the qualifications or training required of interpreters, which results in arbitrary selection criteria. Consequently, individuals are often recruited without the necessary professional training or deontological guarantees. As León Pinilla *et al.* (2016: 32) note, interpreting in refugee contexts in Spain is frequently carried out "as best as possible", and there is a clear precariousness in public interpreting services for asylum seekers and refugees, which increases the vulnerability of these users.

This situation includes the frequent use of *ad hoc* interpreters, such as volunteers, friends, family members—including children—or staff members of reception organisations who lack the required competencies. Such practices seriously compromise the impartiality and professionalism of the service (Martín-Ruel, 2021b).

4.1. Empirical Study on Interpreting Needs in the Reception of Asylum Seekers in Andalusia

Considering the above, there is a clear and pressing social need for professionally trained interpreters in the reception of asylum seekers. The continuous arrival of applicants for international protection confirms that the labour market will increasingly demand qualified professionals in this sector. For this reason, members of the Interglosia research group at the University Pablo de Olavide (Seville, Spain) initiated a study in 2017 to examine interpreting needs within reception organisations in Andalusia and the ways in which these needs were being addressed.

4.1.1. Methodology of the Study

The research project focused on analysing interlinguistic and intercultural communication needs in international protection contexts in Andalusia.

An initial project (2017–2018), entitled *La traducción y revisión de documentación del Centro de Acogida de Refugiados de Sevilla: investigación y formación en Traducción y compromiso social* (*Translation and Revision of Documentation at the Seville Refugee Reception Centre: Research, Translator Training and Social Engagement)*, was funded by the Andalusian Regional Government's Plan for Strengthening R&D&I and coordinated by Francisco J. Vigier. This exploratory and descriptive study examined access to interpreting services at the Seville Refugee Reception Centre (CAR) through an open-ended structured interview with one of its managers. The project concluded in 2018 with the First International Conference on Interlinguistic and Intercultural Communication in Asylum and Refugee Contexts (CIICAR), held at the University Pablo de Olavide.

This line of research continued between 2018 and 2020 with the project *Necesidades de traducción e interpretación en las entidades de acogida a refugiados en Andalucía: investigación y compromiso social* (*Interpreting and Translation Needs in Refugee Reception Organisations in Andalusia: Research and Social Engagement*,) funded by the Fifth Internal Research and Knowledge Transfer Plan (2018–2020) of the University Pablo de Olavide and coordinated by Estela Martín Ruel. Building on the data obtained in the preliminary CAR project and on existing literature, the research scope was expanded to include additional organisations involved in the international protection programme in Andalusia, with the aim of obtaining a more comprehensive overview of the situation in one of Europe's main maritime entry regions. Results were obtained through data triangulation (Denzin, 1970), combining information from different sources and time points: existing research documents, the initial interview conducted at the CAR in 2018, and interviews with other organisations carried out in 2019.

Specifically, the study was extended to five reception organisations in Seville—Cruz Roja, Federación Andalucía Acoge, Accem, Fundación Cepaim and Fundación SAMU—which, together with the CAR, account for almost the entire network of entities involved in the international protection programme at regional level.

In total, nine individuals were interviewed, including a training coordinator, a psychologist, a centre director, a lawyer and head of the translation and interpreting service, a centre coordinator, two managers of the international protection programme, a social worker and a legal officer.

A semi-structured interview comprising 39 questions was designed, including 17 questions related to interpreting, 17 questions related to translation, four questions on training and interaction with translators and interpreters, and one final question addressing areas for improvement.

The interviews were conducted in April 2019, with an approximate duration of one hour per organisation. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, subsequently transcribed in full and anonymised.

In 2022, the study was further expanded through a two-month research project at the University of Almería. Four additional interviews were conducted with a total of eleven participants, including four heads of translation and interpreting services, three intercultural mediators, a centre director, a lawyer, a psychologist and an additional social worker, thus providing a comprehensive overview of the situation in both western and eastern Andalusia.

4.1.2. Main Findings of the Field Study and Premises for the Design of Specific Training for Refugees in Translation and Interpreting with Languages of Lesser Diffusion

The data obtained across all phases of the research and projects were analysed and disseminated through several publications (Martín-Ruel, 2020; Briales & Relinque Barranca, 2021; Martín-Ruel, 2021a; Martín-Ruel, 2021b; Relinque Barranca & Martín-

Ruel, 2022; Vigier Moreno & Relinque Barranca, 2023a; Vigier Moreno & Relinque Barranca, 2023b; Relinque Barranca, 2024; Vigier Moreno & Relinque Barranca, 2024; Vigier Moreno & Relinque Barranca, 2025).

Regarding the present article, particular emphasis is placed on the professional and deontological findings, as significant gaps were identified that the subsequent phase of the research sought to address by providing asylum seekers working with languages of lesser diffusion with access to higher education in interpreting.

- First, the ideal profile of an interpreter in asylum and refugee contexts should include well-developed interpreting techniques, specialisation in Public Service Interpreting, solid training in international protection, a clear understanding of deontology in this field, as well as specific personal qualities and emotional self-management skills. However, interviews with reception organisations revealed that the training required for interpreters is often unspecified or limited to general university degrees (such as philology or journalism) or to backgrounds in mediation, social integration or teacher training, without explicitly requiring specialised training in interpreting. In fact, many organisations are unaware of the prior training and experience of external interpreters, placing unquestioned trust in subcontracted service providers.

- Considerable problems arise when communication involves an asylum seeker who speaks a language of lesser diffusion. In such cases, it is not always possible to work with interpreters in the applicant's native language, and communication relies on the use of a *lingua franca*—typically English, French, Russian or Arabic—known to the participants but not as their mother tongue. This practice entails significant disadvantages, as applicants often lack sufficient proficiency in a language they perceive as foreign, which is used in a situation of vulnerability and power imbalance such as this one: authority/refugee (Relinque Barranca & Martín-Ruel, 2022). Linguistic divergences between interlocutors (different language varieties, dialects or accents) may create situations of vulnerability in which understanding is assumed without having been clearly achieved. Communication through a vehicular language can never match the expressive capacity of one's first language, generating situations of inequality.

- Numerous deontological issues arise due to limited awareness of professional ethics in Public Service Interpreting among both contracted interpreters and reception organisation staff. This places the full respect of asylum seekers' right to effective communication—explicitly recognised in both European and Spanish legislation (see Section 4)—at serious risk. Ethical considerations become even more crucial and complex in refugee interactions, which are characterised by a highly asymmetrical context: on the one hand, authority (the state or the police); on the other, the migrant in a position of vulnerability. Based on the interviews conducted (Martín-Ruel, 2020, 2021a, 2021b), the following major deontological

issues were identified and subsequently addressed in the next phase of the research:

- Impartiality and boundaries between interpreting and mediation: unlike conference interpreting, where neutrality is more easily expected, asylum contexts involve asymmetrical interactions in which one party represents authority and the other is a vulnerable individual. Impartiality in such contexts requires flexibility. Interpreters are often required to go beyond mere message transmission to explain how institutions operate (healthcare, education) or to clarify culturally sensitive aspects (honour, respect, religion). However, such intervention must be regulated to avoid assuming the role of mediator or advocate for one of the parties and overstepping professional boundaries. Interviews revealed cases in which interpreters intervened in conflicts, advised applicants, shared personal contact details to establish later contact, or attempted to influence social workers' decisions regarding aid allocation. University-level training equips interpreters to recognise these boundaries and to apply strategies such as clearly distinguishing between what has been said and what constitutes an explanatory comment.

- Accuracy and integrity of the message: lack of professionalism is also associated with omissions or excessive summarisation of information. This is unacceptable, as interpreters are not entitled to decide which elements of a narrative are relevant in procedures that determine the granting of asylum. Moreover, the case study revealed that almost no interpreters used note-taking—a fundamental technique in consecutive interpreting—thereby placing accuracy at risk. Professional training provides interpreters with the tools and strategies required to ensure faithful, accurate and complete renditions.

- Confidentiality and trust: given the highly sensitive nature of the issues addressed—such as asylum seekers' traumatic experiences—professional secrecy must be strictly observed. Ethical training guarantees this principle. Lack of training leads to misunderstandings, such as some organisations preferring interpreters not to take notes for fear of information disclosure, reflecting a lack of awareness that deontology ensure confidentiality. Confidentiality is also essential for building trust, as asylum seekers often fear that interpreters may disclose their information to authorities in their country of origin.

- Empathy and emotional strain management: working with refugees entails exposure to distressing narratives, requiring interpreters to develop sensitivity and empathy while maintaining sufficient professional distance. Lack of preparation may lead some interpreters to become emotionally blocked or excessively empathetic—sometimes crying,

particularly when sharing a similar background—which compromises service quality and may result in vicarious trauma. University training addresses emotional management and emphasises the importance of recognising personal limits and declining assignments when one is not adequately prepared.

- Practical training and case-based learning: For deontology training to be effective, the educational model must be comprehensive, combining theory (ethical codes), practice (action) and instrumental reasoning (reflection). Higher education programmes should incorporate real-life case studies. The use of authentic ethical dilemmas—such as those proposed in UNHCR manuals or drawn from sensitive situations in social service contexts—through classroom debates and role-play activities enables students to reason through the consequences of their decisions in situations of high vulnerability.

5. The Need to Create University-Level Training Courses for Asylum Seekers Working with Languages of Lesser Diffusion

Building on the research line developed by the group, in 2024 the research team continued its work with the project entitled *Diseño de perfil de competencias básicas para la formación en interpretación en contextos de protección internacional (Designing a Profile of Basic Competences for Interpreter Training in International Protection Contexts)* (R&D&I Strengthening Plan funded by the Andalusian Regional Government's Ministry of Economy and Knowledge), coordinated by Mariana Relinque Barranca.

Through the interviews conducted in previous projects, it was observed that, despite a general lack of awareness regarding formal training requirements in Translation and Interpreting, reception organisations in Andalusia expressed a clear demand and willingness to receive specific training on how to interact with professional interpreters. In other words, while there was limited knowledge, there was no lack of commitment to improving service quality.

On the one hand, training in Translation and Interpreting fulfils a crucial social function by safeguarding asylum seekers' fundamental rights through ethical and high-quality communication. At the same time, it represents an opportunity for economic and professional integration for refugees and asylum seekers themselves, who could gain access to employment within this specific social niche. Moreover, interpreting in international protection contexts can be approached as a form of social entrepreneurship. The growing need for high-quality interpreting services in this sector constitutes a field in which both social demand and the opportunity to generate social well-being coexist, aligning closely with the concept of social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship involves combining a social mission—such as addressing communication barriers and facilitating the integration of disadvantaged groups—with a sustainable business model. The social entrepreneur identifies opportunities to create social value by addressing an "unjust equilibrium" (Martín-Ruel, 2020).

On the other hand, languages of lesser diffusion pose additional challenges for professional interpreting (see Section 4.1.2.). In asylum and refugee contexts, a language is often directly associated with an individual based on their country of origin, without adequately assessing their actual level of proficiency. However, not everyone who claims to speak English, French or Russian is capable of accurately narrating their experiences—particularly when these are traumatic—or of participating effectively in an asylum interview in which their future is at stake. Individuals do not express emotions and feelings in the same way in their mother tongue as they do in a foreign or vehicular language (Costa *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, speaking in a non-native language influences decision-making processes: information is processed more slowly and less fluently, requires greater cognitive effort, and elicits weaker emotional responses (Relinque Barranca & Martín-Ruel, 2022).

The demands expressed by reception organisations and the needs identified through the research validate the necessity for higher education to formalise and expand training provision in Public Service Interpreting, with a particular emphasis on deontology specific to international protection contexts and on languages of lesser diffusion that are currently absent from Translation and Interpreting curricula in Spanish higher education.

5.1. Existing Curricula in Spain and Andalusia

According to Briales and Relinque Barranca (2021), there is a clear disconnect between the real needs of the asylum and refugee sector and the training offered in undergraduate Translation and Interpreting programmes in Spain, particularly in Andalusia. An analysis of the curricula of the Universities of Granada, Málaga, Córdoba and Pablo de Olavide reveals that compulsory interpreting courses primarily focus on general techniques (bilateral interpreting, consecutive interpreting, introductory interpreting courses) and, to a lesser extent, on specialised fields such as legal or economic interpreting, without specifically addressing interpreting in asylum and refugee contexts.

Although some optional courses related to Public Service Interpreting are available—such as those offered at the University of Granada—these are neither compulsory nor sufficient in terms of credit load or language combinations. In general, undergraduate programmes do not include specific modules aimed at developing key competences required in this field, such as empathy, emotional management, psychological resilience, respect for service users, or in-depth knowledge of the social and cultural contexts of asylum seekers (Briales & Relinque Barranca, 2021).

A similar situation can be observed across the rest of Spain, although provision improves slightly at postgraduate level, most notably with the Master's degree in Public Service Translation and Interpreting at the University of Alcalá de Henares. Nevertheless, this remains insufficient to meet existing demand, particularly with regard to languages of lesser diffusion.

Considering the languages most frequently requested by reception organisations—such as French, Arabic, Russian, English, Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian, Tigrinya, Bambara, Urdu and Chinese—it is evident that current curricula are not designed to address this growing and evolving need, either due to the absence of many required languages from academic offerings or to the lack of training in competences beyond interpreting techniques that are essential in this field. As Briales and Relinque Barranca (2021)

suggest, it may therefore be appropriate to train *ad hoc* interpreters whose work is specifically focused on this context and who enrich the pool of trained interpreters with languages that may be perceived as exotic or distant, yet are nonetheless essential.

5.2. Previous International Training Initiatives in Translation and Interpreting for Asylum Seekers

A number of previous experiences support the usefulness of intensive training programmes in interpreting. With the aim of designing its own interpreter training course, the research team undertook a review of successful initiatives implemented in other countries—through research stays or invitations to deliver seminars and workshops at our university—promoted by universities and professional associations and involving migrants and asylum seekers. Among these initiatives, the following courses are particularly noteworthy:

- A course designed and delivered in Braunschweig (Germany) by Otero (2018), aimed at public service interpreters. It included core content on the functioning of German institutions, particularly at the local level (social services, healthcare system, judicial administration, etc.), as well as an introduction to interpreting techniques and Public Service Interpreting. In addition, the course incorporated a specific module focused on professionalism and deontology and offered participants the opportunity to undertake internships in public bodies or institutions.
- A one-semester training programme for Public Service Interpreters at the University of Bergen (Norway), funded by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration. The programme combines online teaching with face-to-face sessions in Bergen, delivered on weekends in the form of lectures and workshops. Online instruction covers communication, translation theory, deontology for interpreters and specialised terminology. The on-site sessions focus on the development of interpreting techniques through group work and role-play, as well as lectures delivered by specialists in fields such as medicine, psychology, law, police work and terminology management (Johnsen, 2005).
- An intensive workshop held at the University Pablo de Olavide in 2022, designed to provide basic training for interpreters working with Ukrainian refugees. This initiative responded to the urgent need for Ukrainian-language interpreting services in Spain—as in many other countries—following the mass displacement caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The course included training in deontology governing interpreting in international protection contexts, interpreting techniques and practical training through role-play. It also incorporated specific modules on remote interpreting and mental health interpreting.
- The course *Assistenza linguistica per l'ambito giudiziario e socio-sanitario*, delivered by lecturers from the Department of Interpreting and Translation at the University of Bologna (Italy). The programme includes training in interpreting techniques, deontology, basic concepts of medicine, the Italian legal system, immigration regulations, and the theory and practice of remote interpreting, interpreting with minors and interpreting in emergency hospital settings, gynaecology, among others. The course comprises 140 teaching hours delivered on weekends in a hybrid format (online and face-to-face).

- Continuing education programmes entitled *Interprète/Médiateur·rice de services publics* and *Introduction à l'interprétation et à la médiation en contexte migratoire, en milieu social et médical*, offered by the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Mons (Belgium) in collaboration with the organisation Setis. These programmes are structured across four levels aimed at progressively developing interpreting competences and include training in deontological principles and communication, delivered through online and face-to-face sessions as well as role-play activities. A certification system is in place whereby, for example, a minimum of Level 2 is required to work as an interpreter within the organisation, while Level 3 grants access to sworn translator status (Delizée & Michaux, 2025).

In addition to these direct field experiences, the research team also examined similar training initiatives implemented in countries such as France, Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Japan, Austria, Slovakia, Peru, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany and Norway.

6. Training Course for Asylum Seekers and Refugees to Interpret in International Protection Contexts with Languages of Lesser Diffusion at the University Pablo de Olavide, in Collaboration with Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge (Seville)

Given the absence of training programmes of this nature in Spain, the research team concluded that two main options could be considered: either the creation, at university level, of specialised master's degrees in interpreting for international protection contexts—albeit with the limitation that such programmes would necessarily be offered in majority languages commonly used as *lingua franca*, such as French, English or Arabic (Relinque & Martín-Ruel, 2022)—or, alternatively, the design and implementation of courses aimed at providing basic training for interpreters working with languages of lesser diffusion. These courses would enable both aspiring interpreters and refugees already performing interpreting tasks without formal training to acquire foundational principles of deontology, interpreting techniques and sector-specific knowledge.

Through the different phases of research outlined in the preceding sections, the research team identified the competences considered essential and proposed the design of a competence profile for different types of training courses that could be delivered in international protection contexts, targeting *ad hoc* interpreters—that is, individuals who work as interpreters without prior professional training.

Accordingly, we propose addressing a genuine need within the field of international protection: the training of interpreters capable of working with a minimum guarantee of technical and ethical professionalism in international protection contexts, particularly with languages of lesser diffusion, and with the institutional backing of a higher education institution—specifically, the University Pablo de Olavide—in collaboration with refugee reception organisations (in this case, Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge).

Under this model, on the one hand, asylum seekers and refugees would be provided with high-quality interpreting services, thereby facilitating their integration into the host society and, more importantly, ensuring the protection of their rights. On the other hand,

the creation of such training programmes opens up professional opportunities for refugees themselves, enabling their productive integration into the host society in a manner that benefits all stakeholders involved.

6.1. Collaboration between the University Pablo de Olavide and Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge

The design of this training programme was considered essential not only from a university perspective—drawing on theoretical and practical knowledge of professional interpreting, academic literature and teaching experience—but also through close collaboration with reception organisations that engage directly with asylum seekers and refugees and with the real-life interpreting situations that arise in this field. By combining these two perspectives, it becomes possible to identify gaps and needs more accurately and to propose effective solutions to address them.

Accordingly, this first pilot course was designed by the research team at the University Pablo de Olavide in collaboration with Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge, an organisation with which the team has maintained ongoing contact since 2017 within the framework of the research projects referenced in this article. This long-standing collaboration has enabled the research team to analyse how interpreting services for applicants for international protection are contracted and delivered, to identify existing needs, protocols and challenges, and to examine the strategies used to address them. Over this period, the Federation has consistently expressed and demonstrated a clear need for professionally trained interpreters, particularly for languages of lesser diffusion.

Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge is a non-profit organisation founded in Andalusia in 1991 to provide a more effective and comprehensive response to the then emerging phenomenon of immigration. It currently comprises eleven member associations operating across centres throughout Andalusia, Melilla and the Canary Islands. Through the work of approximately 400 staff members and collaborators, the Federation assists thousands of individuals each year, addressing the primary needs of migrants arriving at its centres and promoting their integration into Spanish society (Federación Sur Acoge, 2025).

For its part, the University Pablo de Olavide, through members of the Interglosia research group with extensive teaching and research experience in the bachelor's degree in Translation and Interpreting, positions itself as a pioneering institution in this field. By responding to labour market demands for interpreting in languages of lesser diffusion with higher levels of quality and professionalism in international protection contexts, the University also promotes the inclusion of social groups whose potential is often underutilised, in collaboration with other key social actors such as third-sector organisations responsible for assisting asylum seekers and refugees.

6.2. Course Design, Objectives and Characteristics

The main objective of this pilot course is to provide interpreting training for individuals who wish to work or who are already working as interpreters in international protection contexts with Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge but who have not previously received formal training in Translation and Interpreting.

The target participants are native speakers of languages of lesser diffusion who have been residing in the host society for a period of time and who collaborate with or receive support from the partner organisation. Participants are required to have a sufficient level of Spanish to follow the training content and to perform interpreting tasks with a minimum level of communicative quality and fluency. Candidates are selected through personalised interviews conducted in Spanish. No prior university education is required.

The course content includes core concepts of the interpreting profession, with particular emphasis on basic principles of deontology. Specifically, the training covers foundational memory and reformulation exercises, basic principles of interpreting, distinctions between interpreting and mediation, differences between conference interpreting and Public Service Interpreting, an introduction to liaison interpreting, the interpreter's professional voice, preparation for interpreting assignments through thematic and terminological documentation, glossary compilation, verbal and non-verbal communication, emotional management and vicarious trauma, basic notions of international protection in Spain, interpreter-mediated situations in reception organisations, and remote interpreting. These components are delivered through a combination of theoretical instruction and practical application, including the simulation of real-life situations through role-play activities.

The course is delivered over a five-week period, comprising a total of 40 hours distributed across 15 sessions in a hybrid format: one face-to-face session per week held at weekends, one synchronous online session per week at a fixed time, and one asynchronous online session per week with flexible scheduling.

In this pilot edition, teaching activities were conducted between October and November 2025 in Seville and Jerez de la Frontera at the respective premises of Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge—cities from which the participants were selected—as well as a closing session at the University Pablo de Olavide.

The teaching staff responsible for delivering the course includes interpreting lecturers from the University Pablo de Olavide involved in research on Translation and Interpreting in international protection contexts, professional interpreters with field experience, and specialists from Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge in the theoretical areas addressed in the syllabus.

At the end of the course, a final assessment session is conducted, involving simulated interpreting tasks based on real-life situations, along with a questionnaire allowing participants to provide feedback and suggest areas for improvement.

To date, one edition of this pilot course has been completed, with 19 participants from diverse linguistic communities (including Wolof, Malinke, dialectal Arabic and Bambara).

This first edition was funded through the *Ayudas de Apoyo a la Transferencia de Conocimiento del VI Plan Propio de Investigación y Transferencia* (2023–2026) program of the University Pablo de Olavide. This funding enabled participants to attend the course free of charge and to benefit from the provision of learning materials and travel expenses for face-to-face sessions. This factor, combined with the absence of a requirement for prior higher education, is particularly significant given that economic, logistical and

administrative factors constitute major barriers to asylum seekers' access to higher education, as discussed in Section 2 of this article.

Given the success of this initial pilot edition—reflected in coverage across various media and dissemination channels (Europa Press, DUPO, *Diario de Jerez*, *La Voz del Sur*, *Andalucía Informa*, *Teleprensa*, *Sevilla Informa*[1])—the research team aims to deliver further editions of the course, subject to securing sufficient funding to maintain the same structure and conditions. In addition, other organisations responsible for receiving applicants for international protection in Andalusia have expressed both interest in and need for this type of training.

7. Conclusions

Higher education in Translation and Interpreting emerges as a crucial lever for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees, both by enhancing the quality of reception services provided and by creating a potential employment niche for refugees with linguistic competences in a sector characterised by growing social demand.

The reality of interpreting services within the Spanish reception system, as exemplified by the Andalusian context, reveals a paradox: while the right to interpreting is legally recognised and publicly funded as a fundamental right, ethical and professional quality remains deficient due to the absence of regulatory frameworks governing interpreters' qualifications.

The case studies analysed through the various research projects initiated since 2017 by members of the Interglosia research group at the University Pablo de Olavide, as detailed in this article, confirm that the lack of training in deontology leads to serious shortcomings. These range from loss of accuracy in narratives that are essential to asylum procedures to role overstepping, partiality, inadequate management of emotional strain, and the erosion of trust and confidentiality. In contexts where applicants' futures are at stake, deontology must be both flexible and rigorous, adapting to asymmetrical power relations and the need for cultural mediation, while avoiding any shift towards personal judgement and/or advocacy for one of the parties.

To address this crisis of professionalisation—particularly in situations involving languages of lesser diffusion—higher education institutions must adopt a proactive role. The demand for qualified professionals opens up significant pathways for labour market integration and social entrepreneurship, potentially contributing to the economic and social inclusion of refugees themselves in a sector of critical social relevance.

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[1] DUPO: https://www.upo.es/diario/cultura-social/2025/10/la-upo-y-andalucia-acoge-lanzan-un-programa-pionero-para-mejorar-la-atencion-a-personas-refugiadas-que-hablan-lenguas-de-menor-difusion/, Diario de Jerez: https://www.diariodejerez.es/jerez/jerez-celebra-formacion-pionera-andalucia_0_2004988328.html, La Voz del Sur: https://www.lavozdelsur.es/ediciones/jerez/hablando-wolof-malinke-bambara-en-jerez_343797_102.html, Andalucía informa: https://andaluciainforma.com/proyecto-pionero-upo-andalucia-acoge-proteccion-de-derechos-de-refugiados-con-lenguas-minoritarias/, Teleprensa (periódico de Almería):https://www.teleprensa.com/articulo/sevilla/upo-andalucia-acoge-lanzan-https://andaluciainforma.com/proyecto-pionero-upo-andalucia-acoge-proteccion-de-derechos-de-refugiados-con-lenguas-minoritarias/plan-formacion-interpretes-lenguas-menos-comunes-apoyo-refugiados/20251010094237223911 6.html, Sevilla Informa: https://sevillainforma.es/2025/10/09/la-upo-y-andalucia-acoge-lanzan-un-programa-pionero-para-mejorar-la-atencion-a-personas-refugiadas-que-hablan-lenguas-de-menor-difusion-el-proyecto-busca-formar-a-interpretes-sin-experiencia-previa/, Andalucía Información: https://www.andaluciainformacion.es/articulo/jerez-local/wolof-malinke-bambara-lenguas/20251011303333151106.html, Europa Press: https://www.europapress.es/andalucia/sevilla-00357/noticia-upo-andalucia-acoge-lanzan-plan-formacion-interpretes-lenguas-menos-comunes-apoyo-refugiados-20251010113941.html

Accordingly, after highlighting the main barriers faced by asylum seekers and refugees in accessing higher education—despite their considerable potential derived from their command of languages of lesser diffusion that cannot be covered by professional interpreters—and after identifying the professional needs and gaps in interpreting within international protection organisations, this article presents a pioneering initiative capable of addressing these interconnected challenges: the design and implementation of a pilot course aimed at training asylum seekers and refugees to work as interpreters in international protection contexts with languages of lesser diffusion at the University Pablo de Olavide, in collaboration with Federación Andalucía Acoge / Federación Sur Acoge (Seville).

Declarations:

Funding:
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Clinical trial number:
not applicable

Data availability:
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethical approval:
All human-related procedures were performed in accordance with relevant institutional guidelines and regulations of Universidad Pablo de Olavide.
The Research Ethics Committee of the Universidad Pablo de Olavide (CEIH), responsible for authorizing research involving human participants, has formally waived the requirement for ethical review, as the study does not involve the collection of data

Consent to participate:
Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully informed about the purpose and objectives of the study

Consent to publish:
Consent to publish is not applicable, as no identifiable personal data (such as names, photographs, or biometric information) were collected or included in this article.

Competing interests:
The author declares no competing interests.

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