

# Language Mediation. Security Aspects in the Police Force

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# The situation in Italy

- “Cultural mediators” and “language mediators” are used frequently in criminal investigations, both as mediators and interpreters
- The pro-active role of the ‘mediator’ is used in preliminary investigations to aid the police and the victim
- The more technical role of the “interpreter” is in the trial phase

- During the phase of preliminary investigations which involves the police and public prosecutor, the victim's testimony is fundamental and it is crucial that his/her testimony is understood by the other actors. In this phase the rights of the victim have a high priority.
- It is during the investigative phases that the victim decides to collaborate with the institutions, and the cultural mediator's role becomes essential.

- Laying the foundations: It is important to build up a trust-based relationship with the person willing to report on the people exploiting them. This requires an ability to listen and an awareness of their cultural background.
- When this work is done, the investigating magistrates verify whether the information gathered is consistent, thereby enabling the judicial authorities to start legal proceedings should they so choose.

- Typologies of crime in which mediators and interpreters are used most frequently
- 1. Prostitution. Collaboration with the victims of prostitution (very often non-Italians). We can understand how the women are recruited in their own countries (based on which criteria), how they travel to Italy and where in the country they are 'allocated'.

- 2. Human trafficking of migrants is the main cause of an increase in migrant-related crime, often victims of organized crime. The geographical position of Italy is conducive to this particular type of international crime.

- Recently, the Italian judiciary has expressed interest in language and cultural mediation, especially in the area of human trafficking, **where the Chief Public Prosecutor in the fight against Organized Crime, Pietro Grasso**. In November last year, he sent a circular letter to the Public Prosecutors, highlighting the need for mediators and emphasizing the need to establish a pool of mediators representing the most diffuse languages and ethnicities at the local immigration offices and police headquarters. The same circular specifies that the mediators are to be on call to assist the judiciary and police when necessary. This is a novelty in our country and reveals an increased awareness of the need for language services, which is very much welcomed.

- Other situations in which mediators work closely with police officers:
- To prevent illegal immigration and other immigrant-related crimes
- Conventions were signed in 2002 by some Government Territorial Offices and by CIR (Italian Council for Refugees), an independent charity organization set up in 1990 under the aegis of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.
- These conventions allow State border police offices to have CIR personnel available when linguistic, cultural mediation, legal counselling and documentation services are needed.
- Caritas also collaborates with CIR. Cultural mediators carry out mainly administrative functions in this case, but can act as a useful “filter” between migrants and institutions, enabling victims to flee organised crime.

# Voluntary organizations

- At the CIE (Identification and Expulsion Centre – Centri Individuazione Espulsione), associations like “Misericordia” use cultural mediators.
- Cultural mediators of various ethnic origin work at the Bologna Centre. They are hired by “Misericordia”, which signed an agreement with the Prefecture.

# Role of interpreters/mediators

- Cultural mediators can therefore act as the victim's "first interlocutor" and police officers may ask them to be present when statements are rendered. Their presence also "supports" the person who is supplying information and allows police officers to work more efficiently.
- Cultural mediators should not replace interpreters, but should work alongside them, unless interpreters can cover both roles.
- In Italy it is still difficult to find interpreters receiving adequate training as court interpreters for Arabic, Chinese, Farsi etc.

- Cultural mediators are not normally employed by the Ministry of Interior Affairs (Investigating Bureaus), but judicial police officers give them assignments when necessary and contact them directly or through other institutions or associations that cultural mediators work for (such as municipalities and other local authorities).