



A co-ordinated global initiative to enhance interview practice



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ABSTRACT

Interviews with suspects, victims, and witnesses are among the most important and regular tasks undertaken by police/law enforcement agencies to progress criminal investigations. The present article addresses a critical gap both in the literature and practice of investigative interviewing—namely, the lack of a coordinated global action to establish and implement a universal standard. While countries like England and Wales, Norway, and Australia have successfully adopted rapport-based practices, these efforts remain largely confined to individual national contexts. Broader collective efforts involving academics, activists, and practitioners worldwide—focused on expanding the adoption of investigative interviewing—are scarce. To address this gap, the article outlines developments in the last

few years that have attempted to provide a more universal approach to investigative interviewing and introduces a pioneering global action to support its implementation. The initiative and action are justified by their potential to improve global consistency, fairness, and effectiveness in investigative practices while fostering international collaboration. Its significance lies in broadening the reach of investigative interviewing, improving justice outcomes globally, and establishing a framework for sustained cooperation and knowledge exchange.

Key Words: Mendez Principles, ImpleMéndez, Investigative Interviewing; Coercive interrogation; Criminal investigation

Introduction

Over the last 20 to 30 years, our understanding has grown substantially concerning how interviewing and interrogation practices conducted by the police and other investigative agencies can lead to (i) false confessions from suspects; (ii) inaccurate testimonies and involuntary statements from victims and witnesses; and (iii) miscarriages of justice. Over a similar period, the growing research evidence has enlarged our awareness of what is effective practice in gathering complete and detailed accounts from suspects, victims and witnesses. Such coupling of knowledge from science and practice has prompted changes in practice and policy in several countries. For example, in England and Wales, miscarriages of justice triggered changes in law, policy and practice during the late 20th Century (Gudjonsson, 2018). Since 1986 a legal requirement in this country is that interviews with suspects must be electronically recorded. Analyses of such interviews conducted in this country in the late 1980s found that the interviewing often was not skilled (Milne & Bull, 1999). These changes included the introduction and implementation of an investigative interviewing model that moves away from an aim of seeking confession and towards a goal of the gathering of accurate and detailed information/evidence from suspects, victims and witnesses.

The embracing of such a model by the police service in England and Wales (and the outlawing and removal from practice of interview techniques associated with false testimony/confessions) led to better criminal justice outcomes. For example, there have been no quashed convictions emanating this

country's Court of Appeal based on unlawful interviewing techniques following the introduction of this interviewing model (Poyser, Nurse & Milne, 2018). This is in contrast to the situation prior to both introduction of (i) legislation in the mid-1980s; (ii) electronic recording of interviews from the turn of the 1990s; and (iii) training for law enforcement officers in newly introduced interviewing techniques from 1992 onwards that emphasise, among other things, the importance of building and maintaining rapport between interviewer and interviewee. That is, prior to these various developments, people were found to have confessed to crimes they had not committed largely as a result of their own vulnerability and police pressure, particularly relating to techniques found in a body of research likely to prompt such false admissions (for an overview, see Gudjonsson 2003; 2018).

Moreover, various studies of actual interviews conducted in England and Wales (e.g., Clarke & Milne, 2001; Soukara et al., 2009), which have been undertaken after the new techniques had been adopted, have each found an absence of malpractice that was often prevalent in interviews conducted at the turn of the 1980s (Irving, 1980; Softley et al., 1981). Walsh and Bull (2010) also found interviews were being ethically conducted, while also finding that in those interviews where British investigators employed the techniques more skilfully also were those interviews where more information was provided by interviewees.

Despite this progress, evidence via the media, human rights organisations, NGO reports and extensive research finds that in many parts of the world cruel, inhumane, coercive, and

unethical practices continue (Walsh, Bull, & Areh, 2025; Walsh, Oxburgh, Redlich, & Myklebust, 2016a, 2016b). Those rapport-based practices in countries such as England and Wales, Norway and Australia (described by the term ‘investigative interviewing’) have repeatedly and consistently been found in both scientific research and in actual cases to be not only more ethical and respectful of human rights, but also more effective in gaining detailed and reliable information from suspects, victims, and witnesses, providing the basis for sound decision-making by authorities conducting investigations and information-gathering processes and avoiding miscarriages of justice (Alison et al., 2013, 2014; Gabbert et al., 2021; Kelly, Redlich & Miller, 2015; Walsh & Bull, 2012).

These rapport-based interviewing models recognise and respect all interviewees’ human rights during custodial interviews/interrogations. Appropriate safeguards are provided through measures such as the electronic audio/video recording of police interviews with suspects and vulnerable or intimidated victims/witnesses (such as minority groups, children, those with mental or developmental disorders and those reporting being victims of human trafficking and sexual crimes, such as rape) (Bull, 2010). Furthermore, legal protections for suspects ensure that they are provided, inter alia, with accessible information concerning their rights, access to legal representation/advice and have access to parents or guardians; as well as outlawing certain interrogative tactics (such as police interviewers using aggressive questioning or exaggerating/lying about evidence).

The present article outlines developments in the last few years that have attempted to provide a more universal standard of rapport-based investigative interviewing (henceforth investigative interviewing) and focusses on a particular project that aims to support the introduction into practice, policy and law of a standard of practice that is in line with science, ethics and international legal norms.

A global initiative towards improving investigative interviews

The road towards improving investigative interviews, as a global initiative, began almost ten years ago when the United Nations’ then Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatments, Professor Juan Méndez, submitted a report that was then transmitted by the UN Secretary-General to the UN General Assembly. In this report, its summary stated that:

“The Special Rapporteur... advocates the development of a universal protocol identifying a set of standards for non-coercive interviewing¹ methods and procedural safeguards that ought, as a matter of law and policy, to be applied at a minimum to all interviews by law enforcement officials, military and intelligence personnel and other bodies with investigative mandates.” (Méndez, 2016, p.2).

When mentioning this “universal protocol” in 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur noted that:

“Encouragingly, some States have moved away from accusatorial, manipulative and confession-driven interviewing models with a view to increasing accurate and reliable

¹ While the term used here by Professor Mendez is non-coercive interviewing, we refer to those methods which we now know as those alluded to

by Professor Mendez as rapport based investigative interviewing (or more efficiently as investigative interviewing).

information and minimizing the risks of unreliable information and miscarriages of justice” and that “[t]he essence of an alternative information-gathering model was first captured by the PEACE model of interviewing adopted in 1992 in England and Wales... [I]nvestigative interviewing can provide positive guidance for the protocol...” (Méndez, 2016, p.2).

Background

In early 2018, after consultations with key stakeholders, the Anti-Torture Initiative (ATI) at the American University Washington College of Law partnered with the Geneva-based Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) and the Norwegian Center for Human Rights (NCHR) to establish a collaborative effort – led by experts from multiple fields – to promote and coordinate the development of such a document. The Steering Committee for the initiative consisted of specialists in law, psychology, criminology, intelligence gathering and human rights protection. The Committee also consulted with NGOs, policing practitioners and civil society representatives. They aimed to encompass practices beyond traditional policing and include all information gathering contexts such as intelligence agencies, immigration officials, and military personnel. The committee spent over three years integrating information across disciplines into one concise document covering the science, law and ethics of interviewing/interrogating. The finalised version built on consensus was published in June 2021 and was entitled the ‘Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering’. The Principles offer a clear and unique set of expectations (including minimum international

requirements) relating to law enforcement interviewing practices.

The 2021 document states that:

“Robust research supports the efficacy of an information-gathering approach to interviewing. Rapport-based, non-coercive methods offer effective techniques that can be successfully applied by trained professionals to gather criminal and intelligence information from interviewees. Establishing and maintaining rapport is an adaptive skill that helps create a working relationship between persons and enables better communication.” (Steering Committee on Effective Interviewing, 2021).

The ‘Principles’ document notes that an effective interview process will typically involve the following:

- Undertaking thorough preparation and planning, ensuring relevant safeguards are applied throughout;
- Keeping an open mind and creating a non-coercive environment;
- Establishing and maintaining rapport;
- Using scientifically supported questioning techniques;
- Actively listening to interviewees and enabling them to speak freely and completely;
- Skilfully/calmly contrasting what the interviewee says with what the interviewer already knows (or has already been said by the interviewee – where contradictions appear to have arisen within or between various accounts);
- Assessing and analysing both the information gathered from interviewees

and of the interviewing itself (Walsh et al., 2025)

The elimination of torture and inhumane treatment by the police (and more generally law enforcement) during their investigations is central to ethical and fair legal procedures worldwide – and the science is revealing that it makes our societies safer (Méndez, 2016). In recognition of this, a recent and important step towards encouraging fuller implementation of the Méndez Principles has been the launch of the joint UN Operations Manual in 2024. While principally directed at UN personnel, this Manual may well become equally useful to all practitioners who undertake investigative interviews as it succinctly spells out the practical steps recommended to be undertaken when conducting investigative interviews (UNoDC, 2024). This document is important as it sets out operational alternatives to coercive interviewing styles which persist, in our view, largely because investigators in many countries are unaware of other methods of interviewing people. Such perseverance with practices continues in ignorance of the rapport-based investigative interviewing approach – or they may not sufficiently understand this alternate approach (see for example, Gates et al., 2025; May et al., in press).

Toward an effective interviewing style

The Méndez Principles, alongside the UN operational manual, provide a normative framework to the international community for conducting interviews that avoid human rights abuses, including torture and ill-treatment, as well as making the investigation of crime more effective and consistent. Intrinsic to the Méndez Principles is the use of rapport-based investigative interviewing.

Such principles, policies and procedures have been accepted and adapted into practices and legal frameworks in several other countries (e.g., New Zealand) with positive effects on criminal investigations and case outcomes (Walsh et al., 2016a; 2016b). Other countries (e.g., Sweden, Belgium, Ireland, and The Netherlands) have also recently adopted (or are beginning to adopt) investigative interviewing practices, or at the very least have taken initial steps to incorporate investigative interviewing into policies. Yet, it remains understood from research and NGO reports that many countries are still undertaking less effective coercive and unethical interrogations and in contrast to the foregoing named countries are yet to implement such practices, whether operationally or in their policy making (Barela et al., 2020).

How forensic research has helped inform interview practice

Since it is known that the goal of obtaining accurate and reliable information requires interviewees (whether victims, witnesses or suspects) to trawl from their memory details as to what happened, interviewers should be mindful of the challenges in obtaining a description of events that is as free as possible from error or defect. Of particular concern in this regard, is the now well-established scientific finding that memory can be fragile, imperfect, incomplete and may degrade quickly (Howe, Knott, & Conway, 2017). Therefore, interviewers must adapt their tactics in contemplation of these vulnerabilities and should seek to gather and record an account of what occurred during an event under examination which is as factual and complete as possible without omissions or distortion. Since the purpose of interviews/interrogations is to achieve

information that can progress investigations, attempts therefore to obtain relevant and accurate information from those deliberately placed under duress during interrogations have been established as counterproductive due to the extreme effects of stress and anxiety has on the brain, impacting adversely on the ability to retrieve accurate recall (O'Mara, 2015).

These well-established coercive practices (e.g., offering inducements, deploying complex questions or confusing syntax) are now widely understood to prompt false confessions from those interviewed as suspects of crime and/or elicit tainted information, leading to flawed decision-making, wrongful convictions, miscarriages of justice and ruined lives (Gudjonsson, 2018). In the USA, it has been reported that 27% of overturned convictions, involved innocent suspects earlier making false confessions, largely under the duress of harsh and unfair police interrogation (see <https://innocenceproject.org/>).

Nevertheless, beliefs that coercive treatment in interviews is effective are known to persist, involving practices of intimidation and mistreatment (Walsh et al., 2025; 2016b). Yet this is a known misconception since such interview practices are not only ineffective, but also the relevant scientific research has found them counterproductive, putting at risk victims, perpetrators, institutions, and society at large (Vrij et al., 2017; Meissner et al., 2012). Furthermore, ill-treatment (such as torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment) transgresses international law. At the same time, research has found that ethical interviewing practices more likely lead to suspects making true confessions (Cleary & Bull, 2019), as well as them providing more reliable information (Walsh & Bull, 2012).

To add further evidence as to the importance of adopting modern investigative interviewing practices, studies in forensic linguistics have found that interviewees occupy a less powerful speaking role in the interview because of the status granted to investigators (Heydon, 2005). The opportunity for interviewees to provide information or to access their legal rights, such as the right to remain silent or the right to legal representation, is substantially reduced when there is any communication barrier between participants (see Erlich, Eades & Ainsworth, 2016). Additionally, linguistic research has demonstrated that when investigators control the talk during the interview, interviewees are less able to provide detailed accounts, which undermines the central purpose of an interview, being the elicitation of reliable and accurate information (Heydon, 2005). The investigative interviewing practices endorsed in the Méndez Principles provide a discourse framework that is better suited to safeguarding the linguistic rights of individuals being interviewed by the police than the coercive and dominating discursive behaviour promoted by guilt-presumptive and confession-focused interrogation practices. Thus, the Méndez Principles, based on science, law and ethics, represent an invaluable opportunity to help eradicate malpractices involved in harsh and hostile interrogations, especially where the resources needed to effect change are in short supply (Barela et al., 2020; Delahunty & Howes, 2017).

Effective interviewing while ensuring legal and procedural safeguards

Beyond this, the Méndez Principles endorse the application of legal and procedural safeguards when suspects, victims and witnesses are being interviewed. Together,

such ethical practices, when understood and operationalised in light of both EU Directives and decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (such as those establishing the right to legal advice) reduce risks of ill-treatment, produce more reliable information and help ensure that investigations have just and lawful outcomes.

Legal and procedural safeguards grounded in international legal norms are an essential component of the interviewing process (and of the Méndez Principles). Their effective implementation before, during, and after the interview contributes to the success of the process, by ensuring respect for human rights and enhancing the reliability and evidentiary value of the information obtained. These safeguards also increase the likelihood of fair treatment throughout the judicial processes and the attaining of legally sound outcomes. Various UN resolutions and EU directives have been issued that cover the arrest, detention and questioning of suspects to ensure ethical and effective interviewing is protected by international human rights law. For example, the right to silence is not specifically mentioned in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), but the European Court of Human Rights has held that this right under police questioning and the privilege against self-incrimination are generally recognized international standards which lie at the heart of the notion of a fair procedure under Article 6. Furthermore, affirmed by the UN Human Rights Committee, the UN General Assembly, and the ECHR (under Article 5), a person has the right to be informed of reasons for their arrest and why they are being deprived of their liberty. Additionally, those whose language is not that of the country in which they are being questioned by policing agencies have the

right to free access to an interpreter under ECHR Article 6(3)(e). Further safeguards are those that provide the right (i) to notify a relative or third party of one's detention; (ii) of access to legal advice; and (iii) of access to a doctor. Meanwhile UN resolution 43/173 Principle 23 relates to the electronic recording of each interview a person undergoes as a suspect of crime.

The European Court of Human Rights has thus emphasised that legal systems should be based upon the rule of law and that evidence obtained through interviews should not be obtained through forms of ill treatment but in accordance with police procedural due process (see Barela et al., 2020). The Méndez Principles represent a clear statement of expected practices. In this regard, these practices are defined as humane and being reflective of respecting human rights. Yet they have not so far been underpinned by any global strategy to positively affect practices in those many countries still known to be adhering to unethical practices, described in the Méndez Principles as 'cruel and inhumane'.

Action to help implement the Méndez Principles

In light of the foregoing, an initiative was taken that aims to form and develop sustainable networks in countries and regions that lay the foundations of actionable strategies to underpin the introduction and implementation of the Méndez Principles, mindful of the continuing advancement of the science that underpin them. In October 2023, the authors of the present article were part of a team that were successfully awarded funding from the European Co-operation in Science and Technology (COST) Association. The COST Action project was called

ImpleMéndez (where its aim was to help *implement* the Méndez Principles, hence the project's title). ImpleMéndez was built on established and developing networks of researchers, policing and legal practitioners and human rights organisations around the world.

These various partnerships, collaborations and networks underpin the development of mutual long-term, intra- and inter-country, regional and global networks between researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. These efforts aim to advance research, policy and practice by fostering scientific, and practical developments and supporting the implementation of the Méndez Principles in interviews with suspects, victims, and witnesses. As such, ImpleMéndez aims to create a network of researchers and practitioners that will help reduce practices likely to lead to adverse outcomes, such as obtaining unreliable evidence or confessions through coercive interviewing. Enhancing the accuracy and reliability of information gathered during interviews serves civil societies' rightful expectations toward their criminal justice systems. Globally, ImpleMéndez aims to undergird a commonality of interviewing/interrogation methods that will improve cross-jurisdictional cooperation, aiding the effective policing and investigation of transnational crimes. Moreover, the project also supports the broader aims of the Méndez Principles to include ethical information-gathering by intelligence agents, immigration officials, and all other investigative entities.

Despite research establishing the benefits of the investigative interviewing approach, more research is required in certain areas. ImpleMéndez also aims to facilitate networking of researchers examining these

matters to fuel the achieving of a larger scientific evidence base to further underpin the Méndez Principles, for example, we know that interviews do not exist in isolation. That is, whether conducted with suspects, victims or witnesses, they are part of evidence and information-gathering processes conducted throughout investigations. Decisions, such as whether to follow certain lines of enquiry and those concerning the generation of single or multiple hypotheses, impact upon police interviews. Furthermore, how humanely or otherwise people are treated upon arrest and how they are treated in custody may also have impact upon subsequent interviews (Skinns et al., 2020), though this matter has been barely covered in the extant research.

Moreover, central to many miscarriages of justice is a vulnerable interviewee, whether they are a witness, a victim or a suspect, and it is especially important to safeguard against inappropriate interviewing methods within this realm. Whereas all persons interviewed by the police find themselves in a vulnerable position because of the inevitable power imbalance and inherent stressful situation, some are understood to be in position of heightened vulnerability due to factors such as age, having a mental or developmental disorder, not speaking the same language as their interviewers (and thus requiring an interpreter), or other external factors (e.g., being victims of war crimes/ sexual offences). Such contexts require interviewers who are highly skilled, well trained, and are specialists at both dealing with complex cases and being able to adapt flexibly within the interview environment. A particular vulnerable group of interviewees is children. Despite the emergence of various interviewing models

around the world (e.g. the NICHD protocol²), research findings here have converged in revealing, for example, that the questioning strategies of interviewers have a major impact on what children report, the amount and quality of the information they report, as well as the perceived reliability of the disclosure (Brubacher & Powell, 2025; Korkman et al., 2024; Lamb et al., 2018). Researchers have also identified clear gaps in the research literature. For example, more research is needed on the developmental needs of adolescents in the investigative interviewing context, interpreter-mediated interviews and rapport-building (Talwar et al., 2024). Thus, the importance of appropriate, research-based training for investigative interviewers cannot be overestimated (Lahtinen, 2022).

A further area requiring more research concerns language diversity. That is, the Méndez Principles document (now available in many languages) encourages dissemination of the investigative interviewing method to police and other law enforcement officers in countries around the globe. However, a key challenge for agencies in various countries is likely to be ensuring the consistency of investigative interviewing when it is implemented in countries that have diverse linguistic, cultural and legal contexts (Hope et al., 2021). For instance, using precisely worded questions is at the centre of interviewing training promoted by the Méndez Principles. The specific impact of appropriately worded questions can, however, be lost in translation without careful consideration of how the interviewing principles will function in local languages and in situations where cross-cultural and multilingual interviewing is undertaken

through interpreters (Tipton, 2019). Such challenges may well be a barrier to successful implementation, requiring more research that helps enable a resolution. Similarly, cultural and legal contexts that affect the effective implementation of ethical interviewing practices must be understood and assessed and relevant research findings applied to any programme of implementation (Muniroh & Heydon, 2022).

Despite advances made in the forensic sciences (e.g., DNA testing), the outcome of most criminal cases and investigations remains highly dependent on personal interactions, such as interviews/interrogations of suspects, victims and witnesses. ImpleMéndez builds on the prior efforts within countries around the globe to implement the Méndez Principles, while introducing strategies to those countries who have made little or no progress towards such implementation. Our aims are consistent with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, that promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, and the building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, and particularly SDG 16.3, that refers to the importance of observing laws relevant at national and international level and ensuring access to justice for all.

In recognition of this, we draw upon wide disciplinary expertise in the ImpleMéndez research network: psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers, linguists, political scientists, criminologists, sociologists; social workers etc. This mix of expertise is believed to be particularly important when

² The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Protocol covers the essential phases

of investigative interviews with (amongst others) children (see La Rooy et al., 2015 for a review).

formulating solutions to adapt the Méndez Principles (without significant distortions of their original intent) and to provide an increased scientific base for any modified adoption. These aims will be undertaken through increasing networking arrangements to bring together researchers, practitioners and policy makers both from within the same country and from the same global regions, to work alongside ImpleMéndez to provide a platform for transformation.

Adaptation without distortion of the Principles might well be one of the key challenges of their wider implementation. We learn from members of the original steering committee that it was intended to keep the Principles to a document of no more than 40 pages upon its publication. As their work progressed, at one point 100 pages had been compiled. In meeting their original goals, the final document condensed what had been written and edited out other sections. Such re-work inevitably leads to concerns over perceived or actual gaps that might provide challenges for their implementation. For example, the matter of whether the Principles dovetail with both inquisitorial and adversarial criminal justice systems is barely covered. Moreover, the evidence base presently relies heavily on research largely (but not exclusively) on that conducted in Western countries. Nevertheless, despite these seemingly demanding challenges, it is still argued that the Principles are compatible with international ethical, legal and scientific standards. Indeed, ImpleMéndez through its large cohort of researchers from around the world is well positioned to help identify whether and how the existing knowledge base is more widely applicable.

Progressing beyond the state of the art and crossing barriers

We plan to build on and extend the application of the Principles to other investigative and information-gathering contexts, guided by the shared principles of science, ethics, and law. ImpleMéndez has already convened several national/international networks and organised training of practitioners, where the Méndez Principles have been the guiding tenet of educational activities for police and law enforcement agencies in those countries where the network/partnerships have been initiated (e.g. Portugal, Finland and Poland). ImpleMéndez members are not naïve to the challenges that lie ahead, recognising that some countries may display a greater willingness and institutional commitment to embracing the Méndez Principles, but that there may also be resistance elsewhere that may manifest (for example) in the denial of the existence of unethical interviewing and interrogation tactics. Such denials may emerge from a lack of recognition of interrogational practice that fall short of outright physical torture but are also known to be psychologically coercive and, as such, conflict with the Méndez Principles.

Furthermore, ImpleMéndez members have found during our earlier research that such a standpoint is often conceived through a misunderstanding as to the precise nature of what effective interviewing entails (May et al., in press; Walsh et al., 2015; 2016). The experiences of the authors in many countries have also demonstrated that law enforcement agencies are more likely to embrace an investigative interviewing approach when

they are able to identify (i) the negative effects of the established coercive interviewing techniques on their investigations and institutional goals; and (ii) the now known benefits of an investigative interviewing approach (Bull & Rachlew, 2019). Indeed, this is the process by which many countries have moved on from coercive and largely unskilled approaches to interviewing that involves evidence-based and scientifically driven, systematic and, above all, *ethical* interviewing training and practices.

Gaining momentum for transformation can be tackled in various ways. For example, we have made inroads with certain agencies and countries in working with key (usually either mid-ranking or senior) practitioners who can become either advocates or agents for change. In other contexts, appealing for change might be more successful in demonstrating the economic costs of failed investigations, while in others we have observed in certain countries how frontline officers aspire to enhance their professionalism through these more skilful rapport-based interviewing techniques, once they have been introduced to them (May et al., in press).

Furthermore, during recent visits the first author has made to certain countries and meetings held with others, in addition to the insight gained from chapters in a recent international handbook (see Walsh et al., 2025), beliefs held that the country is “fully compliant” with the Méndez principles tend to stem from a legal perspective only. That is, criminal procedures and laws are regarded as in line with the Méndez Principles. However, such a viewpoint, in the absence of any evaluation, overlooks the matter that practice may tell a very different story.

Our groundwork with certain countries across Europe has provided a proof of concept of how to inform key players (such as practitioners and policy makers), guide them through processes of policy, organisational and operational changes, and deliver a plan of implementation (and then help these countries undertake that plan). Such experience of working with countries has demonstrated that practices have evolved from generation to generation without the undertaking of any critical appraisal of these outdated techniques. However, at the same time as dispensing learning, we recognise that there is also opportunity for learning from those countries in, say, understanding better the challenges involved in any country implementing the Méndez Principles. This will, in turn, help shape future training programmes, while further developing the scientific base.

We also recognise that managing expectations will be an important matter that will require attention. That is, the employment of investigative interviewing methods will, for some, necessitate the mastering of new skill sets and attitudes, in moving away from unethical methods that some may have employed for many years. Support measures need to be in place to discourage interviewers from returning to those coercive methods/ ensuring that they do not turn back to problematic practices when, for example, experiencing resistance by ‘difficult’ interviewees (such resistance often being caused by the nature of the interrogating/interviewing itself though – see Alison et al., 2013; 2014). Among these measures is the requirement to support supervisors so that they are given the skills and understanding of the Principles and, in turn, ensure they have the support and

conviction of all senior ranks. Such learning will better reinforce lessons learned by front-line officers in the training and ensure that they are embedded into common practices. As such, in a programme of transformation we contend that the first tier of training should be directed towards senior and at least supervisor-ranked officers so that they can support their front-line counterparts as they in turn learn new practices.

Our deliverables

By June 2025, in three countries new ‘Méndez Centres of Investigative Interviewing’ (i.e., Portugal, Norway and Ireland) had been introduced with plans in the next two years for several others. These Centres are intended as repositories and forums for ideas exchange within and between practitioner, academic researcher, and policy-making communities and circles, and with other countries through the ImpleMéndez network, encouraging cross-border research, idea-sharing and collaborations. The Centres will also be those places where conditions are cultivated as part of the action for further research, either conducted by ImpleMéndez members with in-country experts or by in-country stakeholders independently. Regardless, such Centres will provide opportunities where research can be undertaken and thus provide scope for scientific advancements. As such, the Centres can bolster a resilience model that will sustain scientific developments beyond the life-cycle of ImpleMéndez, undertaken locally to create evidence bases, allowing stakeholders hitherto inexperienced with the scientific research process to become familiar and more expert. As part of building longer term capacity, we also plan to deliver training schools where, for example, key policing decision makers and trainers will attend in

efforts to build a networking structure that creates ‘an ecosystem for learning’ to help implement the Méndez Principles. This ecosystem of learning would possess these following elements;

- Legal frameworks and bases (such as the right to legal representation in interviews with suspects and adequate anti-torture regulation)
- Policies that support ethical interviewing, ensuring standards are transparent and accountable (such as mandatory audio/video recording of such interviews and those policies which incorporate measures to assist those viewed as vulnerable interviewees)
- Senior management in policing creating, where previously they do not exist, and adopting institutional policies that support the implementation of the Méndez Principles, and foster conditions that prevent coercive practices)
- Understanding by police and law enforcement institutions (that adopt/adapt the methods of effective investigative interviewing)
- Training materials and educational support (including those in native languages) to help practitioners (with officers learning the methods of effective investigative interviewing through appropriate training materials, curriculum, supervision policies and instruments of assessment and evaluation, alongside the implementation of performance indicators that denote progress)
- Professional support and coaching (that relates to sufficient numbers of suitably qualified trainers in addition to a

meaningful training regime that allows resources to learn and apply the learning)

- Research (undertaken to find methods that function effectively given local contexts involving police organisations providing sufficient access to interview data and facilities to undertake such research). The data sets will arise from scientific missions, meetings, training events and other interfaces with researchers, policy makers, practitioners and other professionals, all subject to strict ethical clearances, conditions of participation, and data protection.

From these elements, ImpleMéndez, working with stakeholders aims to create a matrix of implementation plans based (among other matters) on the countries' respective exposure to the Méndez Principles. Such plans will underpin 'ImpleMéndez Strategic Frameworks for Implementation of the Mendez Principles (or ISF-IMP), adapted and extending existing models of 'Frameworks for Investigative Transformation' (Fahsing & Rachlew, 2025; Griffiths & Milne, 2018). Each ISF-IMP will be agreed through collaboration with networks of researchers, practitioners and policy makers in countries that are yet to adopt or fully endorse those Principles (see Figure 1).



FIGURE 1: *The ISF-IMP model*

The ISF-IMP model, as depicted in Figure 1, illustrates among other matters, that no single country at present is likely to be completely compliant with the Méndez Principles. The model also serves to depict that for some countries, the scale of the challenge of becoming fully compliant is not least in terms of resources but also in terms of fundamental changes in culture, practices, policies and systems that are necessary if full compliance is to be achieved. For some countries, this may well take many years. However, the model does suggest the strategies that are necessary to underpin change and begins to answer the question often posed to us “What steps do we need to take to effect change?”. The ISF-IMP model also acts as a suitable riposte to those comments we frequently confront that relate to beliefs received from those who contend that their country is already fully compliant. As we have already noted, we have found in our previous work (see Walsh et al., 2025) that such beliefs are probably predicated on the basis that (often well established) criminal procedure codes for any nation state have been fashioned robustly over several decades. However, how these procedural codes are followed is unknown, but often found (through research and case studies, for example) to be of concern as they are some distance from the intention of the Principles – and frequently understood to be in contradiction of them. Our earlier point relating to adaptation without distortion of the Méndez Principles further resonates here too. It is in this regard that the capabilities and the range of experience and expertise of ImpleMéndez can provide support.

ImpleMéndez aims to offer fresh insights to strengthen the pillars of the ecosystem while recognising and taking into account previous relevant implementation efforts by any

country or region. Further, amongst the members of ImpleMéndez are those who have experience training lawyers who represent suspects interviewed by the police, and experience informing magistrates and judges about investigative interviewing best practices. Such experience will be vital in providing criminal and civil justice professionals with the essential tools and skills they need to undertake their roles, while increasing their awareness and understanding of the Méndez Principles. Such an ecosystem will be supported by the ‘Méndez Centres of Investigative Interviewing’, being the hubs for stakeholders to advance science, policy and practice during and beyond the project life-cycle.

When we first learned that we had succeeded in obtaining funding for the project in May 2023, ImpleMéndez had a membership numbering 36 from 20 countries. By its first anniversary, the numbers have grown to over 250 from 54 countries and as of June 2025 has a membership of around 340 from 58 countries. Among those countries are all those 25 countries that the funder; COST, has designated as Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs). Those countries termed as ITCs are those where resources are generally known to be limited that may inhibit networking. Fifty eight percent of our current members are female. In the first year of ImpleMéndez, our members had already been involved in the authoring of 24 chapters in a highly relevant book (Walsh et al., 2025) alongside published articles (e.g., Kvanvig, Barela, & Daly, 2024; May et al., in press; Pavalek & Soldov, 2024). Finally, to demonstrate our commitment to building capacity among ImpleMéndez members is the presence of our Young Researchers and Innovators (i.e., as defined by COST, those aged under 40 at the time of their initial

involvement). These make up around one-third of the membership. Funding not only supports meetings and attendance at Training Schools but also provides support to attend high level international scientific conferences, as well as offering opportunities for members to attend such conferences for the dissemination of ImpleMéndez related research. Finally, we offer funding for so-called Short Term Scientific Missions. These are visits (of one week to six months' duration) made by one member to another's host institution to develop their skills and knowledge relative to ImpleMéndez.

DISCUSSION

The 2021 Méndez Principles document, emergent from three years' work by the scientific and legal communities, represents a golden opportunity to introduce widescale policy, procedural and cultural change, but this can only be achieved with the momentum of a global network providing expertise and support in-country. These Principles, when read in light of UN instruments and emergent Strasbourg jurisprudence, are a game-changer. Globally, civil society has an increased intolerance regarding the use of torture, errors of justice and failed trials/investigations. However, even if some countries individually commence considering developments that may eventually lead to the adoption there of the 'Principles', no global strategy existed to assist such transitions. In ImpleMéndez, we have developed a strategic plan of international engagement. ImpleMéndez will step into the lacuna to provide facilitation for the necessary change. While some countries will inevitably be more eager or able than others to embrace these changes, without

such leadership directly assisting those based in countries and regions of the world where practices remain unethical/inhumane, any progress towards change will be either very slow or fail to develop at all.

The effects of such inertia include continued miscarriages of justice, alongside imbuing little public confidence in the police (and other investigative organisations) whose low ethical and professional standards would continue to be questioned and compromised by the undertaking of unethical and ineffective practices. The criminal justice system's entire legitimacy is thereby called into question. A more strategic and encompassing approach is required that in each country convenes networks of researchers from a range of academic disciplines, policy makers, and practitioners to collaborate with each other to prompt changes (possibly for the first time in some countries) with policymakers, practitioners and researchers from elsewhere in the world to assist them.

As such, ImpleMéndez will act as a basis for joint learning and co-produced transitional strategies over and beyond the project's four years' life-cycle. ImpleMéndez recognises that in many countries this duration would be insufficient to ensure a permanent transition to effective interviewing, but it will lay a strong foundation on which future ones can be built, to progress our mission on a more long-term, sustainable basis. This is not a weakness of ImpleMéndez, but rather a strength as we seek to break new ground and effect genuine change. It is a change that is urgent and overdue.

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