



POSITION PAPER

TO: UN System Organizations
Short-term staff interpreters of UN System Organizations

FROM: AIIC UN Negotiating Delegation (un@aiic.net); AIIC Executive Committee (exco@aiic.net)

SUBJECT: Distance Interpreting from hub, temporary guidance while measures to fight the CoVid-19 pandemic are in effect and until negotiations concerning distance/remote interpreting with the UN System Organizations are concluded.

DATE: 17 June 2020

PLACE: Geneva, Switzerland

BACKGROUND

On 15 April, AIIC's UN Negotiating Delegation and the Executive Committee issued a position paperⁱ outlining a series of recommendations for distance interpreting (DI) when working *in extremis* from interpreters' own premises until the COVID19 pandemic restrictions are lifted.

As measures to fight COVID19 are gradually being lifted, more Organizations are opting for in-house hub solutions whereby booths are video-linked to some or all speakers and/or audience members in one or multiple remote locations. The existing hub settings vary between in-house interpreting systems with their hardware consoles connected to a videoconference platform or remote-interpreting platform and remote-interpreting platforms with soft-consoles.

The **2019 UNCEB-AIIC Agreement**ⁱⁱ stipulates in footnote 5¹ that Parties will consult one another on remote/distance interpretation (i.e. working conditions).

A technical studyⁱⁱⁱ carried out in 2019 concluded that the existing platforms do not fully comply with the relevant ISO standards, as required under paragraph 58 of the Agreement. AIIC's Technical and Health Committee will be conducting a new study. In the meantime, it is preferable to use hub solutions in which existing interpreting systems with hard consoles are connected to hub-enabling videoconferencing software. Such a solution

¹ "The Parties will individually review and continue to consult one another and other stakeholders on the issues of sign languages and remote/distance interpretation, as considered appropriate."

allows for maximum control of all interpreting consoles by qualified in-house technicians and reduces the overall technical equipment requirements (RSI platforms normally require two computers, one for the soft console and another for documents, terminology, etc.).

In addition to the acoustic input, the visual sensory input available to interpreters also plays a decisive role in the cognitive load interpreters have to bear in order to perform at the highest quality standards. To work to this level of quality, professional interpreters must invest greater cognitive effort and tolerate higher levels of stress. In distance interpreting settings, visual input - and thus contextual information - is often considerably reduced (with interpreters often deprived of a full view of the audience, and even the speakers at times). To date, none of the videoconference or remote interpreting platforms are ISO compliant and, even if they were, most devices used by participants are not (computer, microphones, etc.).

Thus, working conditions have to be adapted in order to avoid a rapid decline in quality as well as additional health and safety risks for the interpreters that could lead to temporary or permanent incapacity to work.

Awaiting a consultation mechanism meeting specifically on remote/distance interpreting, the ND offers guidance for interim working conditions based on current research and evidence regarding cognitive load and stress levels in distance interpreting settings.

CONCLUSIONS

In **AIIC Covid-19 Distance Interpreting Recommendations for Institutions and DI Hubs**^{iv}, Organizations were reminded that modalities of work with interpreters located together should always be preferred over work from home. Until restrictive measures are fully lifted, temporary guidance on working conditions from a hub is necessary.

While the Agreement does not stipulate distance interpreting conditions, the Negotiating Delegation accepts this modality subject to the restrictions below based on a correlation between sensory input (or lack thereof) and the relevant working conditions (increase in manning strength, reduction in working hours, increase in rest time, etc.).

AIIC's minimum standards and best practice recommendations applicable to working conditions for video remote conference interpreting in simultaneous mode (also referred to as Remote Simultaneous Interpreting - RSI, or Distance Interpreting - DI) and for the establishment of distance interpreting hubs can be found in the **AIIC Guidelines for Distance Interpreting**^v.

AIIC has always stood for delivering quality interpretation while ensuring interpreter health and safety; the distance interpreting scenario will be no exception.

The following guidance should be applied until more evidence-based findings on distance/remote interpreting become available and negotiations between the parties take place. It will be subject to close evaluation and will be revised by AIIC's Negotiating Delegation in due course.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

The UNCEB-AIIC Agreement notwithstanding, the following workload provisions apply to Distance Interpreting from a hub for all conference interpreters of signed and spoken languages.

1 day contract:	1 assignment of 3 hours (divisible in 2 segments)
2 day contract:	EITHER 2 assignments (one per day) of 3 hours each (divisible in 2 segments) OR 3 assignments of 2 hours each (non-divisible) in total
3 day contract:	EITHER 3 assignments (one per day) of 3 hours each (divisible in 2 segments) OR 4 assignments of 2 hours each (non-divisible) in total
4 day contract:	EITHER 4 assignments (one per day) of 3 hours each (divisible in 2 segments) OR 6 assignments of 2 hours each (non-divisible) in total
5 day contract:	EITHER 5 assignments (one per day) of 3 hours each (divisible in 2 segments) OR 7 assignments of 2 hours each (non-divisible) in total
6 day contract:	EITHER 6 assignments (one per day) of 3 hours each (divisible in 2 segments) OR 9 assignments of 2 hours each (non-divisible) in total

MANNING STRENGTH: For multilingual meetings, two interpreters per booth, three interpreters per Arabic and Chinese booths; for bilingual meetings (one booth), three interpreters per booth.

COMPENSATION FOR EXTRA WORKLOAD: Compensation for the extra workload shall take the form of one or more additional rest days being added to the appointment where possible. If time off is not possible during the period of appointment, compensation shall be at the rate of one full day's pay for each interpreter concerned per extra assignment.

MIXED TEAMS: Where due to lack of availability of local interpreters or restrictions impeding some interpreters from travelling to the hub and interpreters may be required to work remotely, Organizations may have to resort to recruiting mixed teams.

For such exceptional cases, all interpreters recruited for the meeting shall be notified. The temporary guidance concerning reinforced teams, issued in the 15 April Position Paper on Work from Home, applies for any single booth not fully manned at the hub.

Organizations shall issue interpreters working from the hub and from home Letters of Appointment and follow the remuneration policy under the UNCEB-AIIC Agreement and also provide for training in the use of remote interpreting technology.

RSI PLATFORM CERTIFICATION: The holder of such certification has received training/induction on the interpreting features of the software only and this certification

on its own cannot be understood as accreditation of a conference interpreter or validation of the individual's competence as a conference interpreter.

VIDEO SPEECHES: In remote conditions, statements are frequently replaced with pre-recorded videos. While this could be a way to circumvent potential connectivity issues, the sound quality is often no better due to the equipment used (ISO compliance). Following normal practice, written scripts of the videos should be provided to the interpreters or they should be given the possibility to watch the videos before the meeting.

Annex A: Number of assignments per contract duration

Annex B: RSI Template for Contractual Disclaimer and Liability Clauses

Annex C: Supplementary Reference Documents

ⁱ United Nations Negotiating Delegation. "UN Interpreters: Distance interpreting from home, in extremis". <<https://members.aiic.net/page/9015>><<https://aiic.ch/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/aiic-un-sector-position-paper-15042020.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱ United Nations Negotiating Delegation. "AIIC-United Nations Agreement (2019)". <<http://aiic.net/p/8805>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Technical Committee, Executive Committee. "Technical study on transmission of sound and image through cloud-based systems for RSI". <<http://aiic.net/p/8831>>.

^{iv} Executive Committee. "AIIC Covid-19 Distance Interpreting Recommendations for Institutions and DI Hubs". <<http://aiic.net/p/8964>>.

^v AIIC Taskforce on Distance Interpreting. "AIIC Guidelines for Distance Interpreting (Version 1.0)". <<http://aiic.net/p/8734>>.

ANNEX A

Number of assignments per contract duration

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
One day contract	3 hours (divisible)					
Two day contract	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)				
	or					
	2 hours	2 hours				
	2 hr break					
2 hours one day only						
Three day contract	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)			
	or					
	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours			
	2 hr break					
2 hours one day only						
Four day contract	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)		
	or					
	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours		
	2 hr break					
2 hours one day		2 hours one day				
Five day contract	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	
	or					
	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	
	2 hr break					
2 hours one day			2 hours one day			
Six day contract	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)	3 hours (divisible)
	or					
	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2 hours
	2 hr break					
2 hours one day		2 hours one day		2 hours one day		

Each box represents an assignment.

Three hour assignments (orange) can be divided into two segments if required, with a 1h30 break in between. When combined, both segments shall not exceed a total of three hours.

ANNEX B

RSI Template for Contractual Disclaimer and Liability Clauses

In accordance with **AIIC Covid-19 Distance Interpreting Recommendations for Institutions and DI Hubs**, Organizations shall provide interpreters working from their own premises, *in extremis*, where no other options are available due to legal or official restrictions, with an exemption from liability applicable under relevant national and international law as follows:

Disclaimer

The undersigned is hereby exempt from any liability for:

- i. interruption of service;
- ii. pixelation, freezing or loss of visual input;
- iii. partial or complete loss of audio, audible artefacts;
- iv. unauthorised access to personal or confidential data;
- v. leaking of information due to inadequate soundproofing;
- vi. data loss.

A visible disclaimer, worded as follows, shall apply to the distribution, broadcast or transcription of interpretation, or parts thereof, stating the following:

The interpretation of the event serves to facilitate communication and does not constitute an authentic or verbatim record of the proceedings. Only the original speech is authentic. As the quality of audiovisual input both to interpreters and participants is dependent on the network infrastructure and connectivity of third parties (including that of remote participants and interpreters, if applicable), no liability can be incurred for interruption of service; pixelation, freezing or loss of visual input; partial or complete loss of audio, audible artefacts or other problems of a technical nature; nor for the accuracy of the interpretation provided. Interpreters may halt interpreting to allow for a better connection to be established should this prove necessary.

This applies to:

- i. live private distribution of event;
- ii. live public distribution of event (e.g. web-streaming);
- iii. post-facto reproduction and/or distribution of any recording of the event;
- iv. transcription of interpretation.

Loss of service

The undersigned is to notify the contracting party to any audiovisual or other deficiencies that impede the quality of service including but not limited to:

- i. pixelation, freezing or loss of visual input;
- ii. partial or complete loss of audio, audible interference.

The interpreter can only interpret what is heard or has been signed and shall therefore indicate "inaudible" or "not visible" where this is the case. In the case of poor audiovisual input, interpreting may need to be paused to allow for technical problems to be resolved.

The contracting party or platform provider shall be responsible and liable for:

- Ensuring the quality and continuity of the data connection.

- Providing interpreter interfaces offering the same basic functionalities as interpreting consoles according to ISO 20109:2016 Annex B.1.

- Ensuring that the interpreter interface can reproduce audio frequencies as set out in ISO 20109:2016 (4.2).

- Ensuring adequate hearing protection as set out in ISO 20109:2016 (4.5).

- Ensuring that the interpreter has access to conference documents and can view them live as they are displayed to the audience.

- Providing the interpreter with adequate soundproofing advice, material and equipment to prevent audible leaking of sensitive or otherwise confidential information (ideally booths, as per ISO standards 2603 (permanent booths) or 4043 (mobile booths)).

- Where platform providers control the interpreter's PC remotely, providing interpreters with a separate laptop to prevent platform access to personal data.

- Access to a secure and controlled IT network, e.g. via a VPN tunnel and employer laptop.

- Ensuring that the system used has built-in hearing protection to prevent hearing damage.

- Ensuring that the setup allows for effective teamwork and booth partnering:

- i. to ensure consistency in the outgoing channel rendition;
- ii. to take over in the case of an untoward event: physiological (e.g. coughing fit), technical or other unanticipated event of such nature to prevent booth partner from continuing;
- iii. to be able to provide immediate effective, real-time support as and when required, e.g. when numbers, acronyms or proper names are read out, unfamiliar or technical terms are used; when booth partner is interpreting a written document read out by a speaker at speed (especially when the speaker omits a paragraph or changes the order of the presentation).

- Ensuring that the setup allows for effective relay;

- Ensuring that the setup allows for effective interaction with the moderator/chair and relevant technicians;

- Ensuring that the interpreter has views of the speaker, moderator/chair and interpretation users (for live feedback on performance);

- Specifying event duration, team strengths and pauses or breaks in the contract, in accordance with the following paragraph:

- Ensuring interpreter teams are strengthened or that meeting durations are shortened to take into account the interpreter's increased cognitive load in remote settings, thereby enabling a sustained quality of interpretation due to:

- i. receiving input via an indirect, video-mediated source;
- ii. the limited communication possibilities with other team and/or booth mates;
- iii. setups in which the sound quality received by the interpreter does not meet the standards of face-to-face settings due to:
 - a. inadequate end-user audiovisual equipment;

- b. inadequate audiovisual transmission; or
- c. both.

Responsibilities of the event organiser

The event organiser shall ensure technicians, interpreters and participants have the requisite equipment and training prior to testing before the event.

Such training for interpreters and participants shall include:

- i. establishing a secure internet connection for the meeting;
- ii. establishing a stable internet connection for the meeting;
- iii. protection of personal and client data;
- iv. how to use the platform or system in question;
- v. how hearing protection is integrated into the platform, system, software or peripherals:
 - I.acoustic shock or peak load protection;
 - II.constant noise exposure protection.

Such training for speakers should include safe microphone practices:

- i. preventing microphone feedback;
- ii. preventing audio shocks.

The event organiser shall require feedback from interpreters on the following observable parameters, during testing and subsequent to the event:

Audio quality indicators:

- i. parts totally inaudible;
- ii. loss of certain words or parts thereof, "clipping";
- iii. audible artefacts: hiss, crackles, hum, feedback;
- iv. tonal quality limited, but otherwise no sound loss;
- v. broadcast quality or equivalent.

Video quality indicators:

- i. frozen picture;
- ii. picture lag (sound and image not synchronised);
- iii. heavy pixelation, blurring, low resolution;
- iv. slight pixelation, images not sharp;
- v. broadcast quality or equivalent.

The event organiser shall ensure interpreters have ISO-compliant audiovisual input at all times when interpreting remote speakers.

The event organiser shall ensure the interpreter has all relevant meeting documentation and/or speaking notes prior to the event.

The event organiser shall ensure and test effective interaction possibilities between the interpreters, team leader, remote technicians and the chair.

The event organiser shall ensure and test a back-up mechanism to enable interaction between the interpreters, team leader, remote technicians and the chair in the event of system failure.

The event organiser shall establish a protocol in advance for interpreter intervention in case of inadequate audiovisual input during the event.

ANNEX C

Supplementary Reference Documents

AllC Taskforce on Distance Interpreting (2019) *AllC Position on Distance Interpreting*. <https://aiic.net/page/attachment/1864>.

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