AIIC statshots: numbers worth a thousand words

The data has been processed and up-to-date pictures of how, where and how much AIIC members work are now available.

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With 22.1% of members responding, the sample was sufficient to deliver sound statistical data for 2010. Work rebounded from 2009 levels, but still remained below figures reported in the 2006-08 period. Interpreters in their prime still work more than average, but younger interpreters are catching up and at times even taking the lead. The all-important bottom line is positive: general satisfaction with the profession is high.

Work: more or less?

With reports of more or much more work (red and dark blue lines respectively), there is cause for optimism. Figures for both rebounded in 2010, while the percentage of respondents reporting less or much less work (purple and light blue) declined from 2009 peaks.

Trend by region

The graph seems to confirm a recovery, but one in which not all regions shared equally.

In the Middle East and Arab Countries interpreters reported a drop in work more often than an increase (38.9% vs. 16.7% and 33.3% vs. 26.7% respectively), and the figures for Europe were nearly equal (24.4% vs. 25.6%).

The flip side of the coin is seen most clearly in Africa where 50% of all respondents worked more and only 11% less. The curious note was struck by South America, which tallied the lowest number for stable work levels (31.4%), but the 2nd highest for more work (43.2%) and 4th highest for less work (25.5%). Being a large, diverse region may have something to do with that.

Trend by age

Work trends tend to change with age. Members 60 and over showed the greatest drop in work days, while colleagues under 40 were more likely to see their workload on the upswing or at least stabilizing.

Evolution by sector
On average members worked 94 days (dark blue line below), a slight improvement over the previous year (92), but still inferior to figures reported between 2006 and 2008. Both the Private Market (PMS - red) and the Agreement (AS - green) Sectors followed suit. Only the Special Terms Market (organisations not party to any agreement and setting their own terms of employment – purple line) was stable over the 5-year period, but it is hardly large enough to offset the trend of the other two, which together represent over 90% of work done by AIIC members.

2010 by sector

For differentiation purposes, the Agreement Sector was subdivided into EU, UNSS, Coordinated Organisations, and Global Union Federations, while the Private Market Sector was divided between work obtained through an intermediary and that negotiated directly with a client.

From a total of 94 days, the Private Market once again represented the largest share (43 days or 47.7%), almost evenly split between direct clients and intermediaries.

Overall the AS accounted for 39 days, with the EU the largest sub-sector with 19 days (23.3% of global work days but a higher percentage for Europe-based respondents), followed by the UNSS (15%).

2010 by geographic area

Africa and USA/Canada were the only two areas surpassing the mean. The category “Rest of World” groups together a number of heterogeneous countries and cannot be seen as illustrative. Respondents in Europe, South America and Asia Pacific suffered most from a still-difficult market.

Although Africa is a stellar performer, it is still 9 days under its 2006 figure. Asia-Pacific lost 3 days from 2009, but is still above its 2006 level of 60. USA/Canada has rebounded from a 14-day decline in the 2005-07 period.

Due to the high percentage of AIIC members residing in Europe (74.4%, with an equivalent percentage of global days worked), the European average has always tended to fall below the world average. Europe does, however, seem stable over the 2006–10 period with an average hovering around 90 days/year.

2010 by age groups

As may be expected, well-established interpreters (age 30–59) again enjoyed an above-average number of working days, whereas colleagues over 60 (22% of respondents) fell below the average of 94. For the first time, younger respondents (20-29) surpassed the mean. It would seem that EU recruitment policy (category 1 for interpreter with less than 250 days of work, numerous “contrats d’insertion” with an obligation of Brussels domicile, and programmed visits to EU institutions for MA courses from all around Europe) has borne fruit.

Days worked: advantage to formal AIIC groups

There seems to be a definite advantage to being a member of an AIIC consultant interpreter group. On average they worked 6 days more than interpreters not belonging to a group.
Modes of interpreting

The breakdown by mode showed little change from 2009: 84% of all reported days (freelance and staff alike) were in simultaneous, whereas pure consecutive represented just 5.5%. If liaison (2%) is considered to be consecutive, however, the figure climbs to 7.5%.

Almost every respondent worked in simultaneous during the year (94.4%), whereas consecutive was practiced by 51%, interpreting with “bidule” by 38.7%, chuchotage by 40.1%, and liaison interpreting by 25.5%. Among those who worked in consecutive, such work represented 12% of their total days.

New Technologies

Remote interpreting is being used more often and being performed by more interpreters. Almost 40% of respondents reported having worked with remote speakers, and a bit more than 25% with a remote audience. Such work increased by 50% from 2005 to 2010.

Other gainful employment?

As in previous years, about 60% of respondents declared not needing or wanting to work other than as a conference interpreter. Among those who did have another job, the income it represented went as high as 50% of total income.

Comments submitted with questionnaire

Respondents were invited to add additional comments. Here we summarize the ones heard most often and voiced by members in at least 3 different regions.

- The dominance of English is having a detrimental impact, sometimes leading to interpretation not being used at all. Complaints heard: Globish is increasingly used in EU institutions; inexorable trend towards EN being used as only conference or floor language; growing use of EN means less work, and increasing number of delegates speak EN even when their own language is a conference language with interpreting available.
- Recruitment and payment conditions are deteriorating. Complaints heard include: payment made too long after work performed (by both private clients and organisations); increasing use of options and last-minute confirmation of the same; less personal contact with client than in the past; poor or unacceptable conditions being offered; many last-minute offers, and frequent cancellations.
- The general environment is not all it could be in these difficult times. Complaints heard: difficulties competing with intermediaries; questionable professional and personal behavior at work; poor booth manners on the rise, and general lack of solidarity.
- Adequate preparation prior to assignments and even at the venue can be difficult to achieve. Complaints heard: material not made available beforehand; printed documents not distributed at meetings, and a growing number of one-day events demanding a lot of preparation for which clients are unwilling to pay higher fees to compensate for the greater time input.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction with the profession continues to be quite high, with notably few AIIC members declaring less than “average” satisfaction with their job.
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<th>All</th>
<th>Africa</th>
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<th>Central &amp; So. America</th>
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Jacquy Neff collected and evaluated the data, and wrote the full statistical report (available to members on this page of the AIIC extranet).

Luigi Luccarelli drafted this summary of the full report.

[1] Data is collected in the first few months of a year for the previous calendar year.


Recommended citation format: