A statistical portrait of AIIC: 2005-06

Demography, stress, language needs, market demand and workload are just some of the elements contributing to a panoramic view of an association with nearly 2800 members spread over more than 90 countries. This executive summary covers some of the highlights gleaned from responses to the online questionnaires for the years 2005 and 2006. Members can read the full 42-page report and see regional breakdowns on the AIIC Extranet. And don't forget to participate in the 2007 survey on the Extranet.

Jacquy NEFF.
Published: March 3, 2008 Last updated: June 28, 2016

A. Generalities

1. Representativeness

With 19.54% in 2005 and 33.62% in 2006, response rates varied strongly in comparison with 2004 (32% worldwide) but remained representative of the AIIC world population for both years. High response rates were obtained for both years in Israel and Turkey (above 40%) and statistically sound rates (10% - 40%) in almost all other regions except for Arab countries in 2005 (5.88% with 4 respondents), and Greece & Cyprus (3.1% or 1 respondent in 2005).

2. Age and gender

As in 2004, the mean age of respondents was around 49 years in both years under survey. Most respondents (60%) were between 40 and 60 years old. Respondents younger than 40 (23%) were more numerous than those over 60 (14-15%). The age varied between 25 and 84 in both years.

The gender distribution of the sample population was comparable to that of 2004 and of the general population (25% male/75% female). Both genders had a similar age structure (age pyramid).

3. Entry into profession and entry into AIIC

Confirming the image already obtained in 2004, the number of new members has been relatively stable over a long period from 1970 to the late 90s with peaks in the late 80s and early 90s. Over 60% of survey participants joined AIIC in the years 1991-2000. The time span between entering the profession and joining AIIC was a mean 9 - 9.5 years (2004: 9.5 years) with great regional variations.

4. Professional status of respondents and group affiliation
Almost 90% of AIIC members worked in both years as freelancers, 9 to 11% as staff interpreters, thus reflecting the general distribution according to the AIIC membership database. Among freelancers worldwide 3 out of 4 interpreters did not belong to a grouping of interpreters, confirming the results obtained in 2004 (75%). Regions with strong group membership (i.e. more than 30% of all regional members) were Brazil, Greece & Cyprus, Italy, Netherlands, Nordic Countries, South America, Spain, Turkey, UK & Ireland.

B. Market situation

1. Work trend

Workload in 2005 and 2006 was almost identical: for almost half of the sample population (44.5%/41.3%) it was stable while it had even increased for one third of the respondents (29.8/29.08%). There was thus a slight change compared to 2004 where 40% declared that their workload had remained stable and 26% reported more work. The number of participants reporting less work went down steeply from 40% in 2004 to 15% in 2005 and 17.9% in 2006. World economic recovery seemed to benefit the interpreting market as well.

There are, however, differences when correlated with different variants: freelance interpreters follow the general tendency, whereas staff interpreters mostly had a stable workload (80%) in 2005 with no significant increase at all; in 2006 however work increased for 28% and remained stable for two-thirds. The work trend continues to be negatively correlated to age compared to 2004: respondents over sixty reported both for 2005 and 2006 a diminishing market, whilst survey participants under 40 benefited from a higher and rather disproportionate workload against other age groups. Workload was also directly correlated to specific market sectors and overall volume of work. Both in 2005 and 2006 work in the Agreement sector, in the EU as well as in the UN, was stable across all work volume classes and even slightly increasing in the lower and medium range work volume classes of 1-100 days of work).

On a regional level, a clear upward trend is to be seen in Turkey, South America and Africa and to a lesser extent in Arab countries, CECO, USA and Austria in 2005. In 2006 this trend continues for Arab countries, South America and Austria; instead of Turkey and Africa, the newcomers were Portugal, Spain and Germany. Downcast regions were Portugal, Spain, Mexico/Central America/Caribbean, Switzerland and Italy in 2005, whereas this was the case for Mexico, Brazil and Canada in 2006. In the latter year, fewer countries reported a downward trend compared to the previous years.

2. Market share and working days per sector

In 2005 and 2006, the bracket between Agreement Sector and Private Market tended to narrow: Private Market represented worldwide the biggest share of the global market (49.9%/45.6% against 48.3% in 2004) but was closely followed by the Agreement Sector (44.7%/45.2% against 42.5 in 2004) and Special Terms Sector (6.4%/9.2% against 9.2% in 2004). The Agreement Sector continued to be strong in Belgium, France and Switzerland, these three countries representing more than half (54.1%/ 52.8%) of the World Agreement Market in both years under survey.

With 94 mean working days per respondent reported in 2005, total market remained fairly stable in 2005 against the 2004 figure (92 days), but went up to 97 days in 2006 (+ 5.4%). Regions where
respondents worked above the average were: Africa, Arab Countries, Austria, Belgium, Canada, CECO, Turkey in 2005, and Africa, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, CECO, France, Switzerland, Turkey and USA in 2006. Somewhat below the mean number of working days were respondents in Asia-Pacific, Israel, Mexico & Caribbean and Portugal in 2005, and Asia-Pacific, Israel and Portugal in 2006.

Worldwide almost one-third (33.2%/36.1%) (2004:34%) of respondents worked between 51 and 100 days, another third between 101 and 150 days (32%/30.7%) (2004:27%), whereas about 20% of respondents worked less than 50 days (2004:16%) and 10% more than 150 days. In comparison to 2004, more interpreters worked in the class slightly above the world average, a sign that could signal a lasting recovery of the world interpreting market.

Regions with a strong share of Agreement Sector were once again Austria, Belgium, France, Luxemburg and Switzerland, whereas Private Market was dominant in Brazil, Canada, Germany, Greece, South America and Turkey, with almost 60% of working days reported.

Working days are not always available in the country of residence. In all Regions without exception respondents indicated that they were also working in at least 2 and up to 3 other countries.

3. Types of interpretation

On world average little has change since 2004: simultaneous interpretation remains the most widely used mode with more then 80% of all working days reported. Pure consecutive interpretation represented less than 6% of all work in both years (2004: 5.8%).

Bidule and chuchotage as well as to a lesser extent liaison interpreting were marginal (less than 3% in each category of all working days reported).

4. Remote interpreting ("New Technologies") and Special Market Segment

With around 2% of all remunerated days reported, the world average for remote interpreting is still rather low. As in 2004, Israel was the region where this kind of new transmission technology of oral messages was the most pronounced (over 25% of all reported days were interpreted in this mode). In all other regions but Canada, Germany and Spain, this new technology is still incipient.

Regions with a high incidence of interpreting for television/radio were the Arab countries, Israel, Canada and Germany, where more than 35% of all respondents declared having worked at least one day for these media.

Courtroom interpreting remains marginal seen against the overall interpretation market (1.8% in both years under survey). The market segment - whether as national or international courts - is present in almost all regions, although there seems to be no identical scheme over the 2-year observation period.

As in 2004, community interpreting (interpreting for hospitals, police and the like) was marginal in both 2005 and 2006 (0.5%) except for the Nordic Countries (5.1%/10.6%) and Asia-Pacific (Australia!).

Telephone interpreting is the most marginal mode compared to the previous special market segments and yielded the same percentages as in 2004 (0.21%).

5. Languages
The use of active-passive language pairs was rather similar to 2004: worldwide only 2.8/2.8 pairs (60%) were actively used against the 4.38/4.37 theoretically possible pairs. In almost all regions respondents used their language pairs up to 60%, with a more pronounced use of B-languages in countries with a strong private market (France, Germany and Italy in Europe; Asia Pacific, Arab countries and South America), and a clear tendency towards C - A language pairs in countries with a greater Agreement Sector share (Belgium, France, Luxembourg).

In both 2005 and 2006, the most often cited language pairs were FR into EN and EN into FR with a slight advantage for the former (in 2004, reverse case!). In both years EN-DE and DE-EN was ahead of EN-ES and ES-EN, although they were rather close to each other. The ratio between these latter 4 language pairs to the 2 first was 2:1.

Language pairs were plotted for the first time ever against the overall workload ("remunerated days") The value found is the mean working days per language pair.

In both 2005 and 2006, language pairs yielding a greater number of working days cover languages with smaller markets and fewer interpreters than for the traditional conference languages of EN, FR, ES or DE. Turkish in combination with English (14/14 respondents in 2005/2006), Russian in combination with French (11/20 respondents), Dutch in combination with either German or French (26/21 respondents) as well as Russian, Arabic or Italian in combination with English or French showed a number of working days well above world average (92/94 days) and far higher than EN>FR (299/411 respondents) with "only" 99/105 mean days/year or FR>EN, with 102/107 mean working days. Examination of the graphs gives a hint as to what language pairs could be interesting in the future.

6. Remuneration

In the Agreement sector, mean lower and upper range remunerations (€ 431/€ 542) were highest in countries belonging to the European Union, but also in Switzerland, thanks to work for European institutions (mostly second category).

In the Private Market sector, world average lower and upper remunerations were at € 502/€ 615. Average remunerations levels were highest in Switzerland (mean lower rate € 655/mean upper rate € 1133), Germany (€ 655/ € 868) and France (€ 587/€ 791).

7. Stressors and job satisfaction

In 2005 and 2006, the most stressful factors were the same in order of importance: "Fast speeches" (75.1% / 77.3%), "Unintelligible speakers" (53.9% / 53.4%), "Highly technical matters" (47.3% / 49.7%), "No documentation" (44.6% / 48.3%) and "Poor air supply in booth" (46.5% / 45.6%). Compared with 2004, the added stressor "No documentation" was indeed justified as its score suggests. If combined to the first three stressors, the work of any interpreter would be really stressful indeed!

Overall job satisfaction levels were again very high in 2005 and 2006. 83% / 76.8% of all interpreters (77.6% / 76.6% of freelance interpreters and 75.7% / 81.2% of staff interpreters) declared themselves highly (= high and very high) satisfied with their work. Satisfaction increased in step with the workload, but the satisfaction threshold clearly depended on the respondents' main market. Between the male and female population there was little difference. There was also a
positive correlation to be noted according to age: in 2006 for example, younger (= > 40 years) were more satisfied (over 83%) than average population (76.8%)

Many thanks are due to all AIIC interpreters who took the time to participate in the 2005 and 2006 surveys, and to all AIIC groups and individuals who contributed their ideas for the questionnaire.

Recommended citation format: