



# AIIC Covid-19 Distance Interpreting Recommendations for Institutions and DI Hubs

## **AIIC Taskforce on Distance Interpreting**

### Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Compliance of distance interpreting modalities with ISO standards](#)

[Covid-19 measures](#)

[Health and safety of interpreters and technicians working on-site or at a remote hub](#)

[Covid-19 recourse to teleconference solutions](#)

[AIIC testing of cloud-based platforms](#)

["Closed" systems v "open" platforms](#)

[Sharing best practices](#)

[Tips for remote speakers using remote platforms](#)

[Co-location in teleconference and remote interpreting](#)

[Access to relevant documents](#)

[Confidentiality and data protection](#)

[Personal data](#)

[Briefing](#)

[Recording and web streaming](#)

[Intercommunication](#)

[Visual inputs](#)

[Professional disclaimer](#)

[Liability](#)

[Loss of service](#)

The recommendations herein are based on the following AIIC principles:

- The health and wellbeing of interpreters
- Commitment to multilingualism
- Quality of service
- Effective teamwork and booth partnering
- Respect of ethics and confidentiality
- Compliance with ISO standards
- Information and data security

At this time of unprecedented uncertainty, AIIC is committed to helping international organisations and the staff and accredited freelance interpreters they employ to meet and adapt to the multifaceted linguistic challenges that international organisations are facing all over the world.

AIIC's primary concern is the health and well-being of interpreters and the protection of public health. AIIC recognises that, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face interpreting scenarios may constitute a public health risk and, as such – as an interim measure while social distancing remains in force – specific forms of distance interpreting (DI) may be the only way to enable multilingualism whilst protecting the health of conference interpreters, technicians and participants alike during this challenging period.

Given AIIC's commitment to multilingualism, it is imperative that AIIC consider all DI options that safeguard interpreter health whilst enabling multilingual institutions to keep functioning. These options include interpreters working from DI hubs or even, in extremis, from their own premises (e.g. via a cloud-based platform) where no other options are available due to public health, legal and/or official restrictions.

## Introduction

AIIC is the only global association of conference interpreters, promoting high standards of quality and ethics in the profession and defending the interests and welfare of interpreters. Just as AIIC has always supported face-to-face interpreting scenarios that underpin interpretation quality and interpreter wellbeing, by setting minimum standards for technology, mode and working conditions, the same is true for distance interpreting scenarios.<sup>1</sup>

AIIC recognises that different distance interpreting scenarios provide interpreters with varying quantity and quality of sensory input, with differing possibilities for effective teamwork, and that such forms of distance interpreting may present both technological and human challenges.

---

<sup>1</sup> [AIIC Position on Distance Interpreting](#)

AIIC recognises that in addition to configurations where interpreters are physically located together in a team, information and communication technology (ICT) enables interpreting modalities whereby interpreters within the same team and even the same booth may be at different locations.

AIIC recognises that some DI modalities and setups could be more conducive to interpreter health and wellbeing than others, and that Covid-19 represents a considerable health risk to interpreters, technicians and participants alike.

AIIC further recognises that some DI modalities and setups could be more conducive than others to quality of service, including but not limited to: quality of audiovisual inputs and outputs, effective teamwork, effective booth partnering, assured information security, assured confidentiality of meeting content, quality of interpretation.

AIIC's Taskforce on Distance Interpreting has therefore prepared a set of recommendations for organisations needing to operate as DI hubs with their staff and accredited freelance interpreters in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The recommendations are equally valid for separate DI hubs

AIIC 27 March 2020

## Compliance of distance interpreting modalities with ISO standards

AIIC emphasises that all distance interpreting modalities must meet the Association's own technical specifications and the applicable requirements of the following ISO standards relating to conference interpreting equipment and sound and image input to interpreters:

<a href="#">ISO 2603:2016</a>	(Simultaneous interpreting – Permanent booths – Requirements);
<a href="#">ISO 4043:2016</a>	(Simultaneous interpreting – Mobile booths – Requirements);
<a href="#">ISO 20108:2017</a>	(Simultaneous interpreting – Quality and transmission of sound and image input – Requirements);
<a href="#">ISO 20109:2016</a>	(Simultaneous interpreting – Equipment – Requirements);
<a href="#">ISO 22259:2019</a>	(Conference systems – Equipment – Requirements).

These standards provide the relevant requirements both for the quality and transmission of sound and image provided to interpreters and for the equipment needed in the booths.

AIIC has also participated in the development of [ISO/PAS 24019:2020](#), a publicly available specification addressing Simultaneous Interpreting Delivery Platforms used for the delivery of simultaneous interpreting services in remote interpreting settings.

## Covid-19 measures <sup>2</sup>

### **Health and safety of interpreters and technicians working on-site or at a remote hub**

In areas where there are no public health, legal and/or official restrictions to prevent interpreters from going to their place of employment or to an offsite remote hub, and where they can safely and responsibly access these workplaces, it is incumbent upon the employer to take all necessary steps to ensure the health and safety of their employees, including interpreters and technical staff. Such measures include but are not limited to:

- Professional disinfection of booths, contact surfaces and all equipment therein;
- Provision of disposable hygienic gloves to interpreters and technicians operating any audiovisual or interpreting equipment, and the appropriate facilities for their disposal;
- Provision of manufacturer-approved disinfectant, antibacterial and antiviral wipes to clean audiovisual or interpreting equipment;

---

<sup>2</sup> See also [AIIC Best Practices for Interpreters during the Covid-19 Crisis](#)

- In so far as possible, the provision of marked interpreter-assigned headphones or headsets to individual interpreters for their sole use, with impedance appropriate to the console to be used;
- Provision of replacement headphone or headset covers;
- Provision of replacement microphone covers;
- Verification of appropriate ventilation in the booths;
- Social distancing in booths and sign language teams: without reducing the total team or language team,<sup>3</sup> limiting the number of interpreters in a given booth space and increasing the distance to a minimum of 2 metres between interpreters working in a booth or sign language team at any time, e.g. by only using larger booths.

Furthermore, interpreters are required to exit the booth and ensure they are at least 1.8m away from other people should they need to cough or sneeze, covering their mouth with their elbow in accordance with WHO guidelines.

Given the extreme circumstances of Covid-19, interpreters should be afforded the possibility to either exit the booth when not actively interpreting or even interpret from an adjacent booth (from where they may still take notes and generally aid their booth colleague(s) at all times).

### **Covid-19 recourse to teleconference solutions**

The institutional response to Covid-19 has included the cancellation or postponement of meetings and/or the holding of virtual meetings via teleconference. Such virtual meetings have for the most part been monolingual meetings on single-channel cloud-based meeting platforms such as Skype, Webex, Zoom etc. International organisations and their employees are for the most part very familiar with and regular users of such applications. This is not necessarily the case when it comes to using multi-channel platforms to enable multilingual videoconferences with simultaneous interpretation from/into multiple languages.

### **AIIC testing of cloud-based platforms**

AIIC has carried out tests on different cloud-based platforms for remote interpreting in simultaneous mode. These tests were carried out by audio and video engineers on behalf of AIIC's Technical and Health Committee in 2019. Platforms were tested for their

---

<sup>3</sup> Ensuring that the actual number of interpreters per language team is never fewer than two, even if they are not physically located together or in the same booth.

compliance with the main features of ISO standards 20108 and 20109, with a focus on the transmission of sound and image input and output signals.

The following platforms were tested (in alphabetical order)<sup>4</sup>:

[Catalava](#)  
[Interactio](#)  
[Interprefy](#)  
[KUDO](#)  
[Olyusei](#)  
[Voiceboxer](#)

Platforms were tested for the following: comparative representation of the characteristics of input signals at the moment of feeding into the system at the source (measurement point 1: source signals) and output signals at the sink (measurement point 2: output signals transmitted to interpreters) related to the following essential parameters applicable to audio and combined audio/video signals for simultaneous interpreting based on the requirements of ISO standards ISO 20108 and ISO 20109:

- Frequency response
- Latency
- Speech intelligibility
- Total harmonic distortion
- Hearing protection
- Video quality (input and output)

Test results for the different platforms can be found in the [Technical Study on transmission of sound and image through cloud-based systems for RSI](#).

Since these platforms were tested, some have improved and new platforms have appeared. It will therefore be necessary to retest them in order to reflect updated performance levels and ISO compliance according to the modified criteria set out in [ISO/PAS 24019:2020](#), as well as to include other new and relevant platforms.

---

<sup>4</sup> Please note that this list of DI platforms is now outdated.

## “Closed” systems v “open” platforms

There are a range of options for distance interpreting ranging from “closed” off-cloud teleconference solutions operated using an organisation’s own cabled infrastructure or servers, and “open” cloud teleconference solutions using third-party platforms. Both present different handling and information security challenges, and pose different challenges from an audiovisual perspective. There are four main types of system:

1. Closed offline system (interpretation distributed via infrared or radio signals from mixing desk) + dedicated telephone line(s);
2. Closed network system (interpretation distributed via dedicated server from/to codecs, online but off-cloud);
3. Open cloud system (interpretation distributed online via cloud from/to codecs);
4. Open cloud platform (audio and video distributed online from/to participants and interpreters via cloud).

## Sharing best practices

### Tips for remote speakers using remote platforms

- Use an ethernet connection, not wifi;
- Turn off all sound notifications (skype, whatsapp, emails, etc.) while attending virtual meetings;
- Eliminate background noise and interference (participate from indoors, in a room with closed door and windows to avoid extraneous noise);
- Replicate eye contact by looking into the camera;
- Speak at a moderate pace and avoid reading from documentation. If you must, documentation should be provided in advance for interpretation purposes only (it will be checked against delivery);
- If on video, ensure that you have a solid coloured background, and that any visual distractions are kept to a minimum;
- Use directional microphones to avoid extraneous noise;
- Preferably, use individual headsets with high quality microphones (see frequency response below) and echo cancelling;
- The microphone and headphones both for speakers and for interpreters (the interpreter’s microphone becomes a speaker’s microphone when working in relay mode) shall correctly reproduce audio frequencies between 125 Hz and 15,000 Hz, i.e. that can reproduce both high and low tones typical of natural speech and suitable for simultaneous interpretation. It is important to consider that this

requirement also applies to handheld, lapel, head-worn and any other type of microphone, as well as to sound input from external sources such as laptops and videoconferencing systems (see the section “Technical Requirements” in AIIC’s Guidelines for Distance Interpreting);

- If information on microphone frequency response is not available, select one that has been designated as suitable for speech recognition;
- Avoid moving the microphone during the videoconference;
- When speaking, talk directly into the microphone from a distance of 30cm to 50cm, without turning your head away;
- Mute the microphone when not speaking;
- Ensure your location is as soundproof and echo-free as possible.

## Co-location in teleconference and remote interpreting

The nature of the interpreting performed depends on the location of the interpreters and active (speaking) participants:

- If the interpreters are located together with some active participants, with other active participants appearing remotely, they are performing **teleconference interpreting**;
- If the interpreters are all located together (**team co-location**) but no participants are at the same location, they are performing **remote interpreting**, here **remote hub interpreting** (also referred to as a **DI hub**);
- If the interpreters are working together by booth<sup>5</sup> (**booth co-location**) but not with the rest of the team, they are performing remote interpreting in a single booth hub.
- Set-ups also exist where interpreters work individually but are able to communicate with boothmates (**virtual booth**) or teammates (**virtual team**).

Given that simultaneous conference interpreting is a team effort, the interpreter must be able to work with their language team and other language teams seamlessly (e.g. communication, collaboration, turn-taking). In order to work together effectively, it is strongly recommended that all interpreters be in the same room or space. Individual language teams/booths are required to be co-located in the same place in order to avoid added cognitive load<sup>6</sup> and such that they can effectively:

- support booth partners when numbers, acronyms or proper names are read out at speed;
- support booth partners when unfamiliar or technical terms are used;

<sup>5</sup> The terms “booth” and “individual language teams” are used interchangeably to include sign language interpreters working on the floor.

<sup>6</sup> Remote interpreting solutions for teamwork and booth partnering, including but not limited to text chat features, add to interpreter cognitive load.



- help booth partners who are following a written document read out by a speaker at speed;
- (especially when the speaker omits a paragraph or changes the order of the presentation);
- monitor the outgoing channel of booth partners (in a bidirectional booth);
- monitor the incoming channel of booth partners (to avoid using relay unnecessarily);
- coordinate with booth partners in the case of technical problems;
- take turns for unpredictable reasons (such as an attack of coughing or other condition).

A DI hub allows for team members to collaborate in a single location, with a technician present. [AIIC's Guidelines for Distance Interpreting](#) set out in detail the appropriate specifications for a DI hub.

AIIC's primary concern is the health and well-being of its members and the importance of not jeopardizing public health in any way. Given AIIC's commitment to multilingualism, it is therefore imperative as an interim measure that AIIC consider the eventual need for interpreters to work *in extremis* from their own premises (e.g. via a cloud-based platform) i.e. where no other options are available due to public health, legal and/or official restrictions.

In these times of unprecedented uncertainty, AIIC members are in full awareness of the need to adapt to the multifaceted linguistic challenges facing international organisations the world over, whilst respecting the provisions set out in AIIC's Collective Agreements.

As such we would like to set out the following specific guidelines for employers of or platform providers for interpreters interpreting from their own premises (e.g. via a cloud-based platform) in extremis for the above-mentioned reasons:

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

- Ensuring the quality and continuity of the data connection;
- Safeguarding the confidentiality of all communications;
- Providing interpreter interfaces offering the same basic functionalities as interpreting consoles according to ISO 20109:2016 Annex B.1;
- Ensuring that the interpreter has access to conference documents and can view them live as they are displayed to the audience;
- Instructing the interpreter on adequate soundproofing to prevent audible leaking of sensitive or otherwise confidential information (ideally booths, as per ISO standards 2603 (permanent booths) or 4043 (mobile booths));
- Providing the interpreter with 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 set up allows for effective teamwork and booth partnering in such a way as to reduce additional cognitive load;
- Ensuring that the set up allows for effective relay possibilities in such a way as to reduce additional cognitive load;
- Ensuring that the set up 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);
- Ensuring team manning strengths are increased in order to ensure sustained interpretation quality taking into account the increased cognitive load for the interpreter firstly due to receiving input via a non-direct source (e.g., screen and/or audio feed) and secondly due to the necessarily limited communication possibilities with other team and/or booth mates.

#### Access to relevant documents

- The interpreter shall be provided with centralised access to all documents relevant to the communicative event. This access shall be available reasonably in advance to the event and throughout its entire duration.
- During the event, the interpreter shall have a point of contact from whom to obtain any missing documents being referenced.

#### Confidentiality and data protection

- The employer assumes liability for ensuring that the infrastructure connecting to the event's data system complies with all necessary measures to ensure confidentiality and data protection.

#### Personal data

- Rules relating to the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and rules relating to the free movement of personal data shall always be respected.<sup>7</sup>

#### Briefing

- The interpreters should have a "technical briefing" to ensure they know how to use the DI platform in question, and be compensated accordingly for their time.
- Clients should have a "test run" of the DI platforms to ensure they are satisfied with the level of support provided. It is recommended to hold a briefing session with interpreters, speakers and event organizers prior to the event. This will allow interpreters to familiarize themselves with the voices and the speaking or signing style of the presenters, gather relevant event information, and optimally prepare themselves for the interpreting assignment.

---

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

## Recording and web streaming

- According to regulations on intellectual property,<sup>8</sup> prior written consent shall be obtained from the interpreter in case interpreting services are recorded.
- The interpreter should include in their contract with clients specific clauses regulating the use of their individual interpreting services.
- A language disclaimer should be added to the web streamed and/or archived recording stating that interpretation via video and audio (including any interpretation via an audio and video channel) are intended to facilitate communication and do not constitute an authentic record of the event.

## Intercommunication

Communication between the interpreter and other relevant actors shall be possible at any time using a dedicated function integrated in the interpreter console. The use of this function should cause minimal additional cognitive load so as not to interfere with the primary function of delivering interpretation. Intercommunication shall be possible between:

- Interpreter and technician;
- Interpreter and event moderator;
- Interpreters using the same outgoing language channel;
- All interpreters at the same communicative event.

Sign language interpreters do not work with an interpreter console and another form of communication with the relevant actors should be agreed upon prior to the event, e.g. directly with the head of the interpreter team.

## Visual inputs

As interpreters are in a different location removed from the conference room, they require visual input provided via screens or video monitors.

Speakers or signers intervening from any point connected to the event, as well as any visual materials displayed to the participants and/or the audience, shall be made available to the interpreter as a separate video feed during the event, ideally on a dedicated screen. In case of a presentation or intervention in a signed language, the signer should be displayed on the screen from the signer's waist to just above the head. If captioning services are provided,<sup>9</sup> a separate screen is required for this live text.

For sign language interpreters, multiple video feeds should display:

- Panoramic view of the room;

---

<sup>8</sup> See Universal Copyright Convention and Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works.

<sup>9</sup> Also referred to as speech to text, velotyping, or court reporting.

- View of the speaker, moderator or participant who is speaking or signing;
- View of the sign language interpreter (for sign language interpreters to check their positioning and placement);
- Documents, as displayed for the audience;
- Captioning;
- In case of relay from another sign language(s), view of the other working sign language team interpreter(s).

## Professional disclaimer

Institutions shall provide interpreters with a disclaimer applicable under relevant national law that exempts interpreters working from their own premises *in extremis* where no other options are available due to legal or official restrictions from the following:

## Liability

The undersigned is hereby exempt from any liability for:

- a) interruption of service;
- b) pixelation, freezing or loss of visual input;
- c) partial or complete loss of audio, audible artefacts;
- d) unauthorized access to personal or confidential data;
- e) leaking of information due to inadequate soundproofing;
- f) data loss.

## 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:

- a) pixelation, freezing or loss of visual input;
- b) partial or complete loss of audio, audible interference.

The interpreter can only interpret what is heard and therefore must indicate "inaudible" where this is the case. Simultaneous interpreting may have to be suspended if the audio and/or video quality of the technical system used for the delivery of interpreting services is deemed insufficient.