



# WORKING CONDITIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETERS

## Simultaneous interpreting

Simultaneous interpreting is performed by two or more interpreters in a suitably soundproofed booth where the interpreters deliver the speaker's presentation in a different language while he/she is speaking.

### 1. Booths

The booths need to be situated at the best vantage point in the conference room to ensure maximal visual and auditory perception of the speakers, delegates and projection screens.

The booths need to be sufficiently lit and ventilated (refer to the ISO standards) and the interpreters provided with a suitable table/working space for two people, as well as comfortable chairs and drinking water.

### 2. Microphones

The speakers and delegates need to use microphones in order for the interpreters to hear them correctly in the booth.

### 3. Documents/preparation

Interpreters must receive all conference documents *at least 72 hours before the conference* in order to prepare their vocabulary correctly. Should organizers not be able to provide all the speeches and presentations in advance, the minimal requirements are: final programme/agenda, list of delegates, background documents, previous communiqués and/or reports. The more information the interpreter is given in advance, the better their performance will be.

### 4. Team composition

Owing to the high levels of concentration required in interpreting, interpreters must work in teams of two for conferences of one to three days, and it is usually recommended (UN and Aiic norms<sup>1</sup>) that teams of three to four interpreters be used for conferences of four or more days. Shifts of a half hour on and at least a half hour off help interpreters to maintain the same energy, concentration and quality levels throughout the day, thus providing a consistent level of service.

### 5. Overtime

An interpreter's working day should not exceed eight (8) hours. This includes six (6) half-hour shifts, a full hour lunch break and two half-hour tea breaks during which the interpreters should not be required to work. Conference organizers are urged to arrange their programmes in accordance with this schedule, as overtime is strongly discouraged for interpreters, especially if they are required to perform optimally the next day. A new team of interpreters would therefore be required for overtime or evening sessions. Should an exceptional situation arise where interpreters agree to assist the client with overtime, they should be remunerated at a rate of 1,5 times their hourly rate and should not work more than an extra hour.

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<sup>1</sup> Aiic (Association Internationale d'Interprètes de Conférence): This is the International Association of Conference Interpreters. For more information on this organisation and on interpreting in general, please consult the Aiic Website: [www.aiic.net](http://www.aiic.net).

## **6. Translations**

During the conference, interpreters are unable to translate documents, as they have to give their full attention to interpreting. It is also inadvisable to request translations from interpreters less than 72 hours before the conference, as this work affects their energy levels and concentration for interpreting. Ideally, the organisers should recruit separate on-site translators or have documents sent to off-site translators during the conference.

### **Consecutive interpreting**

Consecutive interpreting occurs when an interpreter provides an oral translation of a statement after the speaker has spoken. It is usually performed in a boardroom situation or during small meetings and is not ideal for large conferences, as it tends to slow the proceedings down quite considerably. It is also a lot more stressful on the interpreter as they are no longer protected from secondary noise and other distractions and without headphones it is a lot more difficult to hear what each speaker has to say. This is why consecutive interpreting is generally more expensive than simultaneous interpreting and cannot be performed by one person for more than 30 to 40 minutes.

The same rules on documentation, team composition, overtime and translations for simultaneous interpreting apply to consecutive interpreting and organizers should ensure that the interpreter is placed in the best possible position to hear all proceedings correctly.

### **Whispered interpreting**

Whispered interpreting is when an interpreter sits behind a delegate (maximum two delegates) and performs simultaneous interpreting by whispering in the delegate's ear. Sometimes whispered interpreting can be performed with the aid of special equipment that allows the interpreter to whisper into a microphone for delegates wearing headphones.

Whispered interpreting is strongly discouraged for large conferences for the same reasons as consecutive interpreting and can cause a disruption in small meetings, with delegates often disturbed by the interpreter.