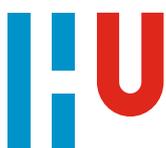


# REMOTE SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING IN TIMES OF COVID-19

Maartje De Meulder,  
Oliver Pouliot,  
Karolien Gebruers



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**Research report January 2021**

Maartje De Meulder, Oliver Pouliot, Karolien Gebruers

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“

I feel this enforced period of remote interpreting will be a longer term 'game changer' which many of us are ill-equipped for.

(Survey 1, Scotland)

”

## 4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report contains the findings of an international study consisting of three online 'living' surveys. A total of 2,634 self-selected sign language interpreters from 63 different countries participated, often more than once. The surveys focused on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted sign language interpreters' working practices, how this was experienced by them, and how digital disruption caused by the pandemic is impacting and innovating the sign language interpreting profession. 1,168 interpreters participated in Survey 1 (S1), 871 participated in Survey 2 (S2) and 595 participated in Survey 3 (S3). The study was carried out between April 2020 and July 2020; the findings are thus bound to this specific time frame.

The largest contingent of respondents over all three surveys were from the U.S., followed by the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland and Belgium. However, the representative participation per number of working sign language interpreters in those countries shows a high response rate from Dutch and Belgian interpreters. Several limitations are identifiable for the study: the number of recurring respondents, respondents being self-selected, and bias of the survey towards Anglo-Saxon/Western/U.S. perspectives.

Our findings indicate that 60% of S1 respondents had never worked remotely before the start of the crisis, while 27% did so only occasionally. Equally, the large majority of S2 respondents worked remotely only occasionally or never before the crisis. A mean 63% of respondents said they had not received any training on how to interpret remotely.

For the majority of S2 respondents, 0% of their workload in the last 6 months of 2019 was remote. In April 2020, the amount changed to 100%. This represents a colossal shift in working practices (from on-site to remote) and a huge drop in workload for many interpreters over those months. The main reason for not working remotely for S1 and S2 respondents seemed to be that there was no available work.

The most common settings for working remotely were (1) education; (2) business/employment; (3) medical/health and (4) government/social services. Some sign language interpreters continued working on-site because they were considered essential workers. Most of these interpreters worked in the healthcare sector (31%), while 17% worked in media settings, another 17% in civil service, and 11% in legal settings.

Over all three surveys, Zoom was by far the most used and most successful platform for remote sign language interpreting, followed by Skype. In S2 WhatsApp was added to the options and became the third most successful programme.

Respondents commented that the crisis will probably accelerate the need for remote interpreting training in interpreter training programs. Another resurfacing issue was the perceived need for sign language interpreting students to have face-to-face practice and live mentoring. Several respondents expressed concerns about the lack of CPD (Continuous Professional Development) opportunities during the crisis. A significant number of comments addressed the issue of team interpreting when working remotely.

Respondents commented on what benefits they thought remote interpreting might bring to the table, both for themselves and for deaf people. In general, the most significant benefits that were mentioned were flexibility and the possibility to improve efficiency and availability of sign language interpreting services.

Notwithstanding these benefits, a significant number of respondents claimed that remote interpreting is more stressful than face-to-face interpreting and requires a heavier cognitive load, because of (1) coping with technical issues; (2) interpreting in 2D instead of 3D; (3) no/less ability to manage conversations; (4) teamwork, and (5) having no real-life personal contact. Because of the different demands of working online, 61% of S3 respondents chose only to work with a self-selected pool of clients online (compared to on-site).

A significant recurring issue linked to changing working conditions was the concern about loss of income and decreasing fees. The expectation was that interpreters would need to accept more remote work at reduced fees or adjust hourly rates down. 73% of respondents predicted they would be doing more remote work in the future, with the majority predicting it would be 25% remote vs. 75% on-site.

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The findings highlight several issues for follow-up research. One is the interplay of factors that made interpreters survive the crisis largely unscathed (or not). The findings show that some interpreters made it through the crisis with only a brief period of slowdown, thereafter receiving seemingly unlimited requests, many times by consumers who would not otherwise be able to book them due to geographical distance. For others, the challenge was much more difficult, having been without any work opportunities for a prolonged period of time and even considering leaving the field. The data points to digital literacy of interpreters being a critical factor, as well as training about and experience with working remotely. Another critical issue to consider is gender, since the sign language interpreting profession is well known to be female-dominated. We see a number of respondents indicating having had a hard time managing the logistic conundrum of working from home and managing childcare and other domestic duties, even going so far as filing for unemployment. A study of the factors that impact whether sign language interpreters endured the crisis successfully or not would have to explore the issue of being out of work. From our data it appears that between April and July 2020 some interpreters lost all work for a variety of reasons.

The digital disruption caused by the pandemic has accelerated a shift towards remote interpreting. This shift would probably have been inevitable in any case, but we have witnessed this at a much faster pace and on a much more global scale than any of us could have anticipated. This has at least two implications. One is that it appears that the sudden shift to remote interpreting is influencing the market by impacting the demand/supply problem within sign language interpreting services (de Wit 2020). While technology can throw a spanner in the works, it can also be an equalizer and make sign language interpreting services available on a broader scale. The second implication is that digital disruption has forced some sign language interpreting agencies and VRS/VRI companies to innovate their systems and incorporate the use of digital technologies. For those agencies who did not embrace technology, the pandemic functions as a 'wake up call'. It is too early to make any substantial claims about how the pandemic is impacting working conditions of interpreters in the longer term, and for this there is a need for longitudinal research.

This research will need to take into account two further issues highlighted by our data. One is that from the data it appears there is a group of newly qualified sign language interpreters doing remote work. Before the crisis, remote work was something that was generally not advised for novice interpreters. The pandemic has changed this guideline almost overnight. A second, related, issue, is that a significant majority of the survey respondents had never or only very occasionally worked remotely before the pandemic, and a majority claimed not to have received any training on how to interpret remotely at all. This has profound implications for sign language interpreter training and CPD programs in terms of monitoring novice interpreters doing remote work, and preparing sign language interpreter students for a hybrid career.

Finally, sign language interpreting services only exist by virtue of having deaf people who use them. A critical consideration of deaf perspectives on remote sign language interpreting in times of COVID-19 is another and urgent issue for follow-up research.

## 5. INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, when COVID-19 became a pandemic, there was a significant impact on the work of professional sign language interpreters (SLIs). Meetings and conferences were cancelled across the board, working from home became the new norm, and interpreters lost many if not all contracts/work in the short term. This led to a sudden and massive shift in the daily work of sign language interpreters. Many SLIs were forced to move online at short notice, with many of them unprepared (technical set-up, skills, ...) to do so. While some interpreters were well set up to 'go remote', most interpreters were learning on the fly. Our surveys show that before the pandemic, remote work was something that most respondents did only very sporadically, and most often only when they chose to do so. The pandemic has forced the profession (and deaf people who work with interpreters) into new working practices. This digital disruption accelerated a shift towards remote interpreting. This shift would probably have been inevitable in any case, but we have witnessed it at a much faster pace and on a much more global scale than any of us could have anticipated.

Since this sudden and drastic impact on sign language interpreters and the sign language interpreting profession was unprecedented, we thought it was important to survey and document how this shift has been experienced by sign language interpreters, and how it has been impacting and innovating the sign language interpreting profession beyond the pandemic.

This research report contains the findings of an international study consisting of three online surveys in which a total of 2.634 sign language interpreters from 63 different countries (repeatedly) participated.

The surveys were designed and analysed by Dr. Maartje De Meulder (University of Applied Sciences Utrecht - HU), Oliver Pouliot, MSc (ASL/BSL/IS/ENG interpreter and founder of Overseas Interpreting), and Karolien Gebruers, MA (research assistant at HU for the study, and VGT/Dutch interpreter).

The findings of this survey are bound to a specific time frame (April-July 2020). In many ways, the state of play is already different. Indeed, while we finish this report (December 2020), many countries are in a second (full or partial) lockdown with the number of infected cases much higher than in the first wave, while others are still following stringent measures. Many sign language interpreters thus continue to work remotely from home, but do so in different circumstances and with a different mindset than in April 2020.

This research report is available Open Access for everyone to read and use. Our aim is for researchers and students in adjacent fields such as Interpreting Studies and Deaf Studies, as well as for national, regional, and international sign language interpreter associations and registers to use the findings from this report as a basis for further research and policy and practice development.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

### Data collection: living surveys

We decided to work with a 'living survey' format that would consist of several surveys to enable us to assess changes over time. 'Living' because each survey was different to the one before, based on feedback from respondents and our own evaluation of how the situation was evolving as well as what we wanted and needed to know. The methodology for this study was thus time-sensitive and has grown organically.

Our initial plan was to launch the survey bi-weekly for a prolonged period of time, but we quickly decided that this was too ambitious. This was partly a necessity (health reasons) but also because we realized it would be overwhelming to bombard people with a survey every two weeks. In the end, we did three surveys over a four-month period. The first survey was launched at the beginning of April 2020, the second survey two weeks later, and the third survey at the beginning of July. See Table 1 for an overview of the survey details.

	Dates open	N respondents	Work status	N participating countries	Top 5 participating countries
<b>Survey 1</b>	1-3 April 2020	N = 1.168	(not included)	42	U.S. UK the Netherlands Finland Germany
<b>Survey 2</b>	15-17 April 2020	N = 871	44% freelancer 37% employee 15% own company 4% 'other'	40	U.S. the Netherlands Australia Germany France
<b>Survey 3</b>	1-5 July 2020 (extended to 8 July)	N = 595	53% freelancer 18% company employee 15% own company 10% state employee 1% co-own company 3% 'other'	45	U.S. Germany the Netherlands UK Australia

Table 1: Overview of the survey details

The surveys were created in the online survey tool Microsoft Forms. The questions were designed by the research team based on what we observed in our own networks, what we knew from observations in the field and what appeared to be topical for sign language interpreters during the crisis. The surveys contained a range of multiple-choice questions, questions to answer on a Likert scale, and open questions. The surveys were designed using branching to enable respondents to skip non-applicable questions. See Appendix 1 for the questions and response options of all surveys.

We advertised the surveys via social media and the personal and professional networks of the researchers (e.g. interpreter associations, Whatsapp groups). At the end of Survey 2 we added the option for respondents to leave their contact details (name and email address) so we could contact them for follow-up research. Those contact details were used to do a direct mailing pre-launch Survey 3 to encourage people to participate again.

The first two surveys were promoted as 'short surveys' that would take 10 minutes based on tests of the surveys by ourselves and colleagues. The mean time for people to fill in the survey was 13 minutes for S1 (42 questions) and 11 minutes for S2 (53 questions). Survey 3 was introduced as a survey to be completed within 15 to 20 minutes. On average it took 17 minutes for participants to fill out this survey as it had the largest number of questions (58; not all questions had to be answered by all respondents). The increased length of S3 may have influenced some participants to abandon the survey before completion. A

living, repeated survey bears the risk of respondent fatigue, combined with the general 'corona-fatigue' that many of us were prone to in July of 2020. The lower number of participants for this survey may also be explained by other factors: an increasing number of interpreters growing tired of remote work or just not being interested in remote work and any related surveys, and more interpreters returning to work and thus having less free time.

In this living survey, some of the questions were finetuned following feedback from colleagues, survey respondents, and others. For example Q6 of S1 was: 'Do you feel confident about how your on-screen physical appearance will change over the next few months (e.g. not being able to go to the hairdressers, etc.)?' Respondents could indicate their level of confidence on a Likert scale. In the comments section of S1, several respondents indicated that they did not think this was a relevant question, wondering why this issue would even be important during a pandemic. We decided to not repeat the question in S2 and S3.

S1 included several questions about interpreting to/from International Sign. Since the responses showed that this was only a small percentage of the work there were few reasons to continue focusing on this group. We decided to concentrate on the majority of interpreters and did not include questions about International Sign in S2 and S3.

We also considered changing terminology. For example S1 used 'mass quarantine' (for example 'Have you noticed a decrease in your workload since mass quarantine started in your country?'). In S2 we decided to use 'lockdown' to reflect current concepts (e.g. 'Is your country currently on lockdown?'). When S3 was launched (beginning of July 2020), it became clear that this crisis would be more longitudinal than most of us thought. Also, some countries either were not in lockdown anymore or the very meaning of 'lockdown' had changed, with only regions going into lockdown instead of countries, or countries establishing partial lockdowns, or countries being completely out of lockdown. So we did not use that term any longer, and instead included questions linked to the on-going nature of 'the crisis' (e.g. 'Are you considering switching careers and leaving the interpreting profession because of the crisis?'). By this time, some interpreters were also (partially) returning to on-site work so we also included questions to reflect that.

In S2, and especially in S3, we added questions related to the physical and psychological demands of remote interpreting, in line with feedback we received from respondents. A S1 respondent from Finland wrote: "I expected this survey to ask more about mental and physical aspects interpreters may feel during this situation". A S2 respondent from the UK commented: "The questions in this survey are interesting in what is asked, but also in what is not asked. For instance - psychological effects of staying in one place [...] I would be interested in any of these questions being answered." Moreover in S3, we asked about the future impact on the SLI profession and about interpreters' future aspirations concerning working online.

Finally, there is a comment to be made about the meaning of 'working remotely'. While remote work existed for sign language interpreters long before the pandemic, during the crisis it has taken on a specific (additional) meaning: working from home (often with children and other family members around). Working from home in this case always means working remotely, but working remotely does not necessarily mean 'working from home'. Some interpreters continued to work remotely but not from home, e.g. those working for VRS companies and working in their offices.

### Languages of the surveys

Because our methodology was time-sensitive, S1 was available in English only (the written language expected to be most widely understood by prospective respondents). We got feedback from some respondents from non-English speaking countries that some of the questions were hard to understand and therefore respond to. With the assistance of volunteer translators recruited in our own networks, S2 was also available in Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and French while German was added for S3 (the translators also assisted with translating responses in German, Spanish, Portuguese and French back to English). This process also impacted the questions, especially in the first part of the surveys which had questions about levels of education, which significantly differs in specific languages.

### Respondent demographics

2.634 self-selected sign language interpreters from 63 different countries participated in one, two, or all three of the surveys : 1.168 participated in Survey 1, 871 participated in Survey 2 and 595 participated in Survey 3 (see Table 1). The largest contingent of respondents were from the U.S., followed by the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland and Belgium (see Table 2). However, when we look at the sample size per number of working sign language interpreters in those countries (see also Table 2), we see a high response rate from Dutch and Belgian interpreters. This was already notable from the response to Survey 1, which was not available in Dutch. One reason for the high response rate might be that the study was carried out by an institution in the

Netherlands (University of Applied Sciences Utrecht) which is the only institution in the Netherlands where NGT (Nederlandse Gebarentaal, Sign Language of the Netherlands) interpreters are trained, and the lead researcher and research assistant are Belgians with networks in both countries. A significant number (some 77%) of working NGT interpreters are members of the Dutch Sign Language Interpreter Association (NBTG), which assisted with disseminating the survey. The relatively small total number of interpreters in the Netherlands within a concentrated network lends itself to more recruitment via snowball sampling techniques.

	Respondents	Registered/working interpreters	% of SLIs reached
<b>United States</b>	S1: 449 S2: 254 S3: 81 (total: 784)	15.501 registered SLIs (RID 2018)	S1: 3% S2: 2% S3: 0.5%
<b>United Kingdom</b>	S1: 238 S2: 49 S3: 61 (total: 348)	1.282 registered SLIs (de Wit 2020)	S1: 19% S2: 4% S3: 5%
<b>The Netherlands</b>	S1: 117 S2: 101 S3: 69 (total: 287)	496 registered SLIs (RTGS 2020)	S1: 23.5% S2: 20% S3: 14%
<b>Germany</b>	S1: 40 S2: 51 S3: 71 (total: 162)	800-1.000 working SLI (no registry available) (de Wit 2020)	S1: 4-5% S2: 5-6% S3: 7-9%
<b>Finland</b>	S1: 69 S2: 39 S3: 8 (total: 116)	800-900 working SLIs (no registry available) (de Wit 2020)	S1: 8-9% S2: 4-5% S3: 1%
<b>Belgium</b>	S1: 39 S2: 45 S3: 31 (total: 115)	187 working SLIs (no registry available) (de Wit 2020)	S1: 21% S2: 24% S3: 17%
<b>Australia</b>	S1: 24 S2: 53 S3: 31 (total: 108)	605 registered SLIs (ASLIA 2020)	S1: 4% S2: 9% S3: 5%
<b>France</b>	S1: 14 S2: 50 S3: 9 (total: 73)	450 working SLIs (no registry available) (de Wit 2020)	S1: 3% S2: 11% S3: 2%

Table 2: Overview of top 8 participating countries and response rate per number of registered SLIs

For all surveys taken together, 12% of respondents were newly qualified (i.e. having less than 3 years of experience) (313 out of 2.643 respondents). The largest contingent of respondents in all three surveys had between 10 and 20 years of interpreting experience, while the second largest had between 5 and 10 years of interpreting experience. The sample size of interpreters with over 30 years of experience was small.

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3
1-3 years	12%	13%	12% (0-3 years)
3-5 years	9%	11%	10%
5-10 years	23%	21%	20%
10-20 years	33%	33%	35%
20-30 years	17%	>20 years: 22%	16%
30-40 years	5%	-	6
> 40 years	1%	-	1%

Table 3: Overview of years of professional interpreting experience of respondents

Respondents had achieved their qualified/certified status via various training routes (see Table 4). Over all three surveys, most respondents had a professional certificate or qualification (28%), an academic bachelor's degree (27%), or a professional bachelor's degree (25%). A large number of countries around the world do not have any formal sign language interpreter training programs (WASLI 2017). We attribute some responses of having no interpreting training or degree to this fact.

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3
No interpreting training or degree	1%	3%	6%
College degree	-	-	6%
Vocational training	5%	6%	9%
Professional certificate/ qualification	36%	27%	21%
Associates degree	-	15%	7%
Bachelor's degree	-	-	27%
Professional bachelor's degree	26%	24%	-
Academic bachelor's degree	15%	13%	-
Master's degree	17%	12%	11%
Postgraduate degree	-	-	7%
Other	-	-	6%

Table 4: Overview of sign language interpreting qualifications/training background of respondents

Respondents also varied in terms of work status, being freelancers (44% of S2 respondents and 53% of S3 respondents), state or company employees (37% of S2 respondents and 28% of S3 respondents), self-employed within their own company (15% of S2 and S3 respondents).

Respondents' highest degree of education (not necessarily linked to interpreting) is mostly clearly visible in S3, with the majority having a bachelor's degree (42%), followed by a master's degree (30%) and a professional certificate or qualification (13%) (see Table 5).

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3
No degree	-	-	1%
High school degree	-	-	5%
Vocational certificate	-	4%	6%
Professional certificate/ qualification	-	17%	13%
Bachelor's degree	-	-	42%
Professional bachelor's degree	-	23%	-
Academic bachelor's degree	-	28%	-
Master's degree	-	26%	30%
PhD	-	2%	3%

Table 5: Respondents' highest degree of education (not necessarily linked to interpreting)

### Participating countries

Table 6 gives an overview of which countries participated in one, two or all three surveys.

Countries participating in all three surveys (26)			Countries participating in two surveys (12)		Countries participating in one survey (25)		
Australia	Germany	Norway	Argentina	Slovenia	Algeria	Kazakhstan	Poland
Austria	India	Philippines	Brazil	South Africa	Bulgaria	Kenya	Russia
Bangladesh	Ireland	Portugal	Colombia	South Korea	Chile	Malaysia	Saudi Arabia
Belgium	Italy	Spain	Ghana		China	Morocco	Singapore
Canada	Japan	Sweden	Greece		Costa Rica	Nigeria	Taiwan
Croatia	Mexico	Switzerland	Iceland		East Timor	Northern	Turkey
Denmark	Nepal	United Kingdom	Indonesia		Ecuador	Cyprus	Uruguay
Finland	Netherlands	United States	Malta		El Salvador	Paraguay	Venezuela
France	New Zealand		Serbia		Hungary	Peru	

Table 6: Overview of participating countries

Figure 1 shows participating countries for all surveys on a world map. See Appendix 2 Table 7 for an overview of the numbers of participants for each country.

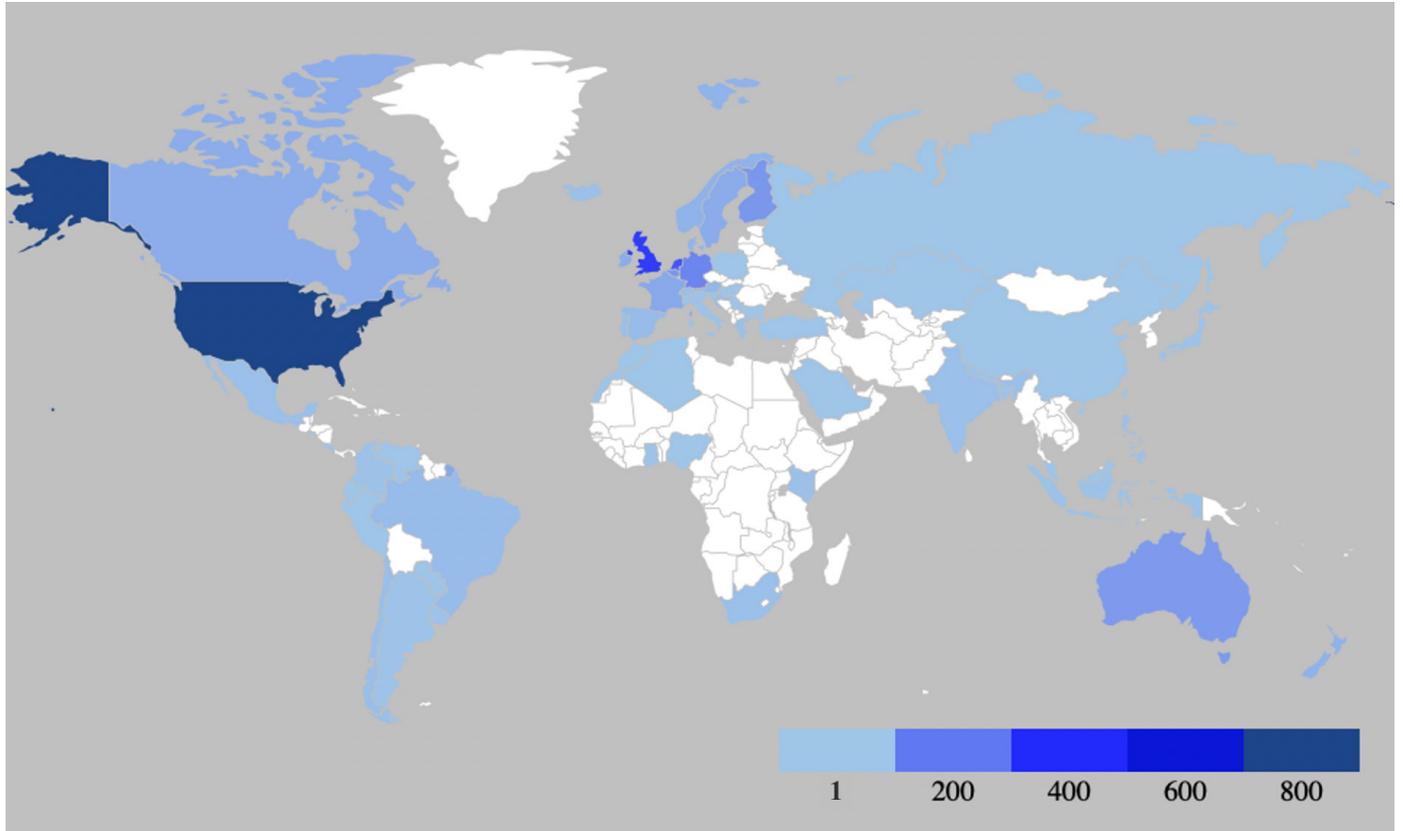


Figure 1: World map participating countries all surveys

### Data analysis

As the surveys were designed in MS Forms the programme automatically analysed and visualised the closed questions. Open questions in S1 and S2 were analysed in MS Excel. Open questions in S3 were coded and thematically analysed in ATLAS.ti through a process of iterative data coding through several cycles to identify key themes and subthemes following principles of grounded theory. In this report we present a descriptive statistical overview of the results from the surveys, along with qualitative extracts from the open questions and comments.

## 7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

### Number of recurrent participants

Since this was a living survey, we aimed for participants to participate in each wave of the survey. This was not straightforward, since most people seem to expect to take a survey only once and since living surveys bear the risk of respondent fatigue. We tried to account for this in our social media shares.



Figure 2: Tweet announcing the second edition of the survey

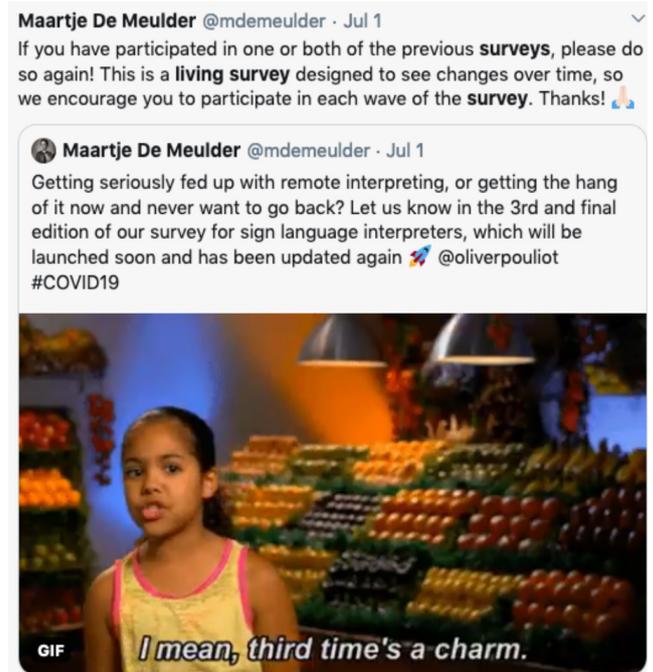


Figure 3: Tweet encouraging people to participate again

Some respondents indicated in the comment section of S3 that they did not remember which survey they answered before. Of the 871 participants in Survey 2, 31% also participated in Survey 1, while 69% or 600 respondents participated for the first time. Of the 595 participants in Survey 3, 44% participated in Survey 1, while 43% participated in Survey 2. 32% of Survey 3 participants, coming from 25 different countries, reported they also participated in Survey 1 and 2. Although we had recurrent participants, the aim of comparing participants' respondents over time was therefore not possible because of varying respondent rates.

### Self-selected respondents

Respondents were self-selected. Our data show a high representative participation of sign language interpreters who had never or only very occasionally worked remotely before the crisis. It is possible that they were more likely to participate in the surveys than those interpreters who were used to working remotely before the crisis. Our study also might have attracted mostly those sign language interpreters whose position is similar to ours - Western, academic/with access to higher education, with a degree of fluency in English. This may have affected the outcome.

### Survey biased towards Anglo-Saxon/Western/U.S. perspectives

As Table 2 indicates, the largest contingent of respondents were from the U.S., while most others were from Anglo-Saxon and/or Western countries. Even with surveys 2 and 3 being available in languages other than English (notably Spanish and Portuguese to account for South-American countries) the response rate for non-English-speaking/non-Western countries was still rather low (although S3 had more participants from South-American countries compared to S1 and S2). We think the implications for this imbalance are not only language-related. From the (few) respondents of countries in the global South, their responses showed that remote interpreting is a rare phenomenon in some countries in the first place because of unreliable internet connection, lack of technical support, lack of materials and infrastructure in general.

The survey results are thus biased towards an Anglo-Saxon/Western/U.S. perspective. This is a limitation of the study. At the same time, institutionalized sign language interpreting services are still mainly a Western phenomenon (Napier, McKee & Goswell 2010), mostly established in countries where there is a larger supply of interpreters, interpreter training programs, greater legal protection for deaf people's rights, employment opportunities, and access to technology. In that respect, our data reflect the current state of sign language interpreting services in those countries.

#### **Point of view of deaf users of sign language interpreting services**

This study will not be complete before a critical number of deaf people have been surveyed about their experiences with remote sign language interpreting, and this is an important and urgent issue for follow-up research. Some of the respondents touched upon this issue already, primarily with concerns about remote interpreting not being in the interests of deaf people, deaf people being forced to use remote interpreting in situations where it is not warranted, and deaf people being forced to work with interpreters who are not suitable for remote work. A S3 respondent from Australia noted: "I don't want remote interpreting to be pushed onto the Deaf community if they don't want it." A S3 respondent from Germany stated that "Face-to-face interpreting is much more pleasant for customers," while a S3 respondent from Peru said remote interpreting leads to "less accessibility" for deaf people. A Swedish respondent of S3 remarked that remote interpreting impacts deaf people too: "Also the deaf clients needing to have proper equipment, download platforms etc, is a heavier load on their shoulders than before." Other respondents also commented on the benefits of remote interpreting for deaf people, for example interpreters being able to cover more assignments per day and thus be more available. There are also implied cost benefits which also impact deaf people (e.g. no more payment of travel costs).

For some interpreters, remote work effectively functioned as an eye-opener to what it means for deaf people to work with interpreters:

*"Also I have noticed deaf participants becoming exhausted much faster than usual, and their stress level is something that has an impact on my human compassion. I know that my presence as an interpreter is valid and necessary, but it affects me to see how much work it is for deaf people to achieve a 'good enough' level of participation when working with an interpreter. This is not new, of course, but it has become even clearer during this period."*

(S3, Norway).<sup>1</sup>

Specific concerns were mentioned regarding the impact on deafblind people, because remote interpreting and social distance measures present specific challenges for tactile interpreting. An S1 respondent from the U.S. wrote: "My greatest concern during this time is the DeafBlind population - making sure they're informed, making sure they get the supplies and care needed, tactile interpreting while remaining healthy and clean." Another respondent from the U.S. (S2) noted that "The hardest hit is on DeafBlind clients who cannot receive tactile/ProTactile/Haptics interpreting at all. My work for DeafBlind interpreting went to zero, unfortunately."

1. When quoting respondents we chose only to mention the survey number and country rather than codes for individual respondents.

## 8. FINDINGS BASED ON CLOSED QUESTIONS

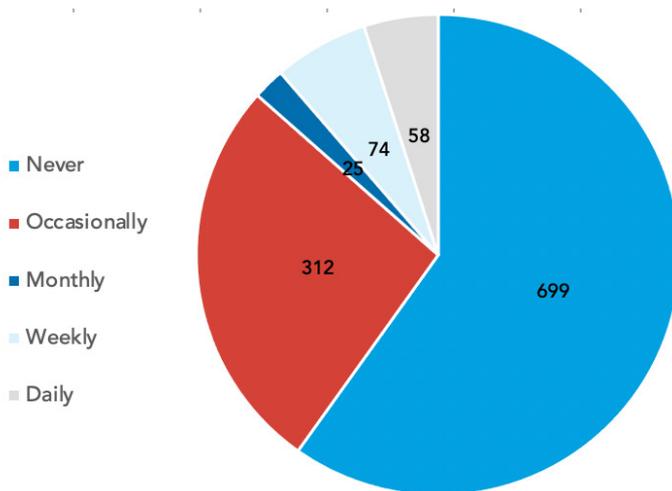
We discuss the findings per topic as this aligns with our focus on changes over time.

### Decrease in workload

“I remote interpreted once but then stopped to be able to apply for unemployment paid by the government. I felt really uncomfortable and couldn’t perform at my best also with 3 children around...” (S1, Belgium).

As detailed in the Methodology section, Survey 1 was launched during worldwide mass quarantine measures, when many sign language interpreters were on a steep learning curve to adapt to the changes. We asked respondents to answer all survey questions relating to the day when mass quarantine started in their country. At that point in April of 2020, 89% of respondents noticed a decrease in their workload.

Notably, 60% of S1 respondents said to never have worked remotely before the start of the crisis, while 27% did so only



occasionally.

Figure 4: How often did you work remotely before mass quarantine started in your country? (S1)

We saw the exact same number two weeks later in Survey 2 with 89% of participants noting a decrease in their workload (with 69% of respondents new to S2). Remarkably at this point (mid April 2020), 33% of respondents (N=286) reported to have lost all interpreting work, including any remote opportunities. 52% of them had not received any financial help from their government. There was no clear correlation with years of experience: both novice and more experienced interpreters claimed to have lost all interpreting work.

In early July of 2020, 15% of S3 respondents had lost all interpreting work, including remote opportunities. The main reason for this was still that there was no available work. As one respondent from S1 (U.S.) put it: “I am still struggling to get the word out that I am available remotely. I am full time freelance.”

When asked about the reasons why they did not have work or could not work as a sign language interpreter, 71% said there simply was no available work, while 16% said it was due to their home environment (health 2%; ‘other’ 11%). 68% of those nevertheless set up an interpreting workstation at home in the hopes of finding work.

Comments of respondents who indicated “they lost all work” however show that this is not only an issue of (passively) losing all work, but that there are also some who were not actively pursuing work for different reasons:

“

Within 48 hours, my entire diary for March, April, May and June was wiped out and I was left with no income. Those with whom I had existing contracts, all but one, will honour them in full or at 50% so I have some income.

(Survey 1, Scotland)

”

“I am not aggressively pursuing work opportunities because I have other revenue possibilities and I don’t want to take work from more desperate colleagues, but I worry how that will impact me long term” (S2, US)

“I feel guilty about taking any of the handful of remote opportunities I have seen so far because I am in a better financial position than a lot of my younger colleagues with mortgages and families” (S2, UK).

We come back to the issue of ‘being out of work’ in the discussion.

**Loss of income**

Losing all interpreting work means loss of income. 60% of the S2 participants had not received any financial help from their government to compensate. For those that did, 64% received funds from a COVID-specific scheme, while 22% filed for unemployment, and 14% listed ‘other’. 34% of those who identified as being an employee were being paid their full salary (S2).

60% of the S3 respondents had not received any financial help from their government or other institution to cover for potential loss of income. 12% said they did receive help but that it had stopped. For the 27% who did receive help, 70% was covered under a COVID-specific scheme, while 15% filed for unemployment and 15% mentioned ‘other’.

**Amount of remote versus on-site work**

75% of S1 respondents were working remotely from home since the start of mass quarantine. 34% did so for less than one day per week and 47% for less than one hour a day.

In S2, we asked a more detailed question to gauge the differences before and after the start of the crisis. In the last six months of 2019, the majority of S2 respondents worked as a sign language interpreter for 5 days a week, both remote and on-site.

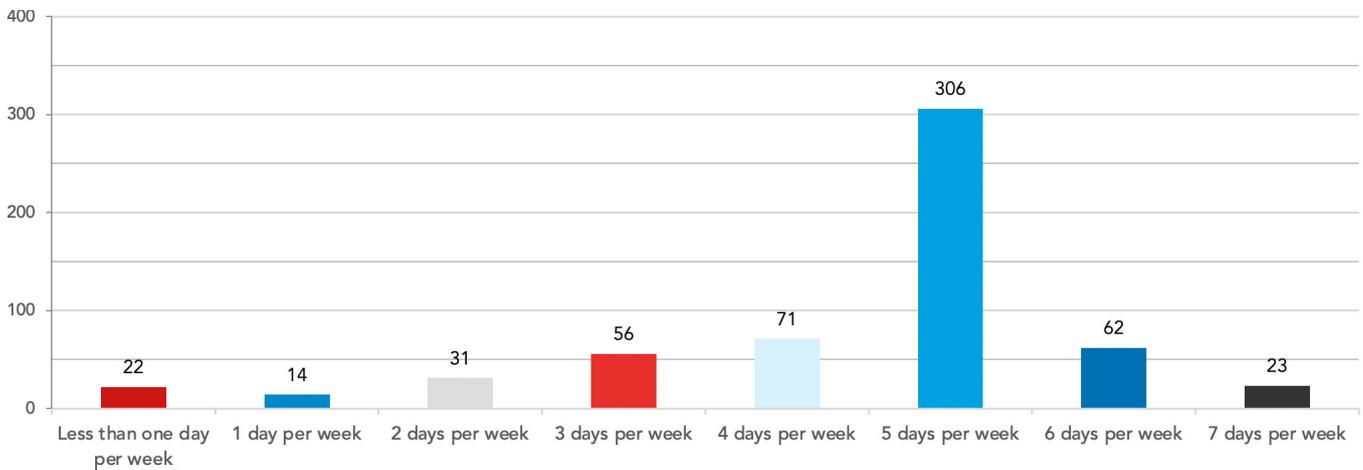


Figure 5: In the last six months of 2019, approximately how many days per week did you work as a sign language interpreter (both remote and on-site)? (S2)

Of this workload, maximum 10% was remote. The majority of S2 respondents only worked remotely occasionally or never.

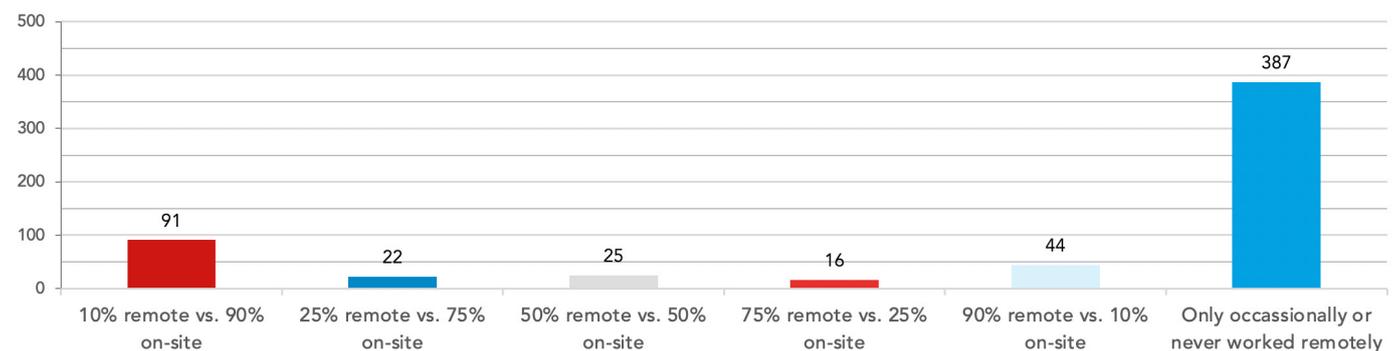


Figure 6: Approximately how much of this workload was remote vs. on-site? (S2)

71% of S3 respondents had on-site work. When asked approximately how many days (i.e. working one hour or more a day) per week they worked as a sign language interpreter both remote and on-site during the last six months of 2019, the results were comparable to Survey 2: the majority worked 5 days per week. For the majority of respondents (267 out of 595) 0% of this workload was remote.

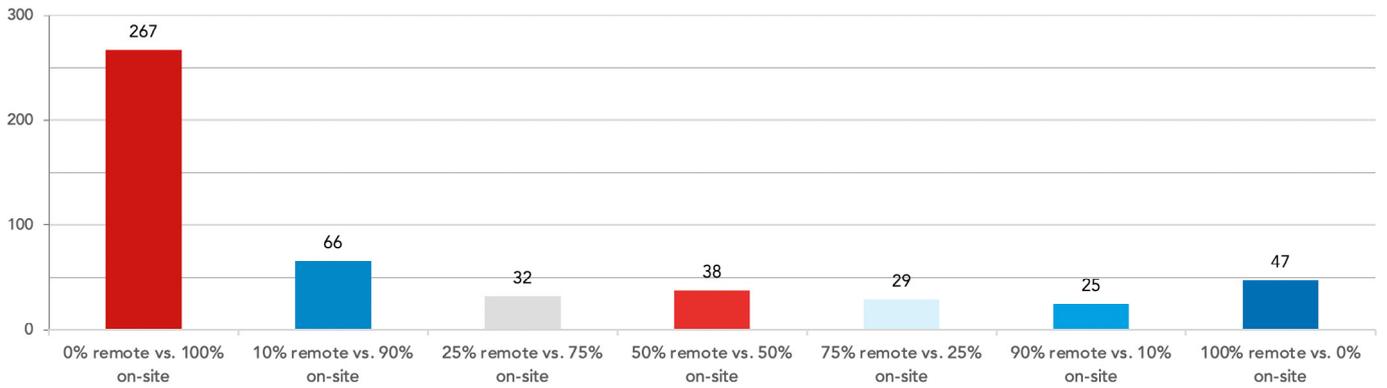


Figure 7: Approximately how much of this workload in the last six months of 2019 was remote vs. on-site?

When asked how much of their workload is currently remote versus on-site, the response was the exact opposite with the majority of respondents having a 100% remote workload.

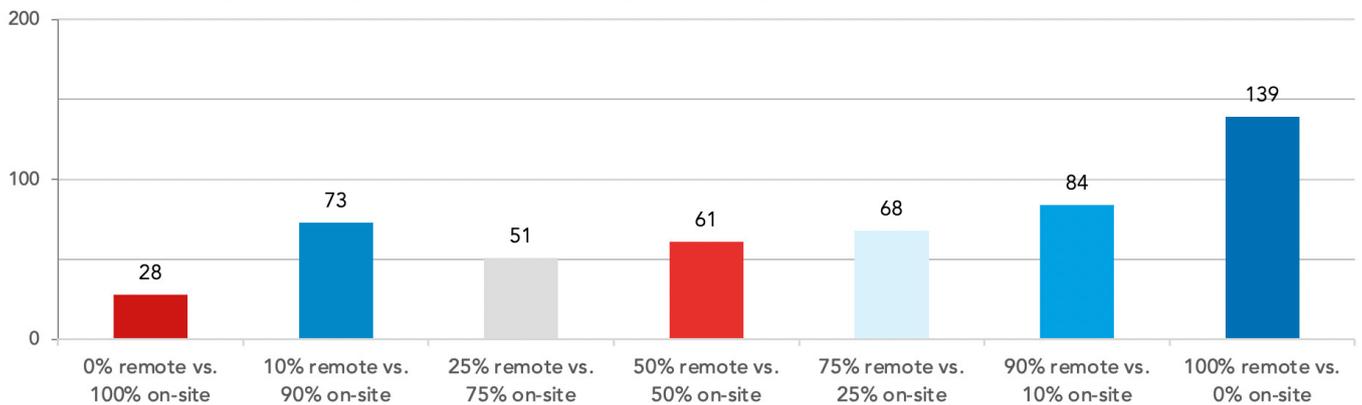


Figure 8: Currently, how much % of your work is remote vs on site?

When asked how many days per week they worked on average as a remote sign language interpreter since the start of the crisis in their country, responses varied, as illustrated below.

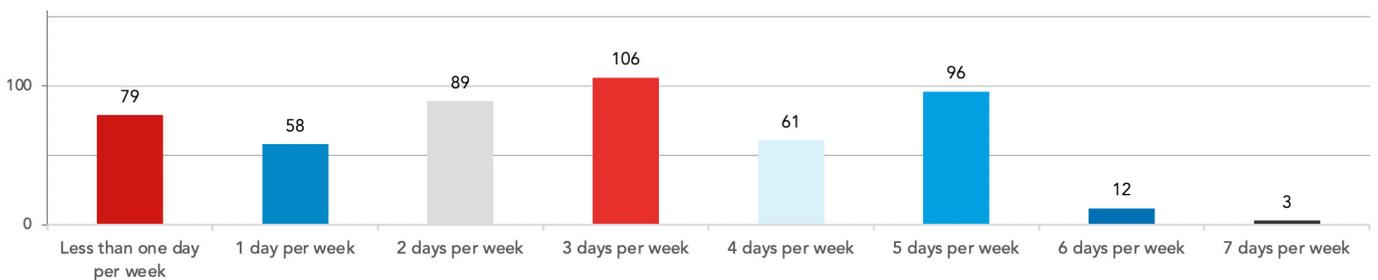


Figure 9: Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis in your country, how many days per week do you work on average as a remote sign language interpreter? (S3)

46% of respondents worked 1-3 hours per day, while 34% worked 4-6 hours a day.

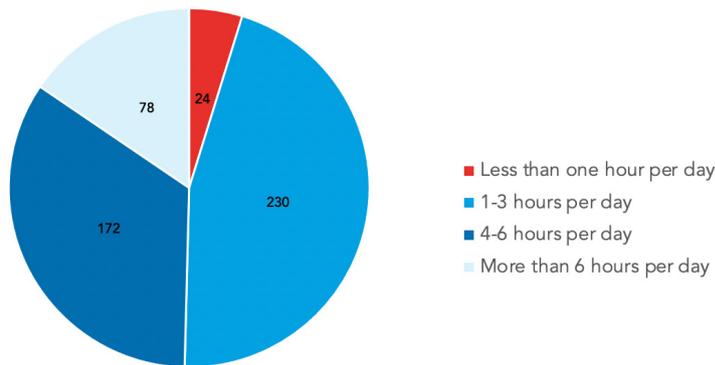


Figure 10: On average, how many hours per day do you work as a remote sign language interpreter?

### Reasons for not working remotely

We asked the S1 respondents who were not working remotely from home why this was the case (306 responses). The main reason in April 2020 seemed to be that there were simply no work opportunities (57% of responses). Another 20% responded that it was due to lack of equipment/technology at home. Several respondents indicated that they were looking for equipment but could not purchase items because of high demand. 10% of respondents said it was because they were working on-site.

In S3, we also asked why some interpreters were not working remotely. The main reason remained that there was no available work.

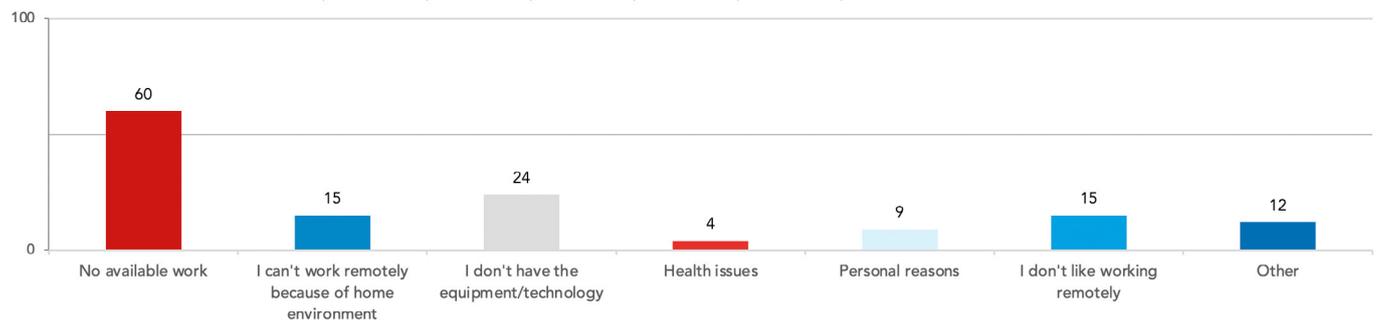


Figure 11: What are the reasons that you currently do not or cannot work remotely? (Choose all that apply) (S3)

### Reasons for not working on-site

52% of S1 respondents had been asked by clients to work outside of their home after the start of mass quarantine. We asked S3 respondents why they were not working on-site. The top 3 reasons were: (1) no demand; (2) still on lockdown and (3) interpreters not being comfortable working on-site.

### Training on how to work remotely

A mean 63% of S2 and S3 respondents said they had not received any training on how to interpret remotely. A mean 32% of respondents participated in remote interpreting related webinars offered during this period.

### Settings for remote work

The most common settings in which S1 and S2 respondents were working remotely were (1) education; (2) business/employment; (3) medical/health and (4) government/social services. However, a considerable number of S2 respondents ticked 'Other'. This might also be due to the fact that the analysis of S1 was not yet finished when S2 was launched, so we could not process and analyze all the comments to adapt questions accordingly.

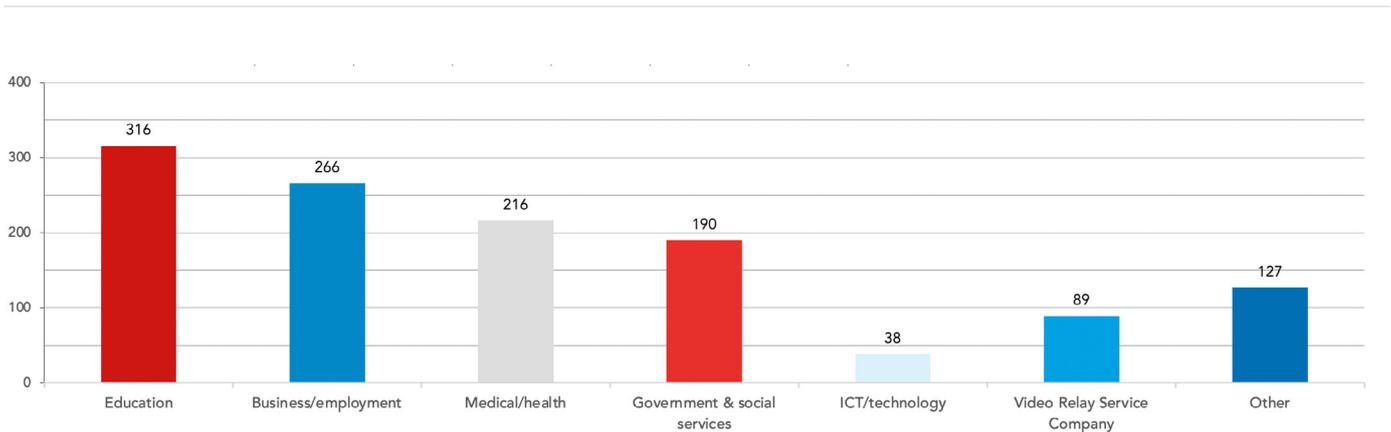


Figure 12: In which settings are you currently working remotely? (choose all that apply). (S2)

In S3 we repeated the question, this time making it a multiple choice question. The majority of remote work was still in education, followed by 'business/employment', 'conferences/webinars', 'medical: physical health' and 'community interpreting'.

This time we asked additional questions per setting. In medical/health settings, most of the remote work seemed to be doctor's appointments. For educational settings, remote work seemed to be taking place mostly for universities, followed by college, secondary school, and elementary/primary school.

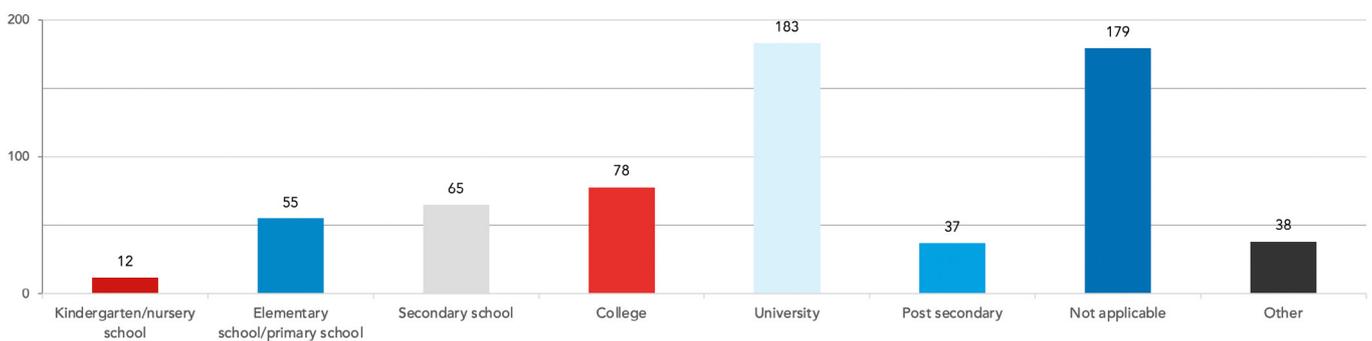


Figure 13: If you are working remotely in educational settings, at which level? (choose all that apply) (S3)

Regarding work in media settings (television, web-stream, ...) we asked how it is organized. Most interpreters seemed to have one co-interpreter but a significant number worked alone.

### Sign language interpreters as essential workers: work settings

In mid April 2020, 52% of respondents claimed to be working as a sign language interpreter on-site/outside of their home. 56% of them said this was because they are considered an essential worker, while 24% were not sure about their status (this might also be due to country-specific terms for and meanings of 'essential worker' at the time). For those considered essential workers, 32% worked in the healthcare sector, 23% worked in media, 18% worked in the civil service sector, and 27% chose 'other'.

By July 2020, 73% of S3 participants were back on-site, with 44% reporting that it was because they were considered an essential worker. Most of these interpreters work in the healthcare sector (31%), with 17% working in media, another 17% in the civil service, and 11% in legal settings.

For those not considered to be essential workers, the top 5 settings in which they were working on-site at the beginning of July 2020 (S3) were (1) medical: physical health; (2) business/employment; (3) education; (4) government or civil service and social services, and (5) community interpreting.

### Home set-up and technical equipment

*“I have made some investment to do more remote interpreting (e.g. faster internet connection, lighting set-up), I would want to make sure these are maximized and that there will be some kind of return of investment.” (S3, Philippines)*

Over the 3 surveys, a mean 62% of respondents stated to be confident that their home was technically set up for remote work. A mean 42% were confident their IT skills were adept to set up their home workspace and fix any technical issues.

Most respondents used a built-in web camera only. A mean 12% had both a built-in camera and an external camera. 65% had a wifi connection, only 18% had both a wifi connection and an ethernet cable. Almost half of the respondents added additional lighting and background. About 55% of respondents had a dedicated room to work in. For those S2 being an employee, 26% got equipment provided from their company to work from home, while 27% did not.

By the time S3 was launched, we expected most interpreters working remotely to have invested in their home set up. Most respondents said they did not buy anything or spent less than 100 dollars, mostly spent on a headset and a background.

### Platforms used for remote sign language interpreting

*“IT skills are lacking and many people have no idea how to be in frame when on a call. Including a surprising number of Deaf people who would otherwise be visually aware.” (S3, UK)*

Over all three surveys, Zoom was by far the most used and the most successful platform, followed by Skype. In S2 WhatsApp was added to the options and became the third most successful programme. The platform MS Teams was less used and perceived as less user-friendly. This might be due to MS Teams not having the option to pin more than three people until well into May 2020, and its options for screen sharing were not a favourite among interpreters and deaf consumers.

Two other points: in all three surveys we failed to list several platforms that were apparently being in use. Some of these seem to be online total communication platforms such as Solves and MMX, used by private VRS/VRI companies. These companies pre-existed the pandemic and had already captured a significant part of the remote interpreting market. WhatsApp was fairly successful and used as a platform, despite not being known as a videoconferencing platform, and the video function being only on the phone. The questions did not allow respondents to indicate how often they used a certain platform, and which platforms they used simultaneously and how often. For example we know from observations in the field that WhatsApp is sometimes used simultaneously with MS Teams in case someone shares a screen.

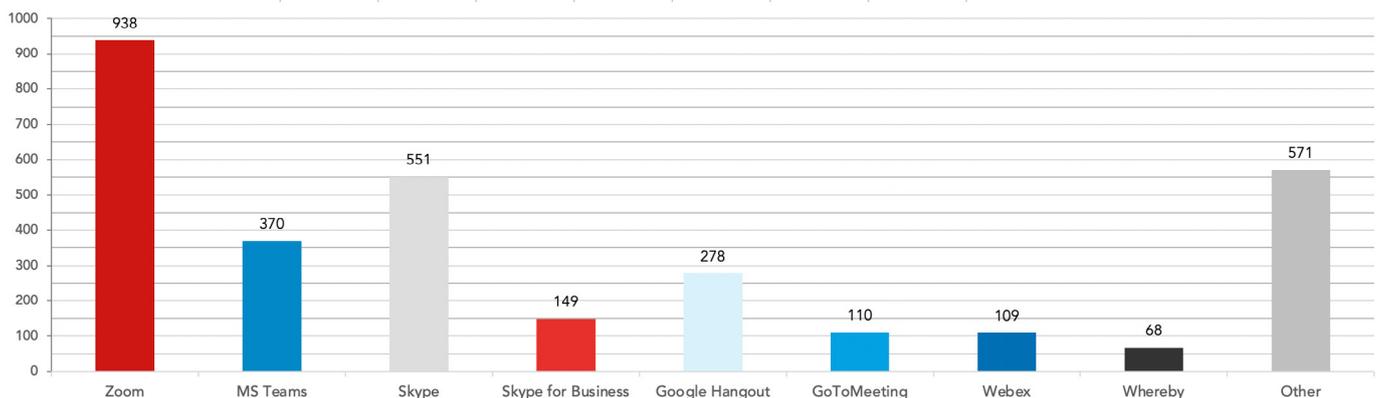


Figure 14: What programs and/or apps do you use for remote work? Please tick any boxes of programs/apps that you use. (S1)

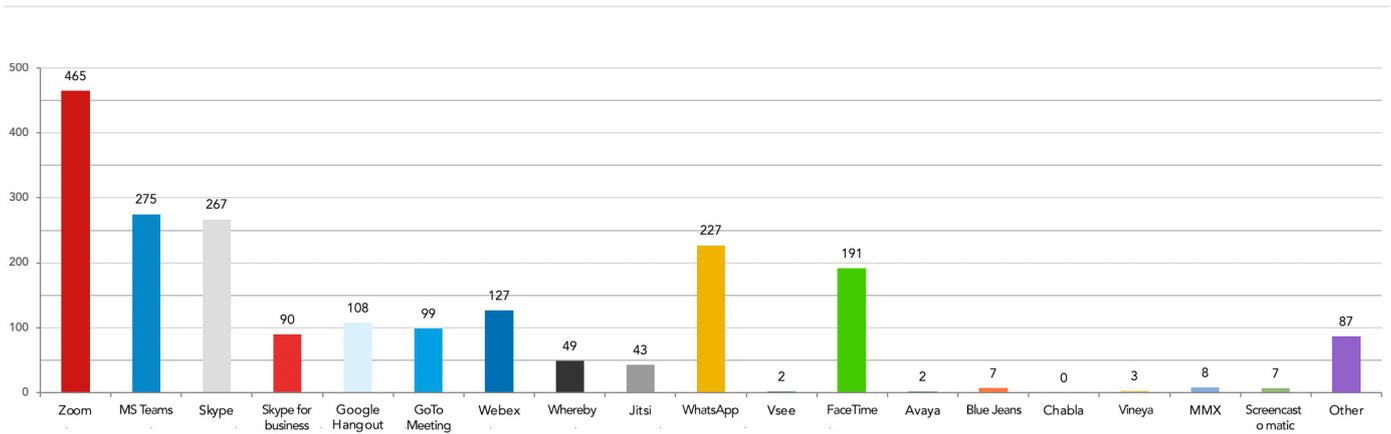


Figure 15: What programs and/or apps do you use for remote work? Please tick any boxes of programs/apps that you use. (S2)

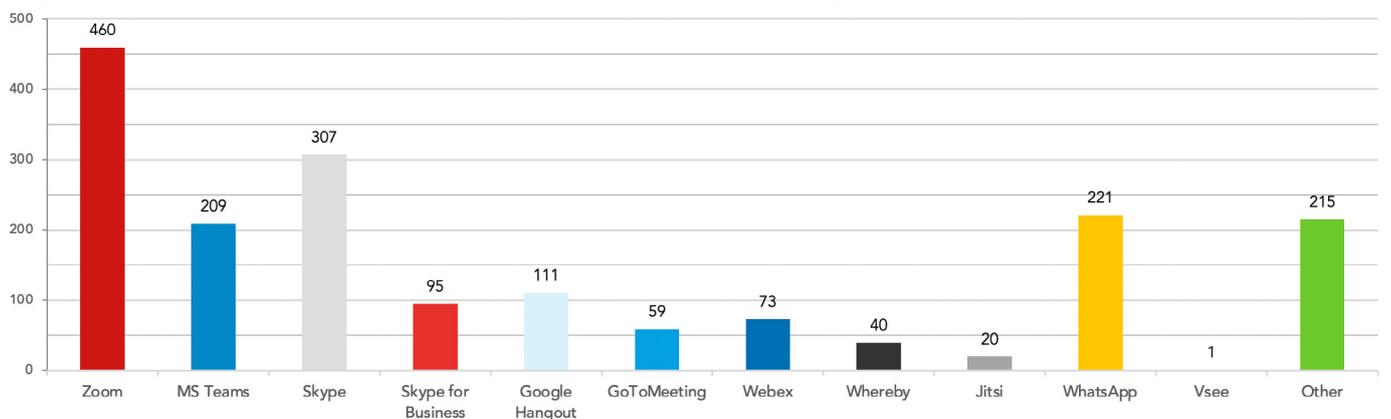


Figure 16: What programs and/or apps do you use for remote work? Please tick any boxes of programs/apps that you use. (S3)

### Obstacles experienced when working remotely from home

*"My domestic situation is that my children are being homeschooled and thus there is never a point in time where I am 'alone'. There is a constant subtle distraction since I don't have a private work studio. My work space is set up with a blue screen in the living area."*

(S1, South Africa)

In S1 we asked respondents through an open question which (maximum three) obstacles they experience most frequently when working remotely. These were: (1) technical glitches, (2) suitable workplace/set-up/equipment, and (3) kids at home and other distractions. After that came (4) issues linked to interaction/control/2D, (5) education of deaf/hearing participants on how to use platforms, and (6) most platforms not designed for sign language interpreting. In S2 we made this a multiple choice question, and responses were similar to those of S1.

Since from Survey 1 it appeared that 59% of respondents did not have a lock in the room they were remote interpreting in (if they had a dedicated room at all), in Survey 2 and 3 we removed the question and only asked if they had a dedicated room for remote work. A mean 54% of respondents had a dedicated room for remote work.

About half of S2 and S3 respondents working remotely felt restricted by their home environment in regards to the amount of time and type of work they could offer. When asked what kind of limitations they experienced (multiple choice question), the most important limitations were: (1) responsibility to children, (2) noisy environment and (3) pets, with 178 respondents indicating 'other'. 196 of 585 respondents indicated they had no limitations.

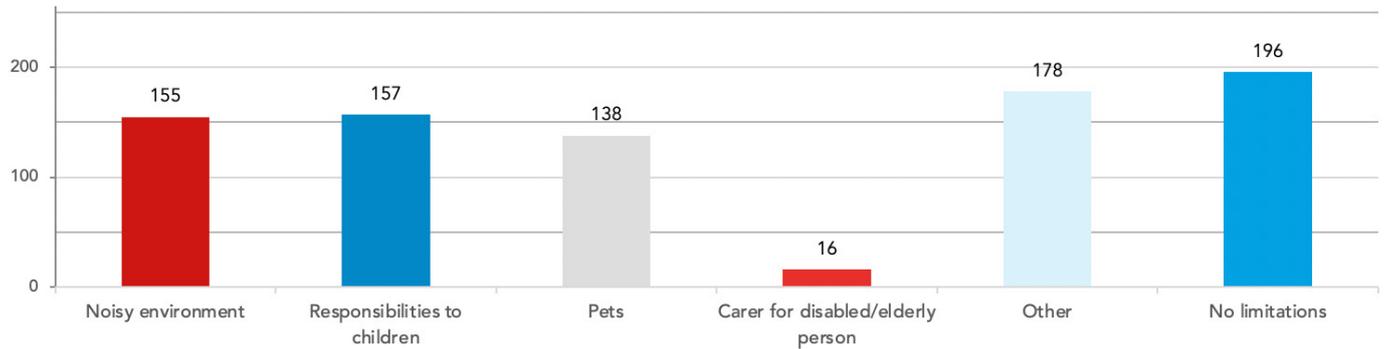


Figure 17: What are the limitations of your home environment in terms of remote work? (choose all that apply). (S2)

When asked about limitations of S3 respondents’ home environment in terms of remote work (multiple choice question), the top 5 was: (1) noisy environment (e.g. dishwashers running, noise of children); (2) children; (3) no limitations; (4) other and (5) pets.

We asked S1 respondents how confident they were seeing themselves signing on screen when working remotely. We thought this was interesting to know as most on-site work does not allow for interpreters to see themselves signing. This turned out not to be a significant issue: only 2% claimed to be ‘not confident at all’ and 10% ‘not really confident’, while 29% was ‘neutral’. 24% felt ‘very confident’ and 34% ‘quite confident’. A respondent from the UK commented:

*“It is off putting seeing myself but I am learning not to look and trust in the process.”*

**Psychological and physical aspects of working remotely**

*“I think the elephant in the room is the deteriorating mental health of our communities. Collective wellbeing is fraying. While there is much to celebrate in terms of how well our community has come together; it’s really challenging to maintain and I can see that there’ll be an exodus of interpreters, myself included, if this pandemic continues or we have a second wave. I don’t think we are well equipped to look after each other and what is fundamentally, counterintuitively passionate and toxic as a professional landscape - as freelancers we need each other but we also compete with each other - the pressures that await us towards the end of 2020 into 2021 can only be devastating.”*

(S3, UK)

We asked S2 respondents how much they agreed with the statement that remote interpreting is more stressful than face-to-face interpreting. 44% agreed it is more stressful, while 23% strongly agreed.

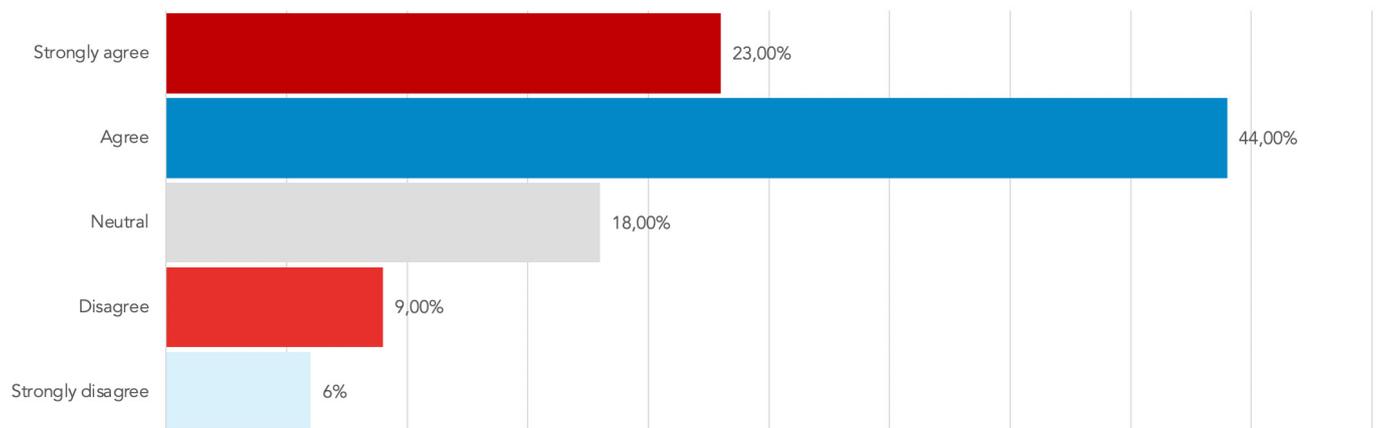


Figure 18: How strongly do you agree with the following statement: Remote interpreting is more stressful than face-to-face interpreting

We asked respondents how much they agreed with the statement that remote interpreting requires a heavier cognitive load than face-to-face interpreting. 53% agreed, while 25% strongly agreed.

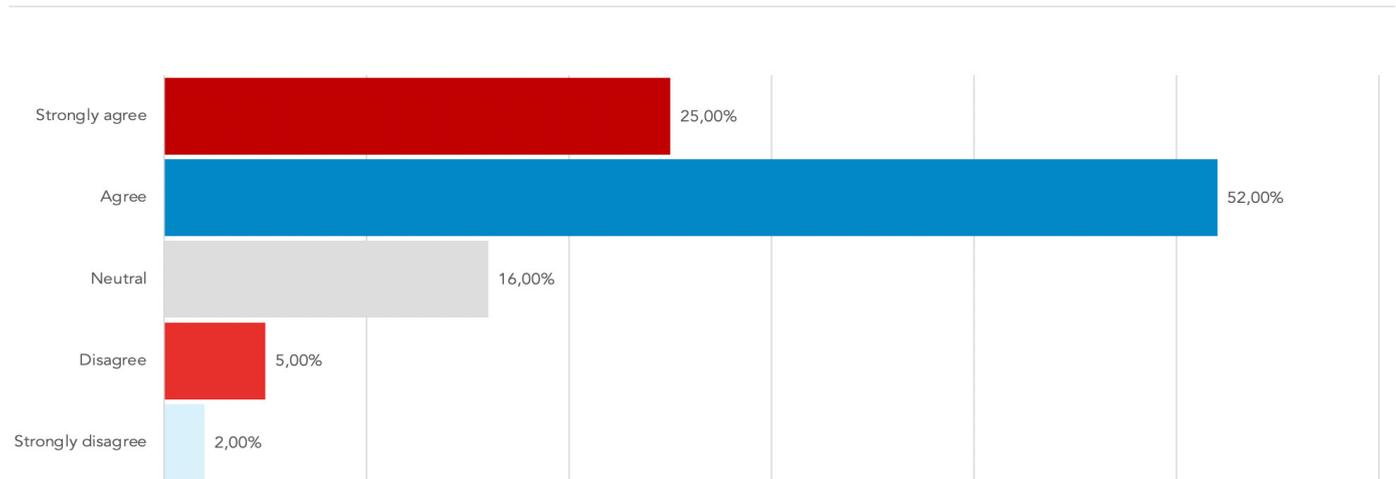


Figure 19: How strongly do you agree with the following statement: Remote interpreting requires a heavier cognitive load compared to on-site work

We asked S2 respondents whether they thought their work as a sign language interpreter has become more psychologically demanding because of the COVID-19 crisis. 63% confirmed this, while 37% said it had not become more psychologically demanding (N=585).

For survey 3 we wanted to include more questions related to the emotional, psychological and physical aspects of working remotely. First we asked for reasons why remote interpreting could be more stressful. The top 5 of reasons were: (1) coping with technical issues; (2) interpreting 2D instead of 3D; (3) no/less ability to manage conversations (e.g. turn-taking, asking for clarification); (4) teamwork (supporting a colleague/being supported by a colleague is harder) and (5) having no real-life personal contact.

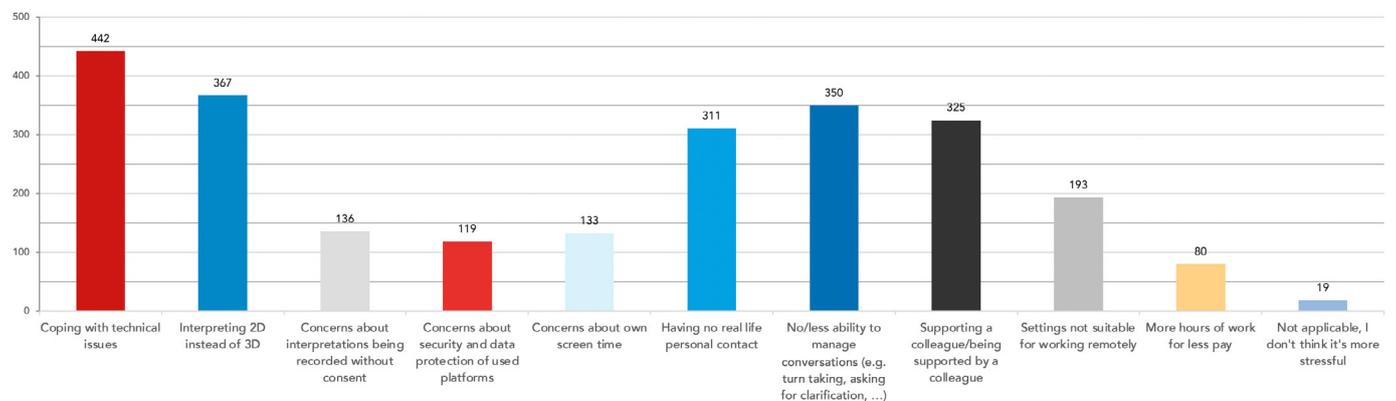


Figure 20: From the previous surveys it appeared that remote interpreting could be more stressful. What do you think are the main reasons for this? (choose all that apply) (S3)

Since from the previous surveys it appeared that remote interpreting is psychologically more demanding, we asked if respondents had sought out mental health support since the start of the crisis to cope with changing professional demands. 13% of respondents (N=504) ticked yes. When asked what kind of mental health support this was, a slight majority stated this was individual support from a professional, closely followed by individual support from a colleague. Peer support groups and individual support from friends also featured: "Group video chats are a good way to consolidate new learning and support for our colleagues" (S2, Australia). A case was also made here for a more active role of professional interpreter associations not only in providing training (such as webinars) but also in emotional support:

*"I find that as a more experienced interpreter I have spent a lot of time offering free support and supervision to other interpreters - to help contain them etc... professional associations gave advice, guidelines and webinars on working remotely but no on-going support. There are interpreters who are having 'melt-downs', have lost confidence in their skills and feel demoralised!"*

(S3, UK).

A S3 respondent from the Philippines commented: "Interpreters should have a pool or support group in their own locality/ country to be continually updated with the "changes" during these times."

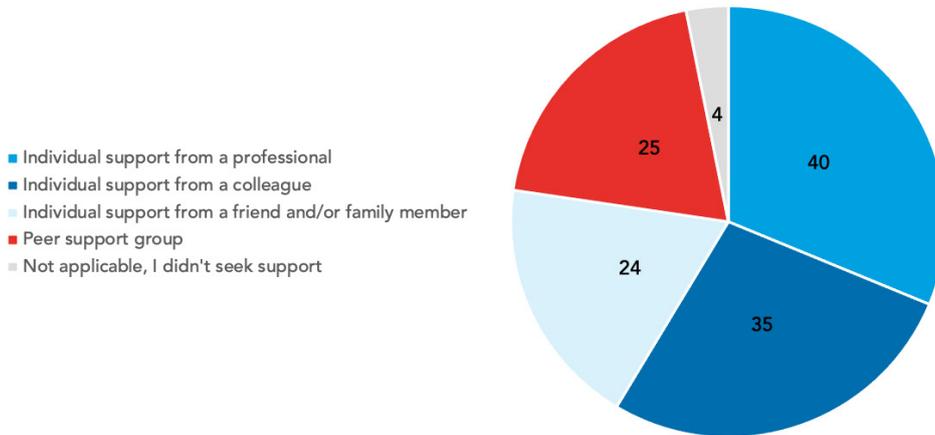


Figure 21: What kind of mental health support was/is it? (choose all that apply) (S3)

The (same) physical space in which interpreters worked was also mentioned as a factor here in preparing oneself for an interpreting assignment and getting 'in the right mood'. One S3 respondent from the Netherlands commented on the influence of the environment:

A S3 respondent from Germany also mentioned the influence of their surroundings: "I get the mood on site; stronger relationship to customers on site."

### Working with a restricted pool of clients online

Based on previous surveys and observations in the field, we knew that because of the different demands of working online, some interpreters only chose to work with a self-selected pool of clients online (compared to on-site). 61% of S3 respondents confirmed they did. One respondent from the Netherlands commented:

*"I barely accept work for people I have not met before now. It is more difficult to understand each other from a screen, accommodating and adjusting is much harder, so I prefer to work with people I know. In live situations I don't mind working with new people, because I know how to work together and figure out how to communicate smoothly. Online, not all strategies for doing so work, so I prefer not to."*

For some interpreters, the transition to remote interpreting was facilitated by working with familiar colleagues and/or clients: "I have had the opportunity to work as a remote interpreter with my long-time colleague for a familiar student interpreting client. This has made the transition to remote interpretation much easier. It is not necessarily easy to understand the customer's sign language from a small screen, it is also easier with a familiar customer." (S1, Finland)

### Remote vs. on-site work in the future

*"Having worked as a VRS interpreter for 10 years or more I am fairly used to working in a remote context. Therefore, I think the balance I had already achieved of about 25% of my work being remote (VRS) was a good distribution to maintain connection in the community as well as learning and enhancing skills in remote work." (S3, UK)*

In S3, we asked whether participants thought they would be doing more remote work in the future. 73% said they would be doing more remote work, while 18% did not know, and 9% said they would not. For those who said yes, we asked on average what % of their work they think will be remote vs. on-site. The majority predicted it would be 25% remote vs. 75% on-site, followed by a 50-50% balance and a 10% remote vs. 90% on-site.

“

[...] location helps to get me in the right mindset. When I enter a university, I am aware of all the university aspects of a setting, entering a hospital gets me ready for a medical conversation. Now I interpret all kinds of conversations in the same physical space.

(Survey 3, The Netherlands)

”

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We also gauged interpreters' likeness for remote work, asking how much remote work they would like to continue accepting once the pandemic is controlled, compared to before the pandemic. 57% reported that they would like to accept more remote work.

When asked if they thought the crisis will have a permanent impact on working standards for sign language interpreters, 55% of S3 respondents (N=595) said yes, while 29% didn't know, and 16% said no.

## 9. FINDINGS BASED ON OPEN QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

In this section, we discuss some of the findings based on responses to the open questions in the surveys, and the comments from respondents.

### Digital literacy of sign language interpreters

*“Before COVID I was not expected to have decent IT skills, but now I am expected to be an expert on interpreting AND technology.” (S3, U.S.)*

Many sign language interpreters experienced a steep learning curve with regard to technological knowledge and skills, and some interpreters feel this effectively means they have to expand their skills set. Respondents commented their work had now become two-dimensional: running technology and trying to maintain clarity of message. They also indicated that one of the challenges of working remotely is that it is often interpreters who need to educate deaf/hearing people about the use of platforms and other technical issues: “ [...] sometimes people are not set up and then it seems as if the interpreter is the chair and has to manage the meeting”(S3, the Netherlands).

Added to this seems the expectation by some interpreters that their own set up and technical savviness will influence work opportunities: “The responsibility of logistics set up and strong connectivity is now on the interpreter and interpreters may be chosen for the bandwidth that they have rather than their skill” (S3, Philippines). This was especially critical in regions where internet connections can be poor. A S1 respondent from Kenya commented that “the internet is not very strong for successful remote interpreting”. At the same time, some respondents saw technology as an equalizer, as one S3 respondent from Finland commented:

*“Personally I find that the dependency on technology (computers, software, connection quality) makes all participants more equal - everyone experiences difficulties at some point so there is more tolerance and will to help each other to solve them. It is not only the Deaf client who is dependent on the interpreter and whether or not they can hear/see well, it is equally important for everyone”.*

The survey data indicate that some interpreters have no difficulties jumping on the bandwagon of remote interpreting and all that it (technically) entails. A S3 respondent from Germany with more than 10 years of interpreting experience commented:

*“The crisis resulted in new assignments through online interpreting after a short period of decline in demands, which quickly resulted in my normal volume of work again. So I've got through the crisis very well as a sign language interpreter. The range of my areas of application is helpful. There are many new challenges with online interpreting, but you grow along.”*

Newly graduated interpreters who are mostly digital natives could be said to have less effort with this than some of the more seasoned (often older) interpreters. One of those seasoned interpreters said remote work and all that it entails was reason enough for them to consider changing careers:

*“I didn't have any remote work before the crisis, and I hope to not have any in the future, because working remotely 1) I experience a loss of connection to the Deaf community and interpreting community, and 2) the tech issues involved and tech knowledge required are beyond my ability and interest.” (S3, U.S.)*

### Sign language interpreter training and education

*“It will be very difficult for young training interpreters to work in this way as they need face-to-face practice in order to shape their interpreting experiences.” (S3, UK)*

Several respondents commented on the impact of the pandemic for current and future training of sign language interpreting students, mentioning less opportunities to do internships, less events in deaf communities which means less opportunities to go

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Working remotely has opened up geographic restrictions and offers deaf clients more choice of interpreters and not be restricted by geographic boundaries.

(Survey 3, Ireland)

”

out and meet deaf people. A S3 respondent from the U.S. commented there will be a

*"[...]gap in upcoming interpreters who are currently in training programs and unable to immersively practice interpreting and socializing with the deaf community".*

Respondents commented that the crisis will probably accelerate the need for online interpreter training in training programs. This is supported by the data which point to the overall majority of interpreters currently working remotely having had no training whatsoever to do this. Another issue that resurfaced was the perceived need to have face-to-face practice and live mentoring: "There will be several years of new interpreters not being mentored live and not developing the skills of in person interpreting" (S3, U.S.). At the same time, it could be argued that observing is less obtrusive online versus on-site. This is an area for future research.

### **Continuous Professional Development (CPD)**

Several respondents expressed concerns about the lack of CPD opportunities during the crisis "Mentors and mentees do not meet due to the social distancing restrictions. Continuous Professional Development workshops (in personal contact) cannot take place and due to the uneasiness of online presentation of such these are either cancelled or postponed" (S3, South-Africa). Other respondents asked for accommodations in achieving the required CPD credits to the circumstances: "My concern is that this year I will not be able to afford registration and CPD which is required. I think they should give a year's grace on CPD requirements and/or provide some sessions whilst hanging around online that by doing e-learning we would automatically meet the requirements for the year." (S2, UK). At the same time, some respondents noted an increase in webinars and online conferences they could attend for CPD requirements which they would not have been able to attend before the crisis (because of distance and location).

### **Benefits of remote interpreting**

*"Working remotely has opened up geographic restrictions and offers deaf clients more choice of interpreters and not be restricted by geographic boundaries." (S3, Ireland)*

Although the challenges involved in remote interpreting were significant, many respondents also commented on what benefits they thought remote interpreting might bring to the table, both for themselves and for deaf people. In general, the most significant benefits that were mentioned were flexibility and the possibility to improve efficiency and availability of sign language interpreting services, which positively impacts on deaf consumers. Indeed, less travel time means less travel expenses (and thus less expensive assignments for consumers or payers), and the ability to cover more assignments in one day means interpreters can be available to more people. Also, interpreters mentioned that there were now more options for deaf people to work with interpreters they want to work with (but before the pandemic were barred from working with because of geographical distance).

*"It has proven to be not only possible but also useful in some contexts and will hopefully enable increased service to clients that have had difficulties in receiving service; i.e. remote interpreting can, if well organised, improve the availability and efficiency of our service." (S3, Finland)*

Remote interpreting also offers more opportunities for interpreters and deaf consumers living in remote areas, or those with health conditions which make on-site assignments challenging:

*"I live rural so it gives more access to those deaf people living in rural/remote areas, especially at short notice." (S3, Australia)*

*"Remote access can sometimes bring benefits, such as increasing opportunities for deaf people who are not able to travel. I am interpreting for people who struggled to get funding to attend events/conferences." (S3, UK)*

This turned out to be especially significant in specific countries, as one S3 respondent from the Philippines said:

*"Being a developing country, the interpreting pool we have is not enough to respond to the needs of the Deaf community. Doing remote interpreting is a big help because it takes out the hassles of long hours of commute. By this I am able to*

“

I'm slightly more positive about remote interpreting now than three months ago. But still the amount of energy it takes to interpret remotely is exhausting. One hour of RI is equivalent energy use, mentally and physically, to interpreting for 6 hours a day for 2 days.

(Survey 3, Norway)

”

| *accept more remote interpreting work (whether paid or pro-bono) within a day/week."*

It also presents new opportunities for interpreters to team with other interpreters living far apart. Some respondents saw a positive impact on work-life balance:

| *"Pre-pandemic I worked and commuted 80 hours per week, I didn't see my children as much. Seeing them more has been a huge benefit I'd like to maintain to some extent."  
(S3, U.S.)*

All in all, respondents saw a larger normalization and acceptance of remote interpreting as another positive aspect.

| *"I think there will be a presumption of comfort with remote work that would not have been so much a given before having to work around full lockdown restrictions."  
(S3, Ireland)*

| *"I would accept more because I think for many deaf people this is an acceptable way to access interpreters, especially professionals working in an office environment who previously would not have considered this as an option, yet now can see the advantage."  
(S3, UK)*

Other (smaller) benefits mentioned were not taking up physical space in an office and downtime spent hanging around offices, especially for 'in-house' interpreters, and needing a more limited wardrobe and fixing one's appearance 'just enough' for the camera.

These positive aspects have a flip side though, as we discuss in the next section.

### **Cognitive, psychological and physical demands of remote interpreting**

Many respondents experienced remote interpreting as strenuous, unsatisfactory, impersonal, tiring, stressful and exhausting in terms of technology. The increase in hours of screen time, conversation control, cooperation with co-interpreters, and 2D instead of 3D all take its toll. Respondents also commented on the isolation aspect of remote work with interpreters working alone for extended hours with little to no interaction or support. An S3 respondent from the UK described remote work as impersonal:

| *"It feels soulless. There is no feel to the room. [...] It is harder to read people, picking up what kind of mood a person has. It is harder to access non-verbal information, [...] the ability to 'read a room': who is shuffling, looking bored, or desperate to interrupt."*

While in the previous section remote interpreting was seen by some interpreters as positive for work-life balance, other respondents saw this differently: "I don't like online, I need the trip and the local people for a good interpreting product, but also for work-life balance." (S3, Germany)

As for the physical demands, respondents mentioned the negative effect on posture, increased risk for RSI, ergonomic consequences, and physical pain and discomfort. As one S2 respondent from the U.S. commented: "My biggest challenge of working remotely is that it is mentally taxing and physically difficult - I often have headaches, neck pain, and eye strain, even though I only interpret 2-3 hours a day with breaks in between."

There were other factors linked to remote work that made it stressful for respondents. While they appreciated being able to cover more assignments in one day, this also had the possibility of leading to longer working hours. The flexible aspect of remote work also had a side effect that often, assignments come in last-minute with no or less opportunity to prepare (and thus more stressful).

For other respondents there were so many unreliable and unpredictable aspects to remote work that they were never really able to relax:

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Though it's possible, it's difficult to interpret truly collaboratively via video platforms. The pendulum seems to be swinging back towards the "on" and "off" team interpreting model.

(Survey 3, U.S.)

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*"Remote work makes an interpreting situation way harder than on site work. Everything is in 2D, I don't know what the room looks like, I never have an opportunity to introduce myself and how I work, I can't trust the other person's internet connection enough to relax while working... etc." (S3, Sweden)*

### Changing working conditions

*"I believe this situation will be used as a driver to attempt to lower interpreters' fees and business terms and conditions. This in turn is likely to lead to skilled interpreters leaving the profession and seeking work elsewhere, at least on a part time basis. In turn, it risks a rise in untrained, unqualified and unregulated signers filling the gaps that are left and resulting in not only lower standards a backward shift in the access and inclusion gains previously made by the deaf community." (S3, UK)*

One of the most significant recurring issues linked to changing working conditions was the concern about loss of income, and concerns about decreasing fees, with the expectation that interpreters would need to accept more remote work for which they will be expected to accept reduced fees or adjust their hourly rates. Other respondents expressed concerns about online services being billed at a less expensive rate than face-to-face, shorter blocks of time reserved as minimum charge for jobs because interpreters do not have to account for travel time, and needing to do more work for the same pay because minimum booking times are shorter for VRI: "... this has had a huge impact on pay, feeling like more jobs are needed each day to earn the same amount" (S3, Australia).

More general concerns were about financial crises in countries recovering from COVID-19, leading to cuts in social services, and concerns that in some contexts it will become harder to convince authorities that on-site interpreting is necessary, and that for meetings that are over 1 hour in duration, two interpreters are necessary, and for meetings over 2,5 or 3 hours, 3 interpreters, not only on-site but also online.

For interpreter agencies, respondents emphasized the need for them to "[...] upskill to provide (help desk) support for employees and freelancers doing a mix of online and on-site work; agencies and freelancers learning how to balance/organize timetables to cover a mix of online and on-site bookings." (S3, New Zealand)

### Remote team interpreting

A significant number of comments addressed the issue of team interpreting when working remotely. During on-site work, interpreters are mostly physically and mentally available to support each other, and this can be different in remote settings. An S3 respondent from the U.S. noted: "[It is] more difficult to team effectively when working remotely. When working on-line the off interpreter can turn their camera off and leave the room instead of watching to see if the working interpreter needs a feed." This also has implications for live broadcasts, as one respondent from South-Africa accounts: "General rules of language practice such as eg turn taking after every 20 min in a team is impacted because working on a live broadcast one simply cannot walk off - the cameraman needs to be queued ever so often and even if he is queued he doesn't remember this and so it impacts the working time of each interpreter" (S3).

These changing working conditions led one respondent from the Netherlands to state that remote work will result in interpreters "having to reinvent ways to actively support each other" (S3). One S3 respondent from South-Africa stated that "Mode of debriefing with team terps [is] impacted since there is a feeling of 'remoteness'". Other respondents saw the benefits of remote interpreting for team work: "I also find that when co-working is a challenge (being in different places), there's also more effort and motivation to make it work and that brings us closer as professionals. Co-working and the need to support each other is also more visible to our clients" (S3, Finland).

For one S3 respondent from Norway the very practice of remote interpreting warrants working in teams more often than for on-site interpreting:

*"I have the need to work more in interpreting pairs, even for shorter meetings (under 1 hour - especially with more than one participant signing), to unburden the stress concerning technical issues, and also for support if I don't understand what the deaf participant is saying."*

### Dependence on technology

*"When handling some interpreting situations, because of the platforms not being friendly SL Interpreting user, and when doing trilingual and quadrilingual interpreting, I've opted to do consecutive interpreting instead of simultaneously. This has allowed me to have better control when troubleshooting."*

*(S3, Mexico)*

Many respondents mentioned the loss of control that engaging with technology implies, being dependent on running technical equipment and a solid internet connection. Added to this was the experience that many online platforms are not set up for sign language interpreting, which exacerbates loss of control. For some, technology means that the interpreter as a human factor becomes invisible in the process. Also, when the interpreter is not (clearly) visible for all participants,

*"[...] hearing participants forget in a larger group to pay attention to the structure of the conversation; due to the time lag and the lack of visual reminder that interpreting is taking place here, reports from deaf participants are lost."*

*(S3, Germany)*

Linked to this was loss of conversation control. Online, respondents found it harder to ask interlocutors to repeat if needed: "I also find it very hard to maybe ask again if you miss something or manage turn-taking. More information will be lost." (S3, Sweden).

### Interpreters who are deaf

*"[...] virtual interpreting has allowed more Deaf people to work and find their co-interpreter to work in tandem compared to physical where our preferred non-Deaf team interpreters may not be available (due to travel time or traffic) [...]."*

*(S3, U.S.)*

Throughout the pandemic, official announcements by the media and governments have featured interpreters who are deaf. This corresponds with an increase in work opportunities for them. At the same time, deaf interpreters (DI) participating in the surveys wondered what impact social distance measures might have on their work opportunities: "As a DI I worry that opportunities which are few already will dwindle as clients opt for a hearing terp alone, this will also have an impact on team interpreting" (South-Africa, S3). Likewise, a deaf interpreter from Germany (S2) commented: "A big problem is the interpretation for deaf interpreters - at many places they do not allow more than 3 people in a room but a deaf interpreter needs a team with a hearing interpreter, plus a deaf and hearing client, is often a problem".

### Influence on interpreters' sign language skills

*"An unexpected, and very positive silver lining in all this has been being able to reconnect with people online. I've had more online meetings, catch ups and chats with Deaf people in the past 2 weeks than I have in years and it's been great."*

*(S1, Scotland)*

In S3, we asked respondents if they were concerned about their interpreting skills due to less practice. 74% claimed not to be concerned. In the comments, some respondents elaborated on this and from this it appeared the concerns were not just linked to being out of work for a longer period of time, but having less opportunities to meet and interact with deaf people. Some respondents stated they needed to find new ways to prepare, debrief, and converse with clients. Others commented on not being updated on new signs circulating in the communities and on sign language interpreters working alone for extended hours without being monitored which could lead to interpreters becoming "too 'comfortable', and then complacent" (S3, Canada).

## 10. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study surveyed and documented how the shift in working practices caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been experienced by sign language interpreters in multiple countries, and how it has been impacting and innovating the sign language interpreting profession beyond the pandemic.

As discussed in the methodology section, a significant part of our respondents seem to be sign language interpreters who were new to remote interpreting. The findings show that some interpreters made it through the crisis with only a brief period of slowdown, thereafter receiving seemingly unlimited requests, many times by consumers who wouldn't otherwise be able to book them due to geographical distance. Those are likely interpreters who were already well set up and experienced in remote work, had a stable network of clients and/or worked in a VRS/VRI company (or a combination of all these reasons). The findings also show that for other interpreters, the challenge was much more difficult, having been without any work opportunities for a prolonged period of time, and with some even considering leaving the field. The interplay of factors that made interpreters survive the crisis largely unscathed (or not) deserves follow-up research, and can point us to relevant issues beyond the pandemic. The data point to digital literacy being a critical factor, as well as training and experience in working remotely. Another critical issue to consider is gender. The impact of crises is never gender-neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception. We did not ask for the gender of our respondents, but the sign language interpreting profession is well known to be female-dominated (Napier & Leeson 2016). In the UK for example, 84% of sign language interpreters are female, and several surveys show this trend to be quite stable (Peaker 2020). We see a number of respondents indicating having had a hard time managing the logistic conundrum of working from home and managing childcare and other domestic duties, even going so far as filing for unemployment.

A study of the factors that impact whether sign language interpreters endured the crisis successfully or not would have to explore the issue of being out of work. From our data it appears that between April and July 2020 some interpreters lost all work for a variety of reasons. Interpreting services are generally funded by public bodies. In the beginning of the pandemic, with the majority of public services closing or limiting face-to-face interactions, work inevitably evaporated. For example, many hospitals and health services cancelled all non-COVID related appointments. Sign language interpreters working in education were impacted too, because most schools closed during lockdown and many schools initially struggled with offering courses online, did not do so at all for a long period of time or if they did, having them being made accessible via sign language interpreters was often an afterthought. Those working mainly as community interpreters might have felt the impact because there were less work opportunities in everyday life settings such as sports, gatherings, family events, cultural events, etc. Other reasons might be due to interpreters' networks: those with large and stable client networks before the crisis might have more opportunities to continue working in quickly changing circumstances. One other reason might be that some interpreters were no longer accepting on-site work (citing safety or other reasons). Even when offered, when an interpreter is not able or willing to work remotely, this effectively means losing all work opportunities. Comments of respondents who indicated "they lost all work" however show that this is not only an issue of (passively) losing all work, but that there are also some who were not actively pursuing work for different reasons, such as not wanting to take work from colleagues who needed it more. A useful addition to this study would thus be a follow-up to ask sign language interpreters for their working status in e.g. April 2020 vs. April 2021. How many came out largely unaffected? How many have even more work than before? How many effectively left the field, and why?

In the introduction of this report we mentioned how the digital disruption caused by the pandemic has accelerated a shift towards remote interpreting. This shift would probably have been inevitable in any case, but we have witnessed this at a much faster pace and on a much more global scale than any of us could have anticipated. This has at least two implications. One is that it appears that the sudden shift to remote interpreting is influencing the market by impacting the demand/supply problem within sign language interpreting services (de Wit 2020). While technology can throw a spanner in the works, it can also be an equalizer and make sign language interpreting services available on a broader scale. Ultimately, this could also benefit deaf consumers of sign language interpreting services. How exactly it impacts the demand/supply problem, and whether or how this impact is long-lasting (beyond the pandemic) is an issue for further research. The second implication is that digital disruption has forced sign language interpreting agencies and VRS/VRI companies to innovate their systems and incorporate the use of (more) digital technologies. Before the pandemic agencies in some countries had rather strict rules regarding how and where interpreters could work remotely, and a system of administration that hinged on interpreters and consumers being in the same physical space (e.g. administration being entirely paper-based). For those agencies who did not embrace technology, the pandemic functions as

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a 'wake up call'.

At the same time, there is the issue of working conditions of sign language interpreters. Several respondents commented on the risk that gains that have been made in the past decades could be rolled back (e.g. fees, co-working, using remote interpreting in situations where it is not warranted nor suitable, ...). The general feeling seemed to be that the conditions negotiated and fought for were precarious and will need to be fought for again (see also Napier 2020, published during the survey period). It is too early to make any substantial claims about how the pandemic is impacting working conditions of interpreters, and for this we will need longitudinal research.

This research will need to take into account two further issues highlighted by our data. One is that from the data it appears there is a group of newly qualified sign language interpreters doing remote work. For all surveys taken together, 12% of respondents had less than 3 years of experience. Before the crisis, remote work was something that was generally not advised for novice interpreters. Best practice guidelines of the UK Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) for example state that video interpreting call centres should only use registered qualified interpreters with a minimum of three years community (!) experience. Only after they have worked in a range of domains, and "have had exposure to working with a breadth of sign language users" (Ryan & Skinner 2015, p. 8) should remote work be considered. The pandemic has changed this guideline almost overnight. What will working conditions be like for this incoming group of newly qualified interpreters? A second, related, issue, is that a significant majority of the survey respondents had never or only very occasionally worked remotely before the pandemic, and a majority claimed not to have received any training on how to interpret remotely at all. This has profound implications for sign language interpreter training and CPD programs. Since it is expected that remote work is here to stay, and will be occurring significantly more than before the pandemic, this skill will become indispensable for any future sign language interpreter. Finally, sign language interpreting services only exist by virtue of having deaf people who use them. A critical consideration of deaf perspectives on remote sign language interpreting through the time of COVID-19 is another urgent issue for follow-up.

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# APPENDICES

## Survey questions

### Survey 1 questions

#### A. Background questions

1. How many years of professional interpreting experience do you have? (open)
2. In which country do you live? (open)
3. What are your qualifications/training background as a sign language interpreter?
  - No interpreter training or degree
  - Vocational training
  - Professional certificate/qualification
  - Professional bachelor degree
  - Academic bachelor degree
  - Master's degree

#### B. General questions

4. Have you noticed a decrease in your workload since mass quarantine started in your country? Yes/No

#### C. Working remotely

5. Are you currently working remotely from home? Yes/No
6. If no, why not? (open)
7. How often did you work remotely before mass quarantine started in your country? never - occasionally - monthly - weekly - daily
8. Since the start of mass quarantine in your country, how many hours per day have you worked remotely?
  - Less than one hour per day
  - 1-3 hours per day
  - 4-6 hours per day
  - More than 6 hours per day
9. Since the start of mass quarantine in your country and up to today, how many days per week have you worked remotely?
  - Less than one day per week
  - 1 day per week
  - 2 days per week
  - More than 2 days per week
10. In the past two weeks, have you participated in any remote interpreting related webinars? Yes/No
11. If you were working remotely before mass quarantine, are your rates the same?
  - My rates are the same
  - I charge less
  - I charge more
12. If your rates for remote work are different, is this your decision or is this imposed by agencies?
  - It's my decision
  - It was imposed by my agency
  - Not applicable (my rates are the same)
13. In which settings are you currently working remotely? (open)
14. Are the settings you currently work remotely in the same as before your country started mass quarantine? Yes/No
15. Are you being paid for any cancelled bookings? Yes/No
16. Since your country started mass quarantine, have you been asked by clients to work outside of your home? Yes/No
17. If yes, have you offered clients the option to interpret remotely after being asked to work on location? Yes/No
18. If yes, were you comfortable doing so? Yes/No

#### D. Technical issues and confidence about IT skills

19. Are you confident that your home set up is suited for remote work? Yes/No
20. Do you have a laptop/desktop computer that is compatible for remote work? Yes/No
21. Do you use an built-in or an external camera?

- Built-in camera
  - External camera
  - use both
22. Do you have a second screen? Yes/No
23. If yes, what size?
- 19-24 inches (normal)
  - +24 inches (large)
  - I'm not sure but larger than a typical laptop screen
24. Are you confident that your IT skills are adept to set up your home workspace and fix any technical issues? Yes/Neutral/No
25. Do you use a wifi connection or ethernet cable?
- Wifi connection
  - Ethernet cable
  - Both (depending on where in my house I am)
26. Do you have a lock on the door of the room where you do your interpreting? Yes/No
27. Have you added additional lighting to your home work environment? Yes/No
28. Have you added a background? Yes/No
29. If yes, is it...
- sourced from home materials
  - Professional
  - other
30. Which (max three) obstacles do you experience most frequently in working remotely? (open)
31. What programs and/or apps do you use for remote work? Please tick any boxes of programs/apps that you use: zoom, ms teams, Skype, Skype for business, google hangout, gotomeeting, webex, whereby, other
32. Which of these programs do you experience as the most successful? Please tick maximum three: zoom, ms teams, Skype, Skype for business, google hangout, gotomeeting, webex, whereby, other

### **E. Changes in the profession**

33. Have you done any volunteer work since your country went on mass quarantine? Yes/No
34. If yes, in which settings? (open)
35. If no, are you willing to volunteer should a client or organisation ask this? Yes/No
36. Do you feel confident about how your on-screen physical appearance will change over the next few months (e.g. not being able to go to the hairdressers, etc.)? lickert: not confident at all - not really confident - neutral - quite confident - very confident
37. How confident are you seeing yourself signing on screen when working remotely? lickert: not confident at all - not really confident - neutral - quite confident - very confident
38. Do you also work as an International Sign interpreter? Yes/No
39. Do you work more in IS settings or more to/from your national sign language(s) since mass quarantine started in your country?
- more in IS settings
  - more to/from my national sign language
  - no changes, same balance
40. How much of your IS workload has transferred to remote interpreting?
- 100% of my workload
  - 50% of my workload
  - 25% of my workload
  - 0% of my workload
41. Have you noticed an increase in requests for remote work in humanitarian settings? Yes/No
42. Below you can leave any comments that you might have (open)

### **Survey 2 questions**

#### **A. Background questions**

1. How many years of professional interpreting experience do you have?
- 1-3

- 3-5
  - 5-10
  - 10-20
  - More than 20 years
2. In which country do you live? (list)
3. What is your interpreting skills degree? (this is not necessarily your highest degree of education: see question 4)
- No interpreter training or degree
  - Vocational certificate
  - Professional certificate/qualification
  - Associates degree
  - Professional bachelor degree
  - Academic bachelor degree
  - Master degree
4. What is your highest degree of education (not necessarily linked to interpreting)?
- Vocational certificate
  - Professional certificate/qualification
  - Professional bachelor degree
  - Academic bachelor degree
  - MA degree
  - PhD
5. Is your country currently on lockdown? Yes/No
6. If yes, how many weeks have you been on lockdown?
- 3 weeks
  - 4 weeks
  - 5 weeks
  - 6 weeks
  - More than 6 weeks

### **B. General questions**

7. Did you participate in the first edition of this survey on 1-3 April 2020? Yes/No
8. Have you noticed a decrease in your interpreting workload since the COVID-19 crisis? Yes/No
9. Are you receiving any financial help from your government? Yes/No
10. If yes, what kind of help are you receiving?
- Unemployment
  - COVID- specific scheme
  - Other
11. Have you lost all interpreting work, including any remote opportunities? Yes/No
12. If yes, have you nevertheless set up an interpreting workstation at home in the hopes that you will find work? Yes/No
13. What are the reasons that you currently do not have or cannot work?
- No available work
  - Cannot work remotely because of home environment
  - Health issues
  - other

### **C. Working remotely**

For this survey, remote interpreting implies delivering interpreting services from home, with the interpreter using ICT to facilitate their work.

14. In the last six months of 2019, approximately how many days per week did you work as a sign language interpreter (both remote and on-site)?
- Less than one day per week
  - 1 day per week
  - 2 days per week
  - 3 days per week
  - 4 days per week

- 
- 5 days per week
  - 6 days per week
  - 7 days per week
15. Approximately how much of this workload was remote vs. on-site?
- 10% remote vs 90% on-site
  - 25% remote vs 75% on-site
  - 50% remote vs 50% on-site
  - 75% remote vs 25% on-site
  - 90% remote vs. 10% on-site
  - Only occasionally or never worked remote
16. Are you currently working as a sign language interpreter on-site/outside of your home? Yes/No
17. If yes, is this because you are considered an essential worker? Yes/No/ I don't know
18. If you are considered an essential worker, in what fields do you currently work on-site? (choose all that apply)
- I work in the media sector (eg television)
  - I work in the healthcare sector (eg hospital)
  - I work in the civil service sector (eg police/government)
  - other
19. Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis in your country, how many days per week do you work on average as a remote sign language interpreter?
- Less than one hour per week
  - 1 day per week
  - 2 days per week
  - More than 2 days per week
20. On average, how many hours per day do you work?
- Less than one hour per day
  - 1-3 hours per day
  - 4-6 hours per day
21. What is your current work status as a sign language interpreter? (choose all that apply)
- I'm a freelancer
  - I'm an employee (for a company that I do not own)
  - I own a company and I work for myself
  - Other
22. If you are currently an employee, does the company provide equipment for you to work from home? Yes/No/ Not applicable, I am not an employee
23. Do you own an interpreting company that employs more than 1 person? Yes/No
24. Have you received any training on how to interpret remotely? Yes/No
25. Have you participated in any remote interpreting related webinars? Yes/No
26. If you were working remotely before the COVID-19 crisis, are your rates the same?
- My rates are the same
  - I charge less
  - I charge more
27. If your rates for remote work are different, is this your decision or was this imposed by your employer?
- It was my decision
  - It was imposed by my employer
  - Not applicable (my rates are the same)
28. In which settings are you currently working remotely? (choose all that apply)
- Education
  - Business/employment
  - Medical/health
  - Government & social services
  - ICT/Technology
  - Video Relay Service Company

- Other

29. Are you being paid for any cancelled bookings? Yes/No/Not applicable to my situation

30. If you are an employee, are you still being paid your full salary? Yes/No/ Not applicable (I'm not an employee)

31. How strongly do you agree with the following statement: Remote interpreting is more stressful than face-to-face interpreting.

Lickert: Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

32. How strongly do you agree with the following statement: Remote interpreting requires a heavier cognitive load compared to on-site work.

Lickert: Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

#### **D. Technical issues**

33. Are you confident that your home set up is suited for remote work? Yes/No

34. Do you have a laptop/desktop computer that is compatible for remote work? Yes/No

35. Do you use a built-in or an external camera?

- Built-in camera
- External camera
- I use both

36. Do you have a second screen? Yes/No

37. If yes, what size?

- 19-24 inches (normal)
- +24 inches (large)
- I'm not sure but larger than a typical laptop screen
- Smaller than a typical laptop screen (eg tablet or smartphone)

38. Are you confident that your IT skills are adept to set up your home workspace and fix any technical issues? I am confident/neutral/I am not confident

39. Do you use a wifi connection or ethernet cable?

- Wifi connection
- Ethernet cable
- Both (depending on where in my home I am)

40. Do you have a dedicated room in your home for remote work? Yes/No

41. Do you feel restricted by your home environment in regards to the amount of time and type of work you can offer? Yes/No

42. What are the limitations of your home environment in terms of remote work? (choose all that apply)

- Noisy environment
- Responsibilities to children
- Pets
- Carer for disabled/elderly person
- Other
- No limitations

43. Have you added additional lighting to your home work environment? Yes/No

44. Have you added a background? Yes/No

45. If yes, is it...

- Sourced from home materials
- Professional
- Otherwise

46. Which (maximum three) obstacles do you experience most frequently in working remotely?

- Technical glitches (connection, sound, picture disruption, ...)
- Kids at home and other distractions
- Most platforms not designed for sign language interpreting
- Education of deaf/hearing participants on how to use remote interpreting platforms/technology

47. What programs and/or apps do you use for remote work? Please tick any boxes of programs/apps that you use.

- Zoom
- MS Teams
- Skype

- Skype for Business
- GoogleHangout
- GoToMeeting
- Webex
- Whereby
- Jitsi
- Whatsapp
- VSee
- Other

48. Which of these programs do you experience as the most successful? Please tick maximum three.

- Zoom
- MS Teams
- Skype
- Skype for Business
- GoogleHangout
- GoToMeeting
- Webex
- Whereby
- Jitsi
- Whatsapp
- VSee
- Other

#### **E. Changes in the profession**

49. Have you done any volunteer interpreting work since the COVID-19 crisis started in your country? Yes/No

50. Do you feel that your work as a sign language interpreter is more psychologically demanding because of the COVID-19 crisis? Yes/No

51. Do you think that the crisis will have a permanent impact on how sign language interpreters work in general? Yes/No/I don't know

52. Below you can leave any comments that you might have (open)

53. If you are interested to receive email updates about the next survey, and/or be involved in any follow-up research, you can leave your email here. (We will not share these addresses). (open)

### Survey 3 questions

#### **A. Background questions**

1. Did you participate in the first edition of this survey on 1-3 April 2020? Yes/No

2. Did you participate in the second edition of this survey on 15-17 April 2020? Yes/No

3. In which country do you live?(list)

4. How many years of professional interpreting experience do you have?

- 0-3
- 3-5
- 5-10
- 10-20
- 20-30
- 30-40
- more than 40 years

5. What is your interpreting skills degree? (this is not necessarily your highest degree of education: see question 6)

- No interpreter training or degree
- College degree
- Vocational degree
- Professional certificate/qualification
- Associates degree

- Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - Postgraduate degree
  - Other
6. What is your highest degree of education (not necessarily linked to interpreting)?
- No degree
  - High school degree
  - Vocational certificate
  - Professional certificate/qualification
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - PhD
7. What is your current work status as a sign language interpreter? (choose all that apply)
- I'm a freelancer
  - I'm a state employee
  - I'm an employee (for a company that I do not own)
  - I'm an employee for the company I co-own
  - I own my own company and I work for myself
  - Other
8. Do you own an interpreting company that employs more than 1 person? Yes/No

#### **B. General questions**

9. Are you currently working as a sign language interpreter on-site/outside of your home? Yes/No
10. If yes, is this because you are considered an essential worker?
- Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
11. If you are considered an essential worker, in what fields do you currently work on-site? (choose all that apply)
- I work in the media sector (e.g. television)
  - I work in the healthcare sector (e.g. hospital)
  - I work in the civil service sector (e.g. police/government)
  - I work in the legal sector (e.g. court)
  - other
12. If you are not considered an essential worker, in which fields are you currently working on-site? (Choose all that apply)
- Education
  - business/employment
  - Medical: physical health
  - Medical: mental health
  - Government & social services
  - ICT/Technology
  - Video Relay Service Company
  - Media
  - Religion
  - Events
  - Legal
  - Political
  - Sports
  - Charity
  - Community interpreting
  - Translation work
  - Conferences/webinars
  - Other
13. Why are you not working on-site? (Choose all that apply)

- My country/state/region/city is still on lockdown
  - I am not comfortable working on-site
  - I am not comfortable traveling
  - There is no demand
  - Shielding due to own health status
  - Shielding due to health status of a family member
  - Other
14. Are you concerned about your interpreting skills due to less practice? Yes/No
15. Do you think that the crisis will have a permanent impact on working standards for sign language interpreters?
- Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
16. What will the impact be? (open)
17. Are you currently receiving any financial help from your government/other institution? Yes/No
18. If yes, what kind of help are you receiving?
- Unemployment
  - COVID-specific scheme
  - Other
19. Are you considering switching careers and leaving the interpreting profession because of the crisis? Yes/No
20. Have you lost all interpreting work, including any remote opportunities? Yes/No
21. If yes, have you nevertheless set up an interpreting workstation at home in the hopes that you will find work? Yes/No
22. What are the reasons that you currently do not or cannot work remotely? (Choose all that apply)
- No available work
  - I can't work remotely because of home environment
  - I don't have the equipment/technology
  - Health issues
  - Personal reasons
  - I do not like working remotely
  - Other

### **C. Working remotely**

23. In the last six months of 2019, approximately how many days (i.e. working 1 hour or more a day) per week did you work as a sign language interpreter (both remote and on-site)?
- 0 days per week
  - 1 day per week
  - 2 days per week
  - 3 days per week
  - 4 days per week
  - 5 days per week
  - 6 days per week
  - 7 days per week
24. Approximately how much of this workload WAS remote vs. on-site?
- 0% remote 100% on-site
  - 10% remote vs. 90% on-site
  - 25% remote vs. 75% on-site
  - 50% remote vs. 50% on-site
  - 75% remote vs. 25% on-site
  - 90% remote vs. 10% on-site
  - 100% remote vs. 0% on-site
25. Currently, how much % of your work IS remote vs on site?
- 0% remote 100% on-site
  - 10% remote vs. 90% on-site
  - 25% remote vs. 75% on-site
  - 50% remote vs. 50% on-site

- 
- 75% remote vs. 25% on-site
  - 90% remote vs. 10% on-site
  - 100% remote vs. 0% on-site
26. Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis in your country, how many days per week do you work on average as a remote sign language interpreter?
- Less than one day per week
  - 1 day per week
  - 2 days per week
  - 3 days per week
  - 4 days per week
  - 5 days per week
  - 6 days per week
  - 7 days per week
27. On average, how many hours per day do you work?
- Less than one hour per day
  - 1-3 hours per day
  - 4-6 hours per day
  - More than 6 hours per day
28. Do you think you will be doing more remote work in the future than before the pandemic?
- Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
29. If yes, then on average how much % of your work will be remote vs on site?
- 10% remote - 90% on-site
  - 25% - 75%
  - 50% - 50%
  - 75% - 25%
  - 90% - 10%
  - 100% remote - 0% on-site
30. Compared to before the pandemic, how much remote work would you like to continue accepting once the pandemic is controlled?
- Less than before the crisis
  - Same as before the crisis
  - More than before the crisis
31. Why would you accept less/same/more remote work? (open)
32. Have you received any training on how to interpret remotely? Yes/No
33. Since the start of the crisis in your country, have you participated in any webinars on how to interpret remotely? Yes/No
34. In which fields are you currently working remotely? (Choose all that apply)
- Education
  - Business/employment
  - Medical: physical health
  - Medical: mental health
  - Government & social services
  - ICT/Technology
  - Video Relay Service Company
  - Media
  - Religion
  - Events
  - Legal
  - Political
  - Sports
  - Charity

- 
- Community interpreting
  - Translation work
  - Conferences/webinars
  - Other
35. If you are working remotely in medical/health settings, what does it concern? (choose all that apply)
- ICU/Emergency room
  - GP appointments
  - Rehabilitation
  - Nursing home
  - Not applicable
  - Other
36. If you are working remotely in educational settings, at which level? (choose all that apply)
- Kindergarten/ nursery school
  - Elementary school/primary school/K12
  - Secondary school
  - College
  - University
  - Post secondary
  - Not applicable
  - Other
37. If you are working in media settings (e.g. television, webstream), how is it being organised?
- I work alone
  - I have one co-interpreter
  - I have two co-interpreters
  - I have more than two co-interpreters
  - Not applicable
38. If you were working remotely before the COVID-19 crisis, are your rates the same?
- My rates are the same
  - I charge less
  - I charge more
  - Not applicable, I was not working remotely
39. If your rates for remote work are different, is this your decision or was this imposed by your employer?
- It was my decision
  - It was imposed by my employer
  - It was imposed by the government
  - Not applicable (my rates are the same)
  - Not applicable (I was not working remotely before the crisis)
  - Other
40. Are you being paid for any cancelled bookings? Yes/No/Not applicable to my situation
41. If you are an employee, are you still being paid your full salary? Yes/No/Not applicable (I'm not an employee)
42. From the previous surveys it appeared that remote interpreting could be more stressful. What do you think are the main reasons for this? (choose all that apply)
- Coping with technical issues
  - Interpreting 2D instead of 3D
  - Concerns about interpretations being recorded without consent
  - Concerns about security and data protection of used platforms
  - Concerns about own screen time
  - Having no real life personal contact
  - No/less ability to manage conversations (e.g. turn-taking, asking for clarification, ...)
  - Supporting a colleague/being supported by a colleague is harder
  - Settings not suitable for working remotely
  - More hours of work for less pay
  - Not applicable, I don't think it's more stressful

43. Since the start of the crisis, did you have symptoms of RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury) because of more remote work?  
Yes/No
44. From the previous survey it appeared that remote interpreting work is psychologically more demanding. Since the start of the crisis, have you sought out mental health support to cope with changing professional demands? Yes/No
45. What kind of mental health support was/is it? (choose all that apply)
- Individual support from a professional
  - Individual support from a colleague
  - Individual support from a friend and/or family member
  - Peer support group
  - Not applicable, I didn't seek support
46. Are you working with a more restricted pool of clients when working remotely? Yes/No

#### **D. Technical issues and confidence about IT skills**

47. If you are currently an employee, does the company provide equipment for you to work from home? Yes/No/Not applicable, I'm not an employee
48. Since the start of the crisis, on average how much did you invest in home set up for remote interpreting?
- Nothing, I didn't buy anything, I already had a set-up and organised myself.
  - 0-100 \$
  - 100-250 \$
  - 250-500 \$
  - Over 500 \$
49. What kind of equipment did you buy? (choose all that apply)
- Camera
  - Additional screen
  - Headset
  - Speakers
  - Background
  - Microphone
  - Other
50. Are you confident that your home set up is suited for remote work? Yes/No
51. Are you confident that your IT skills are adept to set up your home workspace and fix any technical issues? I am confident/Neutral/I am not confident
52. Do you have a dedicated room in your home for remote work? Yes/No
53. Do you feel restricted by your home environment in regards to the amount of time and type of work you can offer?  
Yes/No
54. What are the limitations of your home environment in terms of remote work? (choose all that apply)
- Noisy environment (e.g. neighbours, street noise, ...)
  - Responsibilities to children
  - Pets
  - Carer for disabled/elderly person
  - Other
  - No limitations
55. How strongly do you agree with the following statements regarding obstacles experienced while working remotely?  
Lickert: Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
- Technical glitches (connection, sound, picture disruption, ...) are main obstacles when working remotely.
  - Kids at home and other distractions are main obstacles when working remotely.
  - The fact that most platforms are not designed for sign language remote interpreting is a main obstacle when working remotely.
  - Education of deaf/hearing participants on how to use remote interpreting platforms/technology is a main obstacle when working remotely.
  - Team interpreting is a main obstacle when working remotely.
  - Working 2D (turn-taking, interaction, ...) is a main obstacle when working remotely.
56. What programs and/or apps do you use for remote work? Please tick any boxes of programs/apps that you use
- Zoom

- MS Teams
- Skype
- Skype for Business
- GoogleHangout
- GoToMeeting
- Webex
- Whereby
- Jitsi
- Whatsapp
- VSee
- FaceTime
- Avaya
- Blue Jeans
- Chabla
- Vineya
- MMX
- Screencast o matic
- Other

57. Below you can leave any comments that you might have (open)

58. If you are interested to receive email updates about the next survey, and/or be involved in any follow-up research, you can leave your email here. (We will not share these addresses.) (open)

### Overview of participants per survey and for all surveys

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3	Total
Algeria	-	-	1	1
Argentina	-	2	1	3
Australia	24	53	31	108
Austria	3	20	14	37
Bangladesh	1	1	1	3
Belgium	39	45	31	115
Brazil	-	5	18	23
Bulgaria	-	-	1	1
Canada	21	21	20	62
Canada	21	21	20	62
Chili	-	-	17	17
China	1	-	-	1
Colombia	-	1	6	7

<b>Costa Rica</b>	-	-	2	2
<b>Croatia</b>	1	8	9	18
<b>Denmark</b>	11	12	18	41
<b>East Timor</b>	-	-	1	1
<b>Ecuador</b>	-	1	-	1
<b>El Salvador</b>	-	1	-	1
<b>Finland</b>	69	39	8	116
<b>France</b>	14	50	9	73
<b>Germany</b>	40	51	71	162
<b>Ghana</b>	-	2	2	4
<b>Greece</b>	9	-	1	10
<b>Hungary</b>	-	1	-	1
<b>Iceland</b>	-	10	1	11
<b>India</b>	8	3	3	14
<b>Indonesia</b>	2	-	5	7
<b>Ireland</b>	23	25	15	63
<b>Italy</b>	3	2	1	6
<b>Japan</b>	2	2	1	5
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	1	-	-	1
<b>Kenya</b>	12	-	-	12
<b>Korea South</b>	1	1	-	2
<b>Malaysia</b>	2	-	-	2
<b>Malta</b>	5	-	1	6
<b>Mexico</b>	1	2	10	13
<b>Morocco</b>	-	1	-	1
<b>Nepal</b>	2	1	1	4
<b>Netherlands</b>	117	101	69	287

<b>New Zealand</b>	25	11	11	47
<b>Nigeria</b>	1	-	-	1
<b>Northern Cyprus</b>	1	-	-	1
<b>Norway</b>	14	26	8	48
<b>Paraguay</b>	-	-	1	1
<b>Peru</b>	-	-	1	1
<b>Philippines</b>	2	2	6	10
<b>Poland</b>	-	2	-	2
<b>Portugal</b>	4	2	7	13
<b>Russia</b>	1	-	-	1
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	-	1	-	1
<b>Serbia</b>	1	-	1	2
<b>Singapore</b>	1	-	-	1
<b>Slovenia</b>	5	1	-	6
<b>South Africa</b>	-	8	7	15
<b>Spain</b>	4	15	6	25
<b>Sweden</b>	5	36	24	65
<b>Switzerland</b>	3	3	7	13
<b>Taiwan</b>	1	-	-	1
<b>Turkey</b>	1	-	-	1
<b>United Kingdom</b>	238	49	61	348
<b>United States</b>	449	254	81	784
<b>Uruguay</b>	-	-	3	3
<b>Venezuela</b>	-	-	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	1.168	871	595	2.634

Table 7: Overview of participants per survey and for all surveys



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