

# Interpreters' demands

-Health Protection: application of the **precautionary principle**, constant monitoring of interpreters' auditory health and effective follow-up.

-**Binding rules on use of recommended equipment and technical set-up** for remote connections;

-Immediate **launching of a negotiation** with a view to agreeing on a regulatory framework for interpreting Multilingual Remote Participation (MRP) before the summer recess as not specifically foreseen in the Interpreters' Working Conditions (IWoCo) from 2018.

-Putting an end to undue pressure from DG LINC Management on individual interpreters, including through the **externalisation** of the service provision which amounts to a **violation of the right to strike**.



Context:

- The Interactio platform was first deployed in March 2020, without any prior testing, as a means to enable the Parliament to continue its work during the pandemic (at a time of lockdowns and social distancing).
- Mindful of this, interpreters agreed, explicitly and exclusively on the basis that they were not thereby establishing a precedent for their work after the pandemic, to derogate massively from their working conditions and sound quality standards, so that Parliament could continue to operate.
- As things stand, the sound feed that comes through remote participation platforms (Interactio) does not comply with the ISO standards governing meetings with interpretation, (standards that guarantee auditory safeguards for both interpreters and participants), all the more so if the recommended peripheral devices (such as the microphones provided free of charge to MEPs) are not used and the required technical settings are not respected.
- Since Interactio was rolled out, some 100 of an approximate total of 250 staff interpreters have reported hearing problems to the EP Medical Service. This is an unprecedented number, yet it is merely the tip of the iceberg.
- Sound processed by a platform is compressed and harmful to all listeners. Even if sound quality may appear adequate in a meeting room, it is in actual fact doing damage to those interpreting because it has been pumped into our eardrums via our headsets for two years now.
- The reduced booth hours introduced by DG LINC during the pandemic (under the Business Continuity Mode, or BCM) were designed to prevent excessive exposure to poor sound and allow recovery time in light of the increased effort required to interpret remote participants. That safeguard disappeared once all Covid-19 measures were lifted on 13 June last. However, remote connections are still commonplace.
- This return “to normal”, without specific rules governing remote participation, is taking place because DG LINC has refused to discuss a suitable and mutually-acceptable regulatory framework with us.
- For all these reasons, and in a bid to obtain proper guarantees around our workplace safety, we filed a strike notice on 17 June last.
- The legal notice of five working days before industrial action (meant to begin on Monday 27 June) were not used in order to engage in serious negotiations around a system of safeguards or to work with trade union representatives to ascertain minimum service levels.
- Despite this serious departure from the usual rules, we decided to postpone the start of our industrial action until Tuesday, 28 June in order to give social dialogue one last chance as requested by the President of Parliament.
- In the meantime, we have learned that our Directorate-General recruited interpreters for some sensitive meetings by ignoring the prevailing EU-AIIC Convention and hiring in an external service-provider. That appears to be in conflict with the provisions of the Code of Conduct on Multilingualism, which requires DG LINC to provide interpreting for statutory meetings of the Parliament. This has never previously been interpreted as permitting outsourcing of service provision to external providers or agencies. This move is designed to undermine the action we began today, and exposes other, more vulnerable workers to the same damaging sound.