



# Translation and interpretation in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study from Slovakia

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly had a significant influence on the translating and interpreting industry. Even while certain tendencies are now apparent, it will take some time to fully understand how profound and transformative the years of pandemic measures and social isolation were. This paper summarises findings from two surveys conducted among translators and interpreters in Slovakia. The first was conducted during the first wave of the pandemic and focused on the immediate economic and psychological implications of the first lockdown measures on the translation community. Apart from measuring the changes in demand for services, the share of cancelled assignments and general mood among professionals, we have also enquired about the demand for remote interpreting. The proportion of those who encountered offers for remote interpreting nearly doubled in the six weeks after the introduction of the first lockdown measures in Slovakia (an increase from 18.75% to 39.69%). The second source of data is a survey of rates which already captures how much remote interpreting penetrated the structure of interpreting service one year after the onset of the pandemic. Based on our findings, the average number of remote interpreting days in 2021 was 67.53% of the total number of interpreting days. This rapid onset of remote interpreting recovered demand for interpreting services as the volume of work began to catch up with pre-pandemic levels, but also brought a greater psychological burden and stress resulting from the different nature of remote interpretation.

**Keywords:** pandemic, COVID-19, remote interpreting, demand for interpreting, demand for translation

## Prevajanje in tolmačenje v času pandemije: študija na primeru Slovaške

### IZVLEČEK

Epidemija COVID-19 je brez dvoma imela pomemben vpliv na prevajalsko in tolmaško dejavnost. Čeprav je danes že mogoče razbrati nekatere značilnosti, bo vseeno trajalo še nekaj časa, preden bo možno popolnoma razumeti, kako globok in transformativen je bil vpliv dvoletnih pandemskih ukrepov in izolacije. V prispevku so povzeti izsledki dveh anket, v katerih so sodelovali prevajalci in tolmači na Slovaškem. Prva anketa je bila izvedena v času prvega vala pandemije in se je osredotočala na neposredne ekonomske in psihološke implikacije ukrepov prvega zaprtja družbe na skupnost prevajalcev. Merili smo spremembe pri povpraševanju po storitvah, delež odpovedi naročil in

splošno razpoloženje med poklicnimi prevajalci, poleg tega pa smo spraševali tudi o povpraševanju po tolmačenju na daljavo. Delež tistih, ki so se srečali s ponudbami za tolmačenje na daljavo se je v obdobju šestih tednov od začetka veljavnosti ukrepov prvega zaprtja družbe na Slovaškem skoraj podvojil (povečal se je z 18,75 % na 39,69 %). Drugi vir podatkov pa je bila anketa o prevajalskih in tolmaških honorarjih, ki daje informacije o tem, kako globoko je tolmačenje na daljavo prodrlo v strukturo tolmaških storitev eno leto po začetku pandemije. Naši izsledki kažejo, da je leta 2021 tolmačenje na daljavo v povprečju predstavljalo 67,53 % vseh tolmaških dni. S tem skokovitim porastom tolmačenja na daljavo se je popravilo tudi povpraševanje po tolmaških storitvah, saj se je količina dela začela približevati tisti iz časov pred pandemijo. Ta praksa pa je s seboj prinesla tudi večje psihološko breme in več stresa, ki izhaja iz specifične narave tolmačenja na daljavo.

**Ključne besede:** pandemija, COVID-19, tolmačenje na daljavo, povpraševanje po tolmačenju, povpraševanje po prevajanju

## 1. Introduction

A global pandemic, with people trapped in isolation, with grounded planes, and all social and economic activity virtually frozen, was only the subject of dystopian movies until the beginning of 2020. Many of us will probably remember the first days, weeks and months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the new and utterly unfamiliar reality we suddenly found ourselves in. No one was prepared for it, and hardly anyone expected the scale of measures which were introduced in many parts of the world in the first months of 2020. Naturally, translators and interpreters were among the countless professions and vocations deeply affected by the anti-pandemic measures. Yet, given the natural, immanent differences between the nature of translators' and interpreters' work, we considered it important to understand and measure just how different the impacts were on both sides of the proverbial coin.

Based on our previous research mapping the sociological and economic characteristics of the market with translation and interpreting services in Slovakia (e.g. Djovčoš and Šveda 2017, 2021), we were interested in understanding how the pandemic affected the translation and interpreting market, both in terms of immediate impacts and in shaping long-term trends. In particular, we were interested in whether the effects of the pandemic and the various related social and economic measures would represent only a short-term deviation from the norm, or would have a long-term transformative impact on the Slovak translation and interpreting market.

## 2. Theoretical background

Naturally, the body of theoretical works written before the pandemic could hardly predict such a dramatic and unprecedented change in the socio-economic conditions of translators' work as the pandemic undoubtedly caused. Pre-pandemic research

relevant from the perspective of our paper is associated in particular with the advent of technological changes shaping the translation industry since the beginning of the millennium. These changes were dramatically enhanced and augmented during the onset of the pandemic. This trend has been most visible in interpreting. Fantinuoli (2018) signalled a technological turn in interpreting well before the pandemic, building on the work of pioneers in this field (e.g. Moser-Mercer 2005, 2011; Mozourakis 2006; Roziner and Schlesinger 2010; Braun 2015), and experiments with remote interpreting were emerging in research long before the pandemic, whether in community and court interpreting settings (Braun and Taylor 2012) or in the medical field (Jones et al. 2003). Not surprisingly, already before the full break-out of the pandemic Franz Pöchhacker (2020) claimed that interpreting had in large part moved to video. Indeed, as demonstrated by our research presented in this paper, this claim was very much to the point, although perhaps, it would be better to say that interpreting had gone remote. Within the broad range of formats of the remote provision of interpreting services, video applied only to some of the assignments.

Moreover, in 2021 the special issue of the journal *Bridge* was published, dedicated fully to the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on the profession. Perez and Nikolić, in their introduction to the issue, claim that: “Going remote has revealed its pros and cons – work-wise, training-wise, but also socially” (Perez and Nikolić 2021). They continue to say that “as with nearly every other crisis, the pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of translation and interpreting services in the public-service sector, during acute crisis situations, as well as in providing general information to all, inviting translation and interpreting professionals and volunteers to step in and help when needed.” (Perez and Nikolić 2021) It seems that, as in the case of any crisis, the newly emerged situation can also be viewed as an opportunity, certainly a challenge.

The general tendencies among translators and interpreters and in the whole post-pandemic language industry remain to be identified. It is still rather too early to process the full impact of the pandemic in academic journals and papers, and a lot of research is currently ongoing (e.g. the AIIC supported research by AIIC by Heidi Salaets and Geert Brône in 2021 and by Nicoletta Spinolo and Agnieszka Chmiel in 2022). However, we already have detailed analyses of trends and tendencies in the language industry on the EU level mapped by the ELIS surveys (2021, 2022) and on the global level by industry observers such as Slator (2021) or Nimdzi (2022). The ELIS surveys note a positive outlook in 2021 and highlight that COVID-19 accelerated long-needed developments in the industry. The ELIS 2022 report singles out the growth in remote interpreting, noting that the fact, that “disruption can have beneficial effects, was proven by the explosive growth of remote interpreting (RSI), an existing technology

that struggled with strong resistance but turned into a life saver faced when a world-wide pandemic made all physical events impossible. In just 18 months' time, RSI has nearly completely filled its natural niche. It is now part of the new normal in interpreting..." (ELIS 2022, 40). Similarly, Nimdzi noted that much of the space filled by remote interpreting would continue to be serviced remotely; however, onsite events will return in the new post-pandemic normal (Nimdzi 2022). All of these industry surveys were not available in the first months of 2020, when the first part of our research was conducted, yet in hindsight they confirm the general trend that was observed and also recorded in Slovakia in the context of a relatively small language and a similarly closely-knit community of translators and interpreters.

### 3. Methodology

The data we have used in this paper comes from two sources. The first is a two-phase survey called *Translation and Interpretation in the Time of the Coronavirus*. We will refer to it as the 2020 Pandemic Survey to shorten and simplify the name. This survey was conducted online in two rounds in the spring of 2020, just as the first wave of the epidemic and the associated severe social and economic constraints were peaking.

To recall those months of 2020, we will try to outline a little of the context of events at the beginning of the pandemic. On 6 March, the first positive case of the COVID-19 virus was confirmed in Slovakia; on 30 March, the first fatality was reported. On 16 March, severe restrictions began to take effect, restricting the movement of people away from home, closing most businesses and other establishments, and shifting much of the work and education to the home. We were interested to find out how these measures affected the activities of translators and interpreters, how their professional activities were affected, and their expectations in terms of future developments in the field of translation and interpreting services.

The 2020 Pandemic Survey was conducted by means of an online questionnaire in two phases: from 20 to 29 March 2020, and from 20 May 2020 to 9 June 2020. We intended to map the dynamics of the impact of the anti-pandemic measures on interpreter communities shortly after the implementation of the emergency and strict measures (16 March 2020) and just before its end and the first easing of conditions (10 June 2020). For this reason, we decided to carry out the study in two phases. The study's first phase contained 24 items, and the second 25. We collected respondents' gender and age to correlate responses to survey items with basic demographics and determine the extent to which they might influence responses to survey items. The questionnaire contained 21 closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions. However, for each closed question, we also included an option to insert respondents'

own answers so that respondents could add information that was not included in one of the options offered. We were interested, among other things, in the length of their professional experience, the composition of professional activities (translation, interpreting, AVT, etc.), typology of clients, the share of income derived from translation and interpreting, the demand for translation and interpreting services and cancellation of assignments, pressure to decrease rates, the expectation of future demand for services, and experience with remote interpreting.

We asked them the same questions in the study's second phase, but we added one that specifically asked them about their participation in the first survey. This question was intended to ensure that the results from the first and second phases of the research were commensurable. In both stages of the study, we sent out the questionnaire to language service providers (LSPs), freelance translators and interpreters, university academics, and professional organisations. We promoted it on social media to ensure as diverse a sample of people involved in translation and interpreting as possible.

Let us now introduce the second source of data. To assess the pandemic's impacts on remote interpreting, we used data from the internal 2021 Rates Survey conducted online in the winter of 2022 by the Slovak Association of Translators and Interpreters (SAPT). SAPT is the largest Slovak group of professional translators and interpreters, with 217 members in 2022. This survey captured the responses of 66 respondents (all SAPT members). This survey was co-designed by one of the authors of the present paper and included 20 questions covering the rates charged in 2021 for translation and interpreting services, typology of clients, the composition of professional activities, the share of income derived from translation and interpreting, the overall number of pages translated, and days interpreted in 2021 and the experience with remote interpreting as well as the share of days interpreted remotely.

## **4. Findings from the 2020 Pandemic Survey**

### **4.1 Length and fields of professional experience**

A total of 371 respondents, 264 women and 107 men took part in the first phase of the survey. The sex ratio is, therefore, approximately 70:30, confirming the gender distribution as we measured it in 2015. The average age of the respondents was 42.5 years. In the second phase, 240 respondents responded to our questionnaire, of whom 174 were female and 66 were male (again, approximately 70:30). The average age of the respondents was 43.8 years. A total of 156 respondents (65%) also answered the questions in the first survey – we can therefore consider the samples to be relatively comparable.

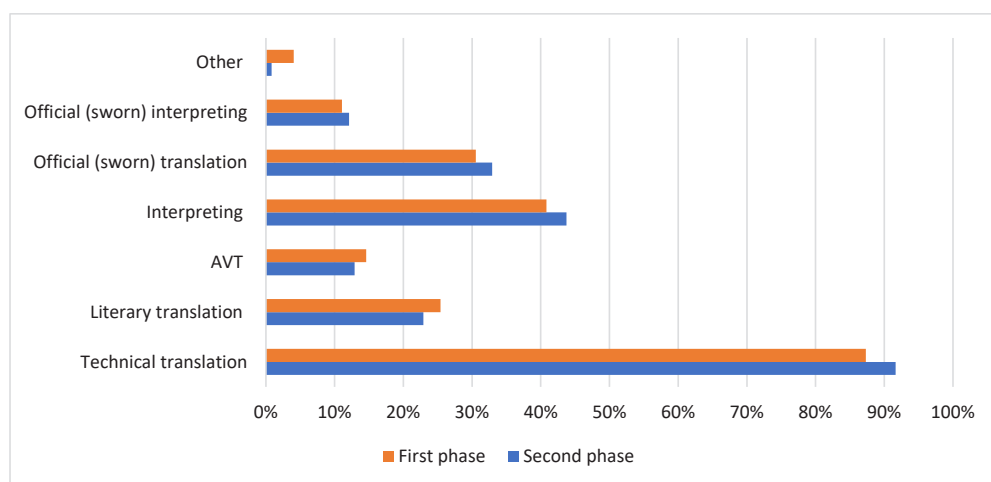
Table 1 summarises the situation in terms of professional experience.

**Table 1.** The composition of respondents in the first and second phases of the survey in terms of length of professional experience in T&I.

Length of professional experience in T&I	Studying	1–5 years	5–10 years	10–15 years	15–20 years	20+ years
First phase (N=371)	0.8%	10.8%	19.6%	17.9%	20.4%	30.4%
Second phase (N=240)	1.3%	15.1%	17.3%	19.4%	19.9%	27%

This information also indicates the distribution of translators and interpreters in the market at the beginning of 2020 in terms of their professional experience. We can see that people with more than twenty years of experience make up the largest share in both phases. They, therefore, have experience of various different market transitions. In contrast, at the opposite pole were newcomers to the market with one to five years of experience. The main age structure of translators and interpreters thus seems to be in the higher band, with new younger members entering at a relatively slow pace.

In terms of the proportion of total income accounted for by each activity, we obtained the results shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The composition of respondents in the first and second phases in terms of fields of the professional T&I services provided.

In this case, the respondents could indicate several answers, and as we can see, the vast majority of them are primarily engaged in professional translation, either for direct clients or translation companies. On this basis, it could be concluded that almost

every translator or interpreter has to do professional translation and supplement it with other activities from the spectrum on offer. Naturally, the share of income from translation and interpreting in the total income of the respondents is closely related to this (see Table 2).

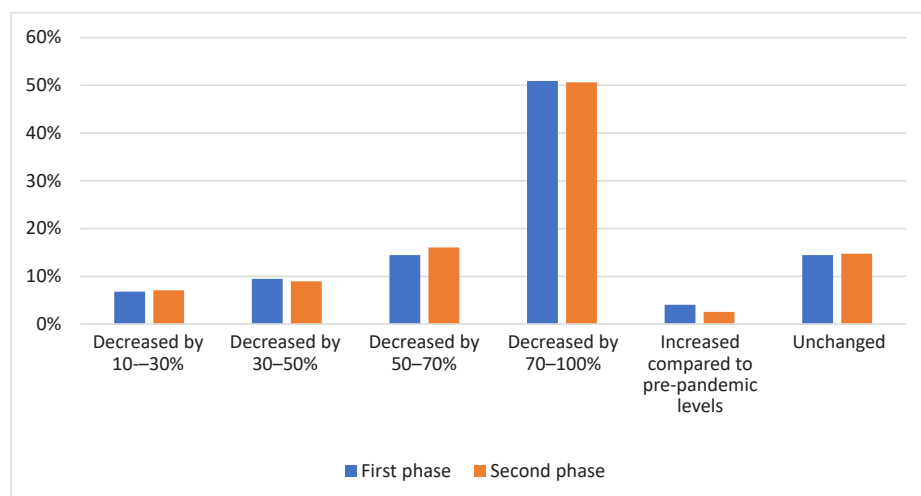
**Table 2.** What is the share of income from translation and interpreting services within your total income?

Share of income from T&I	0–25%	25%–50%	50%–75 %	75%–100%
First phase (N=371)	10.83%	11.94%	12.78%	64.44%
Second phase (N=240)	8.40%	11.76%	12.18%	67.65%

The findings in this category indicate that 65–68% of our sample were primarily engaged in translation and interpretation before the pandemic, as 75–100% of their income came directly from these activities. However, the impact of the pandemic was not uniform.

## 4.2 Demand for interpreting and translation services

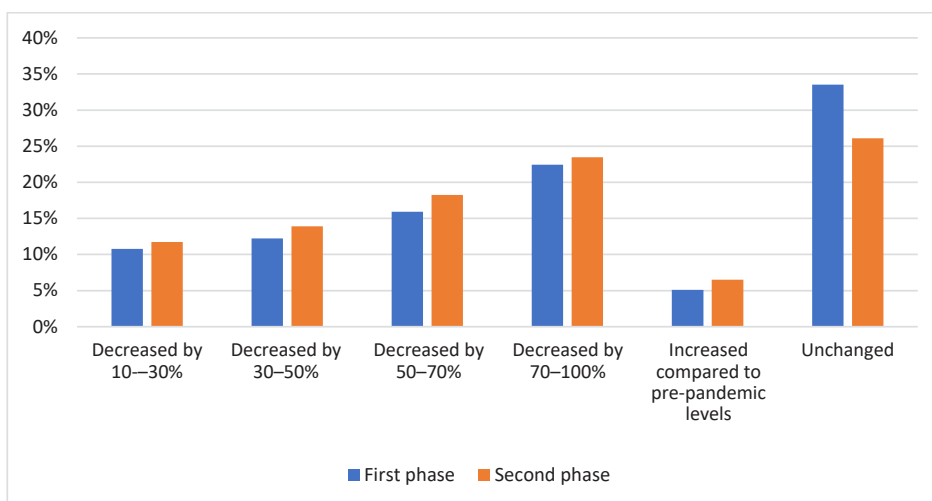
One of the most anticipated aspects of our research was precisely to compare how different translators and interpreters were affected by the anti-pandemic measures. As might be expected, it was those colleagues working primarily in interpreting who were most affected by the measures associated with the first wave of the pandemic. Responses to the question “How has the demand for your interpreting services changed since the beginning of the pandemic?” are presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** How has the demand for your interpreting services changed since the beginning of the pandemic?

Both at the beginning and the end of the first wave, we see that up to half of the respondents involved in interpreting had lost 70–100% of their contracts. Only around 15% of interpreters reported that their workload had not changed. The impact of the anti-pandemic measures during the first wave of COVID-19 on the interpreting market was, therefore, immediate and devastating.

The situation in the field of demand for translation services was very different. The answers of the respondents to the question “How has the demand for your translation services changed since the beginning of the pandemic?” are summarised in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** How has the demand for your translation services changed since the beginning of the pandemic?

The graph clearly shows that our respondents were dominated by translators, whose demand for services remained mainly unchanged (at the beginning of the first wave), but we also saw a slight decline at the end of the wave. The group of those who did not see a change in demand fell from 33.52% at the end of March to 26.09% at the end of May/June. In any case, when we look at the individual columns we can conclude that the situation has not changed that dramatically for translators. Many did see a decrease in demand, but certainly not as significant as in the case of interpreting. A smaller group of translators (5.11% and 6.52%, respectively) even saw an increase in demand. Thus, the situation faced by translators changed much less dramatically, whereas for interpreters there were immediate effects.



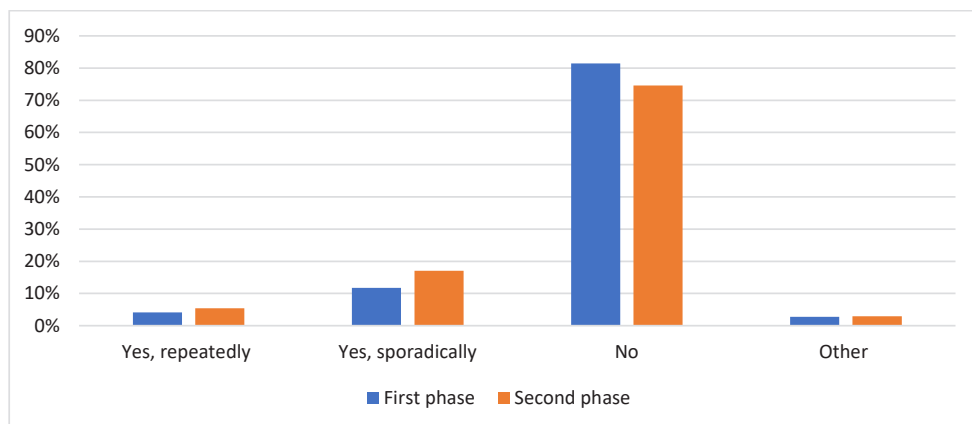
### 4.3 Cancelled assignments and pressure to reduce rates

The contrast mentioned above can be seen in the following table, which shows the responses to two questions, “Have your clients cancelled pre-arranged interpreting assignments since the pandemic began?” and the same question for the area of translations. In the case of interpreters, as many as 52.35% of respondents in the first phase said that clients had cancelled 80-100% of their pre-arranged assignments, while in the case of translations the figure was just over 4%. A look at the very different situations for interpreting and translation illustrates how the pandemic affected different parts of the market (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Have your clients cancelled pre-arranged interpreting assignments since the pandemic began?

Cancelled assignments	Interpreting		Translations	
	First phase	Second phase	First phase	Second phase
80–100%	52.35%	53.40%	4.03%	2.21%
60–80%	5.88%	8.74%	1.15%	1.77%
40–60%	3.53%	6.80%	4.61%	1.77%
20–40%	6.47%	2.91%	6.34%	10.18%
None	31.76%	28.16%	83.86%	84.07%

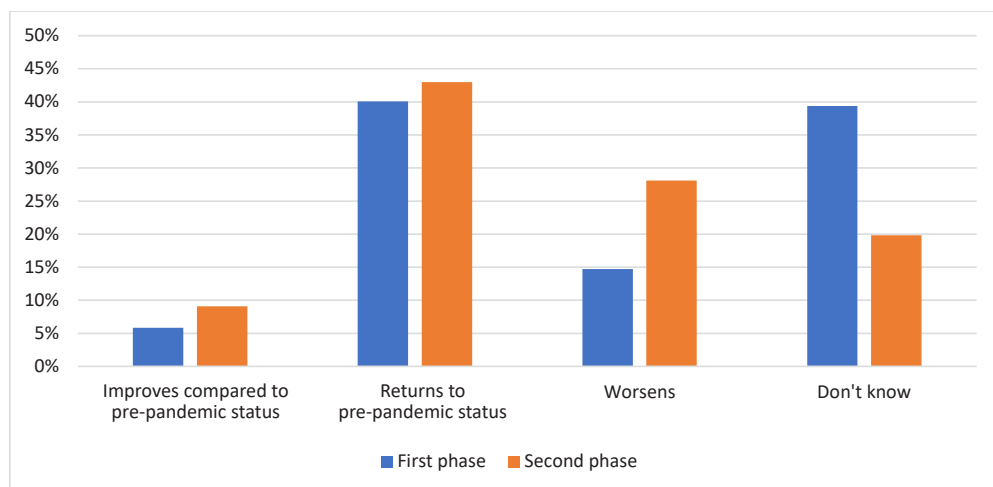
One would expect that with a decrease in demand, one of the responses among the providers of language services could be a lowering of rates. This, however, does not seem to be true, at least according to our survey’s findings, even though rumours about sharp decreases in rates were often discussed on social networks. More specifically, multiple respondents in the comments section to the questionnaire mentioned a fear from pressure on the side of the LSPs to reduce rates among translators. In the comments, some translators and interpreters also added that they had expected their colleagues to reduce their rates, but this never happened. This is a classic example of availability heuristics leading to distortions of reality and negative perceptions of the environment (Tversky and Kahneman in Pinker 2018). As demonstrated by responses to the question: “Have you been confronted with a downward pressure on your rates since the start of the pandemic?” (Figure 4) we can see that these were only isolated incidents.



**Figure 4.** Have you been confronted with a downward pressure on your rates since the start of the pandemic?

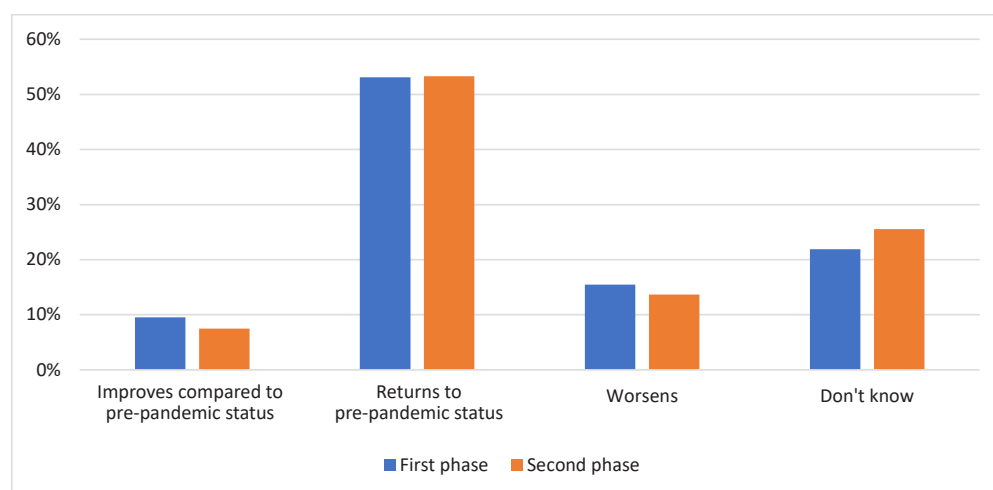
#### 4.4 Expectations of future demand

When asked about the return of demand for their services after the end of the pandemic, interpreters were relatively optimistic despite the situation at the outset, although we noted a relatively high level of uncertainty, with almost 40% of respondents marking “do not know”. In the second phase, just under 20% of respondents had this level of uncertainty. Yet a cautious optimism can be seen among interpreters in both phases of the survey, similar to the findings of the ELIS 2021 survey. On the other hand, as Figure 5 shows, we can see that many pessimists adopted an even more negative outlook in the second phase. This example shows how dynamically the situation changed during the first wave of the pandemic in the first semester of 2020.



**Figure 5.** How do you estimate the demand for your interpretation services after the end of the pandemic?

The translators were much more optimistic in this respect, and perhaps rightly so because the signals they received from the market gradually calmed them down. Again, we would like to point out that, as in times of pre-pandemic market behaviour (Djovčoš and Šveda 2017), market participants make decisions based on what activity they are primarily engaged in, which holds true also during the pandemic. Therefore, we reiterate (as illustrated in Djovčoš and Šveda 2021) that interpreters and translators cannot be “lumped together”, but must be examined by activity type, work volume, and income diversification.



**Figure 6.** How do you estimate the demand for your translation services after the end of the pandemic?

In the second part of the research, as with the previous question, we wanted to focus more on the development of the mood and expectations in the community of translators and interpreters. For this reason, we also asked them whether they considered the current situation to present an existential threat to translators and interpreters. The respondents thus answered two questions: “Do you believe this situation presents an existential threat for interpreters”, and the same question focused on translators (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Do you believe this situation presents an existential threat for interpreters/translators?

	Interpreters	Translators
Definitely yes	26.65%	9.72%
Rather yes	36.68%	25.56%
Rather not	17.48%	43.06%
Definitely not	4.30%	15.28%
Don't know	14.90%	6.39%

#### 4.5 Onset of remote interpreting and open-ended questions

In terms of the future, we see that translators were much more optimistic than interpreters, and had good reason for this. As we observed and as confirmed by subsequent global market surveys, the market changed, transformed itself, and took off again, albeit in a different way than many had anticipated. This is why we were interested to know whether and to what extent interpreters encountered demand for remote interpreting since the pandemic began. While only 18.75% had encountered such a request during the first phase of the survey (end of March 2020), 39.69% of responding interpreters had received such an offer only six weeks later. We believe that this extremely rapid uptake of remote interpreting that our research captures is one of our survey's most interesting findings. We will return to the topic of remote interpreting in a separate part of this paper.

As we indicated at the beginning of this section, two questions in both the first and second surveys were open-ended. The respondents replied to the questions about how they spent the time freed up and how they thought the pandemic would change our profession in the long term.

We received as many as 201 verbal comments in the first phase (54% of respondents) and 131 comments in the second phase (43% of respondents), which is not usual in normal questionnaire surveys we have conducted so far. We could divide the comments in the first phase into three broad categories: catching up with neglected hobbies

and activities (reading, garden, sports, hobbies), preparing a plan B (training, change of career, change of focus from interpreting to translation, etc.), and home-schooling (parents with children at home). Perhaps it is worth recalling that most respondents in our sample had 20 years or more of experience in the field, which means that they often had parenting responsibilities, which were particularly demanding during the pandemic, as they were forced to assist their children with school duties (see Tomšik et al. 2020). The responses in the second phase were very much similar, perhaps with a higher ratio of those spending free time home-schooling their children and preparing a plan B. In fact, responses indicating the acquisition of new skills or brushing up of existing ones were more numerous than in the first phase, perhaps linked to a higher level of pessimism and pandemic fatigue by the second phase.

As regards their vision for the future, we received 182 comments (49% of respondents) in the first phase and 102 (43% of respondents) in the second. There were frequent suggestions that clients would push for price reductions (which was not confirmed, as discussed above). The prevailing view was that there would be a strong move to online interpreting and that this trend would continue after the pandemic was over. Regarding the market transformation, we quote a view that illustrates the respondents' attitude towards it: "I think it will shut most of us down for a while, but those who can cope financially will return to their standard once the situation calms down." Translators also frequently expressed concern that there would be a more pronounced push toward PEMT, with the pandemic acting as a catalyst (similar trends were reported on the EU level in the ELIS 2021 survey). At the beginning of the first wave, we also noted expectations that it would increase the volume of medical translation assignments.

In the second wave, we observed more frequent comments linked to changing the portfolio of services offered and moving from interpreting to translation. Concerns about the accelerated advent of machine translation and post-editing were also reiterated, but translators stated that would feel optimistic if the situation were to return to normal quickly. It is also interesting to note that book translators reported the later payment of royalties. In general, however, opinions about moving to online translation dominated the responses.

We can clearly see that in the first phase, roughly one-fifth of the respondents encountered the requirement to interpret remotely, with the predominance of platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Teams, and Webex, which at that time did not have specific functionalities for simultaneous interpretation, or many interpreters provided their services via conference phone calls and the like. At the end of the first wave, as we have mentioned, almost half of the interpreters had already encountered a request to interpret remotely, but the same platforms still prevailed, although Zoom started to

show up more and more often among the responses (perhaps because this company was the first to introduce a simultaneous interpreting capability into its software).

## 5. The 2021 Rates Survey

To get a broader idea of how significant the rise of remote interpreting has been, we also decided to look at the SAPT 2021 Rates Survey. We believe that although this is a survey that worked with a different sample, there is still a significant overlap, and it captures the trend of the gradual transformation of the interpreting market in Slovakia. In addition, SAPT is the only organisation in Slovakia that brings together professional interpreters, and an invitation to participate in the 2020 Pandemic Survey was also distributed to its members via an internal mailing list. Last but not least, this was the first survey that specifically asked about the proportion of remote interpreting since the pandemic, and worked with a nationwide sample. So what were its findings?

Of the 66 respondents, 44 interpreters interpreted for at least one day during 2021. We then worked with the responses of this sample. For a more complete picture of the situation in the Slovak interpreting market, it is also essential to understand the influence of the European Institutions as a significant employer of Slovak-speaking interpreters. Of the 44 people who interpreted at least one day in 2021, 14 interpreted at least one day for the European Institutions (31.82%). This ratio corresponds to previous SAPT surveys (SAPT 2019). As the influence of the European Institutions is significant in the relatively limited Slovak interpreting market, the questions in the survey were formulated in such a way as to be able to isolate it.

### 5.1 Volume of interpreting and the share of remote interpreting

First of all, we can look at the total number of days with some interpreting work. Answering question 5: “How many days did you work as an interpreter for clients other than the EU in 2021? Include in your answer all interpreting days, including remote interpreting”, the highest value given was 210 days and the lowest was one day. The average number of days interpreted was 34.22 days, and the median was 22 days (see Table 5). For comparison, we add that the average number of days interpreted well before the pandemic in 2015 was 40 per year (Djovčoš and Šveda 2017). Thus, it appears that by 2021, at least for respondents to this survey, the situation has begun to revert to the pre-pandemic average. In answering question 6: “How many days of the total number of days interpreted in 2021 did you interpret remotely? (from home or from an interpreting hub or other remote location)”, 36 respondents answered, with the highest value being 180 days and the lowest being one day. The mean number of days

interpreted remotely was 23.11, and the median was 15. Thus, we can see that roughly 18 months after the pandemic's beginning, the average number of remote interpreting days was 67.53% of the total number of interpreting days among SAPT members.

**Table 5.** How many days did you work as an interpreter for clients other than EU in 2021? How many days of the total number of days interpreted in 2021 did you interpret remotely?

	Average	Median
Total number of interpreting days (outside of EU institutions) N = 44	34.22	22
Total number of remote interpreting days (outside of EU institutions) N = 36	23.11	15

## 5.2 Remuneration of onsite and remote interpreting

The second area addressed in the 2021 Rates Survey was the issue of remuneration or rates for remote interpreting compared to standard interpreting rates (see Table 6). As SAPT is an association of professional interpreters and translators, the survey also naturally focused on rates. So let us look at the responses to question 8 (“When it comes to remote interpreting, compared to standard onsite interpreting, most of the time:”), 51 respondents gave answers, as summarised in the table below.

**Table 6.** Rates for remote interpreting compared with rates for standard interpreting.

When it comes to remote interpreting, compared to standard onsite interpreting, most of the time	
I charge a higher rate	9.80%
I charge the same rate	62.75%
I charge a lower rate	1.96%
I don't interpret remotely	21.57%
I don't interpret at all	3.92%

Therefore, the SAPT members included in this survey approach remote interpreting in much the same way as conventional interpreting in terms of pricing policy. However, the survey addressed rates and the psychological stress that remote interpreting can cause.

## 5.3 Perception of remote interpreting

Indeed, in internal discussions on social media, concerns were repeatedly raised among SAPT members that remote interpreting causes undue stress, similar to

discussions in other professional fora (e.g. Caniato 2021). This is perhaps why item 9 “In my experience remote interpreting (compared to onsite interpreting) is...” was included in the survey. When answering, respondents could choose one or more of the following options: more challenging, equivalent, easier and more convenient (e.g. in terms of time loss). Responses to this item are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Perception of remote interpreting when compared with onsite interpreting (multiple answers possible).

In my experience remote interpreting (compared to onsite interpreting) is...	
More challenging	38.10%
More challenging + More convenient	21.43%
Equivalent	21.43%
Equivalent + More convenient	4.76%
More convenient	11.90% (Seeber 2022)
Easier + More convenient	2.38%

Most respondents considered remote interpreting more challenging compared to onsite interpreting (59.53% in total). A total of 26.19% of the respondents considered it to be equivalent. However, when considering remote interpreting the greater higher convenience offered also plays a significant role, and as one of the multiple answers it was noted by 40.47% of the respondents.

## 6. Conclusion

So what are the most significant findings we have seen in both surveys? First of all, we were able to capture how drastically the onset of the pandemic affected the work of interpreters, who lost a large part of their income from interpreting in a matter of days and weeks. This trend was also captured in other industry-wide surveys (e.g. ELIS 2021; Nimdzi 2021). On the other hand, from our previous research (Djovčoš and Šveda 2017) we know that it is almost impossible to find a professional who works exclusively as an interpreter in Slovakia. We can conclude that interpreting is usually combined with other activities, especially translation. Such a strategy seems to be an economic necessity in the conditions of an LLD environment. This diversity of activities, however, protects translators and interpreters quite effectively, and proved helpful during the pandemic in particular.

As regards the general mood among translators and interpreters, it appeared that the restrictive measures would be temporary at the time of the first wave, and optimism



with uncertainty prevailed. After a few weeks, more scepticism and pessimism emerged, perhaps due to pandemic fatigue. On the other hand, we were particularly surprised by the vigour with which remote interpreting had already taken off during the first wave of the pandemic. As our research findings suggest, within weeks of the outbreak of the first wave in the spring of 2020, interpreters were already beginning to encounter offers for remote interpreting, with the proportion nearly doubling in six weeks (an increase from 18.75% to 39.69%).

When we look at the Slovak interpreter community more than a year after the outbreak of the pandemic, we see that remote interpreting had become an important component of interpreters' work. Of the total number of interpreting days among SAPT members, up to two-thirds were carried out remotely. Remote interpreting thus significantly impacted the structure of work assignments, bringing interpreters a volume of work that started to catch up with pre-pandemic levels, but also bringing them a greater psychological burden and stress resulting from the different nature of remote interpreting. Not surprisingly, and as noted in global forums (e.g. Caniato 2021; Seeber 2022), the issues of sound quality, the various non-standard requirements for interpreters (working alone, without a second interpreter; working from interpreting studios and from home) and other changes brought about by remote interpreting began to be critically discussed increasingly often in the Slovak environment.

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