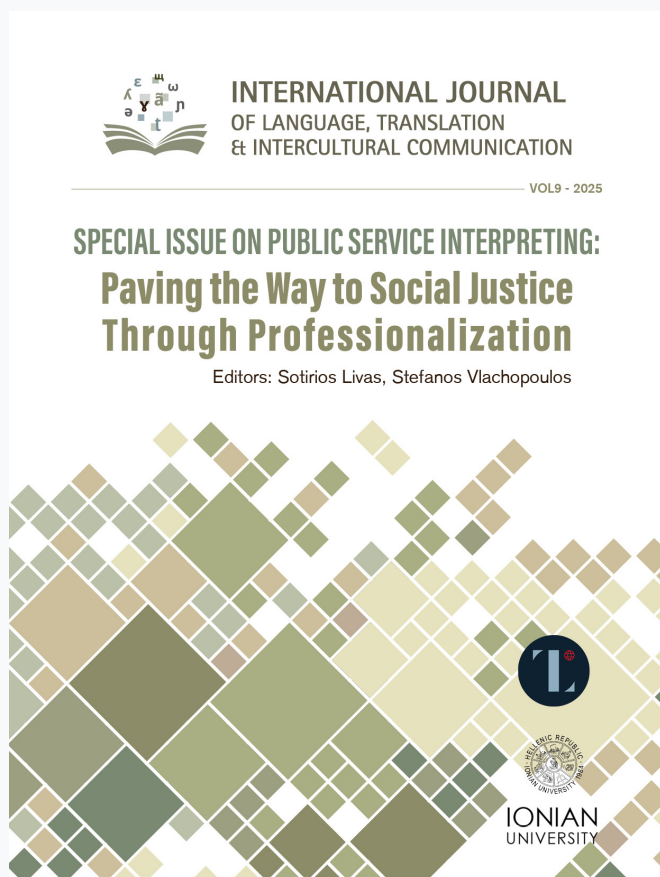


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## Certification of interpreters: an overview and best practices internationally

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# Certification of interpreters: an overview and best practices internationally

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## Abstract

*Over the past few years, the issue of certification has emerged as an issue of paramount importance for all professions, including interpreting. While certification is a voluntary procedure, there is confusion about the use of terminology around the world: in Texas reference is made to licensed court interpreters, while the central website of US Courts of Justice speaks of “certified interpreters”, although in both cases interpreters voluntarily undergo exams at the court to be registered as interpreters. In the case of court interpreters, reference is made to “court certified, registered και enrolled interpreters”, without any difference in the meaning of each one of them, while in the United Kingdom the term “chartered linguist” is widespread. Since its foundation the European Union has been organizing “accreditation tests” for the freelance interpreters it occasionally recruits to cover its interpreting needs, while national interpreters’ associations have started issuing quality certification for their members over the past few years based on their national legislation. Interesting examples of certification are presented (Assointerpeti, AIIC Italia, Universitas Austria) as they could be a source of inspiration for other countries, since they are based on the compliance with certain legal requirements and interestingly do not entail any additional bureaucratic burden or cost for the public sector. In the field of Registers of Public Service Interpreters, Norway and the UK lead by example within Europe. Norway has had a Register of Public Service Interpreters since 2005, while the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) provides a database of the UK’s registered interpreters. Last but not least, reference is made to ISO certification and in particular to ISO 13611 on Community Interpreting Services.*

**Keywords:** community interpreting, public service interpreting, court interpreting, certification of conference interpreters, International Association of Conference Interpreters, AIIC, interpreters’ accreditation, EU interpreters’ accreditation test, licensure, registration, certified interpreters, registered interpreters, chartered linguists, court certified interpreters, enrolled interpreters, Assointerpeti, Universitas Austria, ISO 13611, Italian Law 4/2013 on non-regulated professions.

## 1 Interpreters’ certification

"Certification" is generally defined as the process whereby it is confirmed that products, processes, systems or persons meet specific requirements, standards or specifications and quality is guaranteed. However, terminology varies considerably. In interpreting, different terms such as: accreditation, certification, registration, charter, licensure, are used without any clear boundaries in-between them.

### 1.1 Definitions

*Accreditation* is defined as the process of formal recognition by a competent national authority of the technical competence and capability of bodies and laboratories to provide certification. On the

other hand, *certification* is the process through which an independent third party attests that products, processes, systems or persons fulfil the requirements of specific standards or specifications. Certification is performed by a network of certification, testing and inspection bodies and may be mandatory, if required by EU legislation, or otherwise voluntary. When referring to persons or products, certification is not only the preferred term but also the correct term to use under the current legislation. In particular, certification is a formal process that validates an organization, product, or individual's compliance with established standards or criteria. It involves a thorough audit conducted by an accredited body to ensure adherence to specific requirements. Certifications serve as credible proof of competence, quality, or expertise in various fields. They can verify management systems, product standards, or an individual's professional qualifications, providing assurance to stakeholders and often being necessary for certain practices or market access.

According to European Union law, “accreditation” is the last level of public control in the European conformity assessment system. ‘Accreditation’ means an attestation by a national accreditation body that a conformity assessment body meets the requirements set by harmonised standards and, where applicable, any additional requirements including those set out in relevant sectoral schemes, to carry out a specific conformity assessment activity (Regulation 765/2008, art. 2). Accreditation is designed to ensure that conformity assessment bodies (e.g. laboratories, inspection or certification bodies) have the technical capacity to perform their duties. Used in regulated sectors and voluntary areas, accreditation increases trust in conformity assessment. It reinforces the mutual recognition of products, services, systems, and bodies across the EU.

Requirements for accreditation are set in Regulation 765/2008. Under whereas clause 8 of the Regulation, accreditation is part of an overall system, including conformity assessment and market surveillance, designed to assess and ensure conformity with the applicable requirements. The particular value of accreditation lies in the fact that it provides an authoritative statement of the technical competence of bodies whose task is to ensure conformity with the applicable requirements (Regulation 765/2008, whereas clause 9). Thus, the Regulation promotes a uniformly rigorous approach to accreditation across EU countries. An accreditation certificate is thus enough to demonstrate the technical capacity of a conformity assessment body. The main principles of accreditation under Regulation 765/2008 include a) one accreditation body per EU country (it is however possible to use another country’s national accreditation body) (art. 4, §1), b) accreditation is a public sector activity and a not-for-profit activity (art. 4, §5, §7), c) there is no competition between national accreditation bodies (art. 6), d) accreditation is the preferred means of demonstrating technical capacity of notified bodies in the regulated area (Regulation 765/2008, whereas clause 12).

With regard to interpreting, however, the above distinction between accreditation and certification as defined under European legislation is not respected. Whereas, according to the above definition, reference should only be made to 'certified interpreters', since certification is granted to individuals, the European Union regularly organises 'accreditation tests' for interpreters and the interpreters who pass these tests are called 'accredited interpreters'. This test only applies to conference interpreters, since interpreters are tested in simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. Successful candidates will enter the European Union's list of accredited interpreters and may be invited to work as freelance interpreters at meetings held at the EU institutions. It is

worth noting that interpreters in Australia are also called 'accredited' and this accreditation is provided by the Australian government body, NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters), which is the authority responsible for setting, maintaining and promoting high professional standards for translators and interpreters in the country.

In Canada and the United States of America, although the term 'certification' is widely used to describe the credentialing process for interpreters, there is still confusion and inconsistency in the use of the terminology (Mikkelsen 2013: 66). The terms 'credentialing' and 'accreditation' can be confusing and providing clearer definitions is considered useful (Chan 2008: 48). As early as 2003 (Stejskal 2003a, in Chan 2008: 48) a lack of standardisation in credentialing terms was noted and it was suggested that the term 'accredited' should be attributed to systems, organisations, institutions and foundations, while 'certification' should refer to individuals as a process through which an organisation recognises a certain level of competence of an individual who meets certain criteria, confirming the distinction that was enshrined in EU legislation later (cf. above).

An alternative term used for the credentialing of individuals is enrolment in a registry or registration. Registration is defined as a process verifying whether someone has the necessary credentials or qualifications to perform specific tasks and competencies within a specific sector (Stejskal 2004, in Chan 2008: 48). Thus, courts in Florida, USA, speak of *registered court interpreters*, while Californian courts refer to *court certified, registered and enrolled interpreters* included in the *Master List* of the Court after having passed the necessary exams established by the *Judicial Council*.

In the United Kingdom the use of the term «*chartered*» is widespread, particularly used in combination with “linguist” in the expression «*chartered linguist*». According to the definition provided by the Chartered Institute of Linguists, a Chartered Professional is a person who has gained a high level of skill or competence in a particular field of work, which has been recognised by the award of a formal credential by a relevant professional organization or association. Chartered status is considered a mark of professional competency and is awarded by chartered professional bodies and learned societies. Chartership is the gold standard for practising linguists and reinforces professional recognition. It enables linguists to be valued alongside other chartered professionals. Chartership provides public recognition, as it is a mark of quality and competence inspiring confidence among the wider public. It also shows commitment to maintaining high professional standards. Lastly, chartership helps Chartered Linguists by upgrading their professional profile and standing. It is widely used in the UK, Ireland, the USA and generally the Commonwealth countries.

Contrary to *certification*, which is performed voluntarily, because an individual wants it, without being compulsory, and is usually provided by a professional association or union or academic institute based on language knowledge or skills and the professional experience of the person concerned, *licensure* is a compulsory credentialing process through which a state entity grants a licence to practice a profession to an individual that meets the necessary requirements. Only licensed individuals are allowed to work in a particular field. In the case of court interpreters of Texas, reference is made to *licenced court interpreters*. However, they do not differ from the *certified interpreters* mentioned in the homepage of US courts, since in both cases reference is made to interpreters that have passed relevant examinations. In the case of the interpreting

profession, the prevalent trend around the world is undoubtedly the voluntary certification process. Also, certificates are usually awarded upon completion of a training programme and/or after passing a language proficiency test.

## 1.2 ISO Certification

ISO certification is a credential that validates a business's fulfilment of requirements relating to quality process standards as defined by the International Standards Organization (ISO). The ISO is a non-governmental organization that determines specifications for products, services and systems for quality and efficiency. Its history dates back to the mid-twentieth century, when international delegates met in London to create a new standardization for international cooperation and organization. The ISO now has almost 23,000 published standards throughout 164 countries, and companies earn ISO certifications to prove their quality standards to the world. Standards set forth by the ISO are valuable with regard to international trade as the organization has strict requirements concerning goods. Its ultimate goal is to improve industrial welfare worldwide, increasing levels of safety and security for all.

It is important to highlight that ISO certification is not a licence or permit allowing or banning an activity. It is an assurance that a company complies with certain rules in terms of quality of its products or services, management, production, etc.; the company or organisation retains certification as long as it continues to abide by these rules. ISO standards are considered a formula that describes the best way of doing something. They cover a huge range of activities, including making a product, managing a process, delivering a service or supplying materials. International standards thus refer to all human activities, set requirements and make recommendations for providers of products and services in order to ensure and improve customer satisfaction and make customers aware of the quality they should demand. They are the distilled wisdom of people with expertise in their subject matter and who know the needs of the organizations they represent, i.e. people such as manufacturers, sellers, buyers, customers, trade associations, users or regulators. Finally, ISO standards have to do with trust between providers and users. They benefit everyone, expand global trade and make global economy more robust. Verification of compliance with the standards is carried out by an independent authority, which judges the quality of a business, thus providing consumers with a quality assurance credential.

The most common ISO certification types for businesses are 9001 and 14001. ISO 9001 certification applies to the production and quality control process of a product or service and the control of supplies. It provides for systematic control of a company's activities to ensure the product produced by the company meets customer requirements and the product or service produced delivers what it promises. Finally, ISO 9001 certification may be applied to any product or service around the world and is found in a multitude of companies involved in translation and interpreting. In contrast, ISO 14001 certification sets environmental protection standards for the company with limited application to translation and interpreting businesses.

For interpreting, specific standards have been set in recent years, mainly concerning conference interpretation facilities and the equipment used for simultaneous interpretation. These standards include:

- ISO 17651-1:2024 - Simultaneous interpreting - Interpreters' working environment Part 1: Requirements and recommendations for permanent booths
- ISO 17651-2:2024 - Simultaneous interpreting - Interpreters' working environment Part 2: Requirements and recommendations for mobile booths
- ISO 20108:2017 – Simultaneous interpreting – Quality and transmission of sound and image input – Requirements
- ISO 20109:2016 – Simultaneous interpreting – Equipment – Requirements
- ISO 22259:2019 – Conference systems – Equipment – Requirements
- ISO 17651-1:2024 specifies requirements and recommendations for the design of permanent booths for simultaneous interpreting in new or existing buildings. This ISO also ensures the usability and accessibility of booths for all interpreters. It is to be used in conjunction with ISO 20109, which contains requirements and recommendations for the equipment necessary for simultaneous interpreting.
- ISO 17651-3 regards requirements and recommendations for permanent booths which do not have a direct view of the room in which a communicative event takes place.
- ISO 20108:2017 defines the quality and transmission requirements for the transmission of sound and images to interpreters and the characteristics of the audio and visual signal. The components of classical interpreting systems are defined in ISO 20109. Together with permanent booths (see ISO 2603) or mobile booths (see ISO 4043), interpreting systems constitute the work environment for interpreters. In addition to defining the requirements for on-site interpreting, where participants (speakers and meeting participants) and interpreters are in the same room, ISO 20108:2017 defines requirements for different types of remote interpreting situations, where interpreters as well as one or more participants are not in the same room. ISO 20108:2017 addresses the work of manufacturers and providers of simultaneous interpreting equipment and their technical staff. In conjunction with ISO 2603 or ISO 4043, ISO 20108:2017 and ISO 20109 define specifications on both the quality and transmission of the sound and video input provided to interpreters and the equipment required for the interpreters' booths, the conference room and remote room(s).

An important role in the formulation of these standards is played by the European Union's Directorate-General for Interpretation, which regularly exchanges expertise with architects, engineers and construction companies for public and private conference halls and convention centres. The DG Interpretation team ensures that all conference rooms where the European Union interpreters are called upon to work, both within and outside Europe, meet the relevant ISO standards and specifications. The Interpretation Service provides general advice on conference rooms, in particular on how international standards should be applied in practice. It can also provide advice on the integration of new technologies such as virtual meeting platforms with interpretation into existing conference rooms. Finally, interpretation booths (or booths) are the responsibility of the Technical Compliance Unit of the Directorate General for Interpretation, which seeks to reinforce standards that ensure excellent working conditions for interpreters as well as high quality interpretation for participants. Interpretation booths must be soundproofed, air-conditioned, well-lit and ergonomically designed seating, in accordance with the ISO standards mentioned above. Finally, interpreters must be able to see all participants clearly.

An important milestone for standards on interpreting is the publication of the International Standard ISO 23155:2022 for Conference Interpreting Services on 2 January 2022. This standard

was issued at the right time: shortly after the dynamic emergence of remote interpreting and amidst restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the need to continue life uninterrupted, conference organisers imposed working conditions that did not meet the minimum requirements of conference interpreting, which, unfortunately and under the pressure of circumstances (including the financial crisis that accompanied the health crisis), were accepted by a large number of interpreters. The new standard has mitigated 'collateral damage', and, most importantly, renewed the definition of conference interpreting, making it a distinct type of interpreting from other types of interpreting, thus innovating in terms of organisation, health protection and risk management and, above all, setting out in detail the procedures for ensuring quality in conference interpreting. In conjunction with working conditions as defined and regularly revised by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), the new ISO 23155:2022 standard sets out requirements and recommendations for conference interpreters and Conference Interpreting Service Providers (CISPs) and provides valuable guidance to international organisations, governments, conference organisers, conference centres, conference interpreting equipment providers, educational institutions and research centres.

### 1.3 Certification of interpreters worldwide: history

The certification of interpreters is a difficult task. In the USA, the 6th and the 14th Amendments both apply to the use of interpreters. The 6th Amendment establishes the right to a speedy trial by jury, allows the defence to offer witnesses, and have the assistance of counsel. The 14th Amendment expands on those rights by providing rights to due process and equal protection of the laws (Civics Education Project). Title 6 of the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. Title 6 “prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, colour, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance” (Civics Education Project). Because of this law, federal agencies had to provide interpreters to assist non-English speaking persons. It wasn’t until 1978 that the provision of interpreters by federal courts became a law (Civics Education Project). Indeed, the first form of certification for interpreters was then introduced in the US judicial sector. The Court Interpreters Act, signed by President Carter on October 29, 1978, establishes the right of any individual involved in federal proceedings to have a certified court interpreter if their communication or comprehension capabilities are inhibited because of a language barrier or a hearing or speech impairment. This initiative was the result of endeavours made in the context of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s. But it was also due to pressure from society following news of miscarriages of justice due to inadequate interpretation. This federal initiative was mainly the result of cooperation and pressure from both court interpreters themselves and judicial staff to set specific standards and requirements for the interpreter’s profession, which eventually led to the decision to organise rigorous examinations for interpreters.

Around the same time, the same effort was made in the context of sign language interpreting in the United States, pioneered by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), the professional association of sign language interpreters founded on 14 June 1964 at a seminar at Ball State Teachers College. The main difference in the interpreting test that RID came up with was that it consisted of testing general interpreting skills and was not limited to interpreting for the judicial branch (Kelly 2007). Lou Fant, biographer of RID's history wrote, “The interpreter scene prior to 1964 was so vastly different from that which exists today that it is a strain on the imagination to contemplate it ... We did not work as interpreters, but rather volunteered our services as our

schedules permitted. If we received any compensation it was freely given and happily accepted, but not expected.” (About RID). Thus, before the establishment of RID, sign language interpreting was not a professional service; it was after RID’s creation that a new profession was born. RID has worked diligently to provide the "three Q's of interpreting: Quantity, Qualifications and Quality," i.e. the RID Triad. RID's Triad is composed of: a) training for new and professional Interpreters through the Professional Development Committee (PDC), and the Certification Maintenance Program (CMP), b) continued certification through RID's National Testing System (NTS), and c) self-regulation through a national Ethical Practices System (EPS). In addition to originating and administering the National Testing System that certifies interpreters, RID also provides various support services to practicing interpreters, students of interpretation, and persons who share an active interest in the field of interpretation.

In the 1970’s similar efforts to those in the US were made in other parts of the world, sparked by the increase in the need for interpreting services beyond conferences and diplomacy due to refugee and migrant flows worldwide, and the realisation of the need to set standards and conditions. Sweden was one of the first countries to establish a system of licensing interpreters by means of a special proficiency examination (Niska 2007). What is interesting is that the interpreter’s profession in Sweden was not modelled on the interpreting modes or standards of international organisations or events, such as the establishment of the International Labour Organization and the United Nations, or organisation of the Nuremberg trials. Instead, the mechanisms behind the interpreters’ profession and education in Sweden can be traced back to the late 1960s and 1970s, with the deaf people’s battle for linguistic rights (Persson Bergvall and Sjöberg 2012; Lemhagen and Almqvist 2013), and the special investigations on immigration (SOU 1974:69 2021; SOU 1972:83; SOU 2021:51 2021 in Tiselius 2022:178), which are called SOU (Statens Offentliga Utredning, which stands for Public State Inquiry) and constitute an instrument used by the Swedish government for policy-making (Tiselius 2022:178-179). As explained by Tiselius (2002), prior to a legislative proposal, the Swedish government follows a consultation procedure. Initially a special investigator or a committee is appointed to investigate the specific question. The committee produces a report based on research, previous legislation as well as interviews with stakeholders and focus groups. Following publication, that report is referred to a wide variety of stakeholders, who are invited to submit an opinion. Based on the SOU report and possible opinions, the government may decide to introduce a bill. The same system is still in force in Sweden today. Sweden actually has two categories of interpreters: authorised (or licensed) interpreters, who have passed an examination, and qualified interpreters, who hold a degree in interpreting. Today, interpreters’ certification is common practice in most developed countries, although the methods of certifying interpreters’ competence considerably vary due to the specific nature of the profession and its multiple challenges.

### 1.3.1 Accreditation of conference interpreters at the European Union

The institutions of the European Union (European Parliament, European Commission and European Court of Justice) do not only employ permanent staff interpreters, who must first sit a competition for interpreters, but also *freelance* interpreters. They work mainly in the 24 official languages of the EU and occasionally provide interpretation services in other languages. There is no nationality requirement for *freelance* interpreters. To work as a *freelance* interpreter, you must first pass the "accreditation test". To this end, examinations are regularly organised (usually once



a year and always according to the needs of the EU). Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, they have been held remotely. While it was rumoured that the remote examination would have been a temporary measure, accreditation exams are still held remotely for both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation via a special online platform. This decision must also be linked to savings, since in the past the candidates' travelling costs to Brussels for the tests were fully covered by the EU; thanks to the increasingly widespread use of new technologies, the exams can now be conducted *online* without any particular problems and, above all, at a very low cost for the European Union.

To participate in an accreditation test, interpreters have to fulfil the following eligibility criteria. They need to have one of the following credentials:

BA in Conference Interpreting (4 years) or MA in Conference Interpreting

or

BA in any subject and a Post-graduate diploma in Conference Interpreting of at least one academic year of full-time study or at least one year of professional experience (documented evidence of at least 100 days worked) as a conference interpreter at the level required for international meetings (experience as a court interpreter, liaison interpreter, public service interpreter or company interpreter does not count).

Candidates must also have a language combination, which is in line with the required accreditation profiles. Lastly, they must not have failed an accreditation test three times (failure to attend without a justified reason counts as a fail). Except if the interest of the services so requires, before a fourth (and each subsequent) application can be accepted, a waiting period of five test years shall apply.

If the application is considered eligible, candidates are invited to take the accreditation test. The accreditation test involves the following for each of the tested languages:

Simultaneous interpretation of a speech (10-12 minutes)

Consecutive interpretation of a speech ( $\pm$  6 minutes)

Interpreters are tested from their passive languages into their active language and/or retour; the Screening Committee chooses the tested languages from your declared language combination, in compliance with the language profiles required for accreditation needs. Interpreters are first invited to record their simultaneous interpreting performance for all the tested languages; only if they are successful in the simultaneous test, they are invited to sit the consecutive test.

An interinstitutional Selection Board evaluates the candidates' performance based on specific marking criteria, which are frequently subject to modification. The marking criteria for simultaneous and consecutive interpreting relate to: 1) content (coherence, relevance, completeness, accuracy, knowledge of passive language), 2) presentation (quality of active language, communicativeness/communication skills) and 3) technique (interpreting strategies).

Successful candidates in the accreditation test are put into the joint database of accredited Conference Interpreting Agents (ACIs) and can be recruited by the three interpreting services of the European Union. Inclusion in the above database does not in any way guarantee recruitment by the EU institutions.

### 1.3.2 Certification of Conference Interpreters

Membership in a national association of conference interpreters is, as a rule, a kind of certification for conference interpreters. The admission criteria include both educational qualifications and professional experience and are usually so strict that clients have no reason to be concerned about the service they are bound to receive by choosing a member of the national association of conference interpreters. An interpreter selected from the association's directory is undoubtedly a conference interpreter. Although admission criteria may vary from one country to another, the general principles are inspired by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), the role of which has been and remains decisive in defining, safeguarding and developing the profession of conference interpreters since its creation.

#### 1.3.2.1 International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC)

The International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) has two categories of membership: *active members* or *associates* and *pre-candidates*. To join the International Association of Conference Interpreters, prospective members must be able to demonstrate that they have worked 150 days as a conference interpreter, have the support of existing AIIC members (*sponsors*) who have worked with prospective members in the last 3 years in their language combinations, agree to work at all times in accordance with AIIC's professional standards and adhere to the Code of Ethics of the International Association. For an interpreter to be admitted as a *pre-candidate*, besides accepting professional standards and the Association's Code of Conduct, they must have worked for less than 150 days as conference interpreters and have three *sponsors* attesting that the interpreter in question works as a conference interpreter.

Existing AIIC members who work less than 20 days per year either on a temporary or permanent basis are entitled to remain in AIIC as associate members. Only full members have voting rights.

Professional domicile is of paramount importance for AIIC members. Once an interpreter joins AIIC, they also join the local or regional association in the country where they have their professional domicile. Professional domicile stands for the country where one generally works and is not the same as the interpreter's official place of residence. AIIC members are also obliged to maintain the same professional domicile for at least 6 months. This provision is intended to protect members against unfair competition (i.e. an AIIC member listed in the AIIC interpreters' directory with professional domicile in London cannot claim reimbursement of airfare, accommodation or subsistence for an interpreting assignment in London, as the member's professional domicile does not justify it). In case of lack of compliance, penalties apply.

Although AIIC membership is not a certification *stricto sensu*, it offers members prestige and a high profile, because the admission procedure is rather complex and subject to stringent criteria and aims to provide high-quality services.

### 1.3.2.2 Quality certification for interpreters provided by Professional Associations (Assointerpreti, AIIC-Italia, Universitas Austria)

In recent years, all the more professional interpreters' associations have been providing quality certification for their members. In Italy, legislation has been a decisive step towards that direction. More specifically, the Italian Law No. 4/2013 concerning non-regulated professions was passed on 04/01/2013. Regulated professions include professions such as those of a lawyer, a notary, a physician, an architect or an engineer. This Italian law on non-regulated professions foresees the possibility for the said non-regulated professions to set up associations, without however enshrining any obligation for a single association to exclusively represent a profession; this means that more associations are allowed to represent the same profession. In Italy there are two conference interpreters' associations that provide quality certification for their members under the above law: Assointerpreti and AIIC-Italia. A similar certification is provided in Austria by Universitas Austria.

The National Association of Professional Conference Interpreters ASSOINTERPRETI (Associazione Nazionale Interpreti di Conferenza Professionisti) was founded in 1974 as a non-profit association. The aim of the Association is to represent the profession of conference interpreters, safeguard the interests of its members, promote lifelong learning and continuous professional development (CPD), and disseminate the profession with a view of removing linguistic and cultural barriers between peoples. The Association also aims to define ethical, procedural and contractual rules and promote their application by its members.

Because ASSOINTERPRETI is a non-profit organization, clients contact its members directly or through the regional secretariats or the national secretariat, without any mediation cost. Assointerpreti protects clients by issuing a certificate of professional quality of services to its members. This certification is intended to ensure that high quality standards are maintained in conference interpreting. To obtain this certification, a member of Assointerpreti must have been a full member of the Association for at least two years, have paid all previous annual subscription fees, fulfilled all CPD related obligations (2 days of proven lifelong learning per year), have no pending disciplinary proceedings, nor have been subjected to any disciplinary measures during the two-year period for which the quality certificate is issued. Finally, members must provide proof of positive evaluations by their peers and/or clients. Assointerpreti is registered in the list of Professional Associations issuing a certificate of quality and professional level of service for their members, which list is published on the website of the Ministry of Economic Development under Italian Law No. 4 dated 04/01/2013 (article 4, paragraph 1) on non-regulated professions.

AIIC-Italia is also registered in the above list of Professional Associations; it is established as a non-profit association in Italy, as well. It is associated with the International Association of Conference Interpreters as one of its regional associations. More specifically, AIIC-Italia annually issues a certificate of quality and professional level of service to its members in accordance with the above Italian law no. 4 of 04/01/2013 (article 4, paragraph 1) and the guidelines on certificate issuance as provided by the Executive Board of the Association. To be granted a certificate, AIIC-Italia members have to comply with the statutes and regulations of AIIC-Italia.

The Austrian Association of Interpreters and Translators UNIVERSITAS Austria (UNIVERSITAS Austria, Berufsverband für Dolmetschen und Übersetzen) certifies its members along the same lines. In particular, as they state on their website, thanks to the UNIVERSITAS Austria certification, clients can be sure that they are working with highly qualified professionals, which is particularly important in a non-regulated profession. All interpreters and translators listed in the association's database are UNIVERSITAS Austria certified professionals. They demonstrate their skills through a peer evaluation process, undergo lifelong learning (CPD) and are bound by the Association's Code of Professional Conduct. The most important certification criteria include: (a) a university degree relevant to the field of expertise, (b) at least three years of professional experience, (c) assessment by two independent quality assessment bodies and (d) lifelong learning.

### 1.3.3 Certification of community/public service interpreters

In the US there are several certifications intended to interpreters. The minimum qualifications for someone to become a certified community interpreter in the United States include being 18 years or older, holding a high school diploma or equivalent, being able to demonstrate bilingualism and literacy through language proficiency testing and holding a certificate for professional interpreter training (at least 40 hours of training).

The Community Interpreter® (TCI) is the only national training program in the U.S. for community interpreters and the leading program for medical interpreters. Highly interactive and skills-based, while incorporating the latest advances in the field, it is designed to be delivered as a 40- to 60-hour certificate program. It has also been adapted for longer programs by colleges and universities. TCI can be given as a medical interpreting program or geared for educational, social services or general community interpreting, as needed. Developed by Cross-Cultural Communications (CCC), TCI has more than 400 licensed trainers in 43 U.S. states, Washington, DC, Guam and six other countries.

The requirements for legal and for court interpreters in the United States are not the same. Court interpreters must have a college degree, complete a legal interpreter training program, and pass a court interpreter certification exam. According to “28 U.S. Code § 1827 - Interpreters in courts of the United States”, the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts shall establish a program to facilitate the use of certified and otherwise qualified interpreters in judicial proceedings instituted by the United States. The Director shall prescribe, determine, and certify the qualifications of persons who may serve as certified interpreters, when the Director considers certification of interpreters to be merited, for the hearing impaired (whether or not also speech impaired) and persons who speak only or primarily a language other than the English language, in judicial proceedings instituted by the United States. The Director may certify interpreters for any language if the Director determines that there is a need for certified interpreters in that language. Upon the request of the Judicial Conference of the United States for certified interpreters in a language, the Director shall certify interpreters in that language. Upon such a request from the judicial council of a circuit and the approval of the Judicial Conference, the Director shall certify interpreters for that circuit in the language requested. The judicial council of a circuit shall identify and evaluate the needs of the districts within a circuit. The Director shall certify interpreters based on the results of criterion-referenced performance examinations. The

Director shall issue regulations to carry out this paragraph within 1 year after the date of the enactment of the Judicial Improvements and Access to Justice Act.

The Canadian Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Council (CTTIC) was founded in 1970 and is the legal successor of the Society of Translators and Interpreters of Canada (STIC), which was incorporated in 1956. It is now a federation of seven provincial bodies, one of which, the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO), is a founding member. Since 1972 they have been joined by the following organizations: Society of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia (STIBC), Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta (ATIA), Association of Translators and Interpreters of Saskatchewan (ATIS), Association of Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters of Manitoba (ATIM), Corporation of Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters of New Brunswick (CTINB) and Association of Translators and Interpreters of Nova Scotia (ATINS). CTTIC maintains and promotes professional standards in translation, interpretation and terminology to ensure a high quality of communication across linguistic and cultural communities in Canada through national standardized examinations. CTTIC certifies its members. Indeed, Canada's certified translators, terminologists and interpreters are legally recognized as full-fledged professionals, are respected by Canadian institutions and the public at large and are compensated accordingly for their services.

NAATI, the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters, is responsible for setting and maintaining high national standards for language practitioners in Australia. It is the only organisation authorized by every state of Australia to issue certification for translators and interpreters wishing to provide professional language services in Australia. They issue certification to practitioners of common languages and recognition to language practitioners for rare languages. The organisation is present across every state and territory in both Australia and New Zealand. The interpreter certification and credentials by NAATI include: a) Conference Interpreter (Senior – Formerly Level 5, b) Conference Interpreter – Formerly Level 4, c) Certified Interpreter – Formerly Level 3 or Professional Interpreter, d) Certified Provisional Interpreter – Formerly Level 2 or Paraprofessional Interpreter, e) Recognized Practising Translator – Formerly Interpreter Recognition – Used for dialect and language certification not offered by NAATI and f) Language Aide – Awarded for completing a NAATI test.

In the UK there are also different training programs that prepare trainees to be certified as interpreters. Level 3 Certificate in Community Interpreting (CIC) is considered the ideal entry-level qualification for anyone who wishes to enter the interpreting profession and looking to become a paid interpreter in the UK. It is widely regarded as the minimum requirement for interpreters and one which is accepted throughout the industry for the majority of paid interpreting assignments. Upon completion of Level 3 Certificate in Community Interpreting interpreters are able to work directly with clients or for Language Service Providers who find assignments on the interpreters' behalf.

The National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) provides a database of the registered interpreters in the UK. To be admitted into the NRPSI, they need to prove that they have both professional experience and a certification in interpreting. The register recognizes three different statuses: (a) the full status, (b) the interim status and (c) the rare language status (NRPSI b). More specifically, to obtain full status, applicants need to provide evidence of more than 400

hours of proven interpreting experience in the UK public services; they should also possess a recent qualification attesting to their interpreting and translation skills. Such qualifications can be a degree in interpreting, or a certification granted after having passed an examination.

In Switzerland there is a special certification for public service interpreting (*Interkulturelles Dolmetschen*) called “INTERPRET”. The INTERPRET certificate is the basic qualification for interpreters in the three fields of asylum and justice, education and social affairs, and health. It certifies the holder has basic skills for performing simple interpreting services in the three fields. The Swiss Federal Diploma of Higher Education (*Eidgenössischer Fachausweis*) is a post-secondary professional education qualification (Swiss education system) for experienced interpreters. Interpreters with a federal diploma specialise in at least one field (asylum and justice, education and social services or health) and have the skills to provide effective and accurate interpreting services in complex interpreting situations in the other two fields.

Norway has had a National Register of Public Service Interpreters since 2005. As of 2020 a new upgraded version of the Register is effective. Importantly, on 1/1/2022 the Norwegian Parliament passed a special Act on interpreting which sets out the obligation of public services to use interpreters. The Act ratifies the compulsory use of the Norwegian National Register of Interpreters by the Norwegian public services. This Act is the fruit of labour and advocacy undertaken over the course of several years. The Norwegian Register of Interpreters provides a general overview of the qualifications of active interpreters, aims at increasing the availability of qualified interpreters, improves interpreters’ access to assignments, as well the transparency regarding interpreters’ qualifications. While the Norwegian register is based on the same general principles as the UK National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), it is governed and operated by IMDi, namely the Norwegian Government who is also responsible for funding it. The Norwegian Register of Interpreters covers 70 languages and foresees five categories of public service interpreters based on their qualifications.

In Germany, the Federal Act on Court Interpreters stipulates that anyone wishing to work as a court interpreter must have at least two essential qualifications: (a) basic knowledge of German legal language and (b) knowledge of interpreting. The German federal states are responsible for testing and certifying these qualifications in practice. Thus, some states have established special bodies for conducting certification examinations in interpreting. These consist of a written and an oral part and include all or some of the following components: (a) translation of legal texts, (b) translation of general texts, (c) oral examination in interpreting techniques, (d) report writing and/or oral discussion on cultural or current issues, (e) testing of legal knowledge through oral discussion and/or written examination and (f) oral discussion on the requirements of interpretation. In German federal states where no such examinations are held, the appointment of court interpreters is made on the basis of whether the candidates have passed the official examination of another federal state or another State or a State-recognized examination. Those who pass the above examinations are awarded the status of sworn interpreter and translator and are registered in an electronic database which functions as an online register of court interpreters and legal translators.

In Austria, court interpreting is also provided by sworn and certified interpreters who are registered in a centralized electronic database. According to the Federal Law on Sworn and Judicially Certified Experts and Interpreters, those interested in the above register should firstly

hold a university degree in translation and/or interpretation (240 ECTS) or have completed a continuous vocational training course in judicial or public service interpreting (60 ECT); they should also be able to prove at least one year of professional experience. Candidates who do not have such training must instead provide evidence of three years' professional experience. Those who meet the above requirements are then tested (a) in their legal knowledge via a questionnaire, (b) in (written) translation, (c) in sight translation and (d) in interpreting at a mock court hearing or interrogation (Hlavac 2013: 41, ÖVGd b). Exceptionally, in cases of urgency for non-European languages, the written test in translation may be omitted. These "partially" certified interpreters are admitted to the Austrian register, but their certification is valid for only five years.

## **Conclusions**

The issue of certification in all professions, including interpreting, has become a major issue over the past few years. Terminology varies. Many different terms are used for the certification of interpreters: accreditation, certification, registration, licensure, credentialing, charter, with boundaries that are not entirely clear. Membership of the International Association of Conference Interpreters and/or national associations of conference interpreters constitutes a form of quality assurance to clients for the conference interpreters chosen for a specific assignment; if clients select interpreters who are members of AIIC or the national association, they feel assured that the interpreting services to be provided are professional services. However, some national associations have lately started granting specific quality certification to their members. Such associations include Assointerpreti and AIIC Italia in Italy, which grant such certification under Italian Law 4/2013 concerning non-regulated professions, and Universitas Austria, which also grants quality certification based on a similar Austrian law. The Italian law on non-regulated professions could serve as a source of inspiration in the field of certification of interpreters for other countries around the world as its application is not difficult or cumbersome and does not add extra bureaucratic burden to the state administration. In the field of public service interpreting, special certification is provided in the US, Canada, Australia, as well as in some European countries such as the UK, Norway and Switzerland. In the field of court and legal interpreting, sworn translators and interpreters are certified through specific procedures in Germany and Austria. Norway has had a National Register of Public Service Interpreters since 2005; on 1/1/2022 the Norwegian Parliament importantly passed a special Act on interpreting which sets out the obligation of public services to use interpreters.

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