

AVIDICUS

Assessment of Videoconference Interpreting in the Criminal Justice Services

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The use of videoconferences (VC) in criminal proceedings, especially for hearing witnesses or experts, has been allowed under EU legislation since 2000 (Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters between EU countries, Art. 10). A 2008 survey by the European working group on E-Justice shows that VCs are now widely used in criminal proceedings to speed up cross-border cooperation, reduce costs and increase security.

The emerging settings include videoconferences with witnesses, experts or suspects abroad but also between courts or police stations and prisons. These settings are often multilingual, necessitating the integration of interpreters into the videoconference situation ('videoconference interpreting' – VCI).

Apart from that, videoconference technology also offers a potential solution for current problems with the provision of qualified legal interpreters, especially for minority languages. Thus, 'remote interpreting' (RI) via a videoconference link using interpreters at distant locations, possibly abroad, is gaining momentum in criminal proceedings.

In June 2007 the European Council confirmed that the use of videoconference technology is one of the priorities for future work in E-Justice, in particular in the areas of evidence taking and interpreting.

While these developments are changing the practice of legal interpreting, virtually nothing is known about the viability and quality of VCI/RI, and training for legal practitioners and interpreters on VCI/RI is almost non-existent.

The AVIDICUS project addresses the issue of viability and quality and the need for training in this context. Through a comparative study of face-to-face interpreting and VCI/RI in relevant criminal proceedings settings, the project aims to investigate the viability and quality of VCI/RI in criminal proceedings and to use the findings of this study to develop VCI/RI training modules for legal practitioners and interpreters.

This work involves 6 partners in 4 countries and external experts with complementary expertise in VC technology, legal interpreting, VCI/RI and academic/professional training.

By the end of its lifetime, the project will have developed an improved understanding of the settings in which VCI/RI is relevant and produced the following key deliverables:

- A set of recommendations for the use of VCI/RI in criminal proceedings (benefits, risks, guidelines for best practice),
- A set of VCI/RI training modules for legal practitioners, practising interpreters and interpreting students,
- A final conference to disseminate the major findings to relevant target groups (with book publication to follow).

The project outcomes will be of immediate relevance to legal practitioners and interpreters. Furthermore, they will enable Criminal Justice Systems across Europe to develop common regulations on the use of VCI/RI in criminal proceedings.

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