



TAKE GREAT CARE OF YOUR EARS – THE ADMINISTRATION DOESN'T DO IT!

EN

Brussels, 20 February 2024



Digital mode has been part of our life since the beginning of the pandemic. Headsets and their integrated microphones, digital platforms are now some of your working tools. They are essential, as they allow us to communicate around the world from home or in the European Commission's premises.

As for all the new technologies, the sound chain (or our digital tools as well as software, Ethernet cables or Wi-Fi connecting them) should have been subject to risk analysis when they were introduced by the lead services (DIGIT, HR, OIB) in order to identify preventive measures concerning your health. This has not been done.

However, during the pandemic, both interpreters and politicians reported issues using remote conference equipment, and reports were made throughout the world. There were reports of symptoms of tinnitus, hyperacusis, dizziness or hidden deafness... https://aiic.org/document/10157/Declaration-auditory-health_janv22.pdf. These pathologies are caused by compressed sound (also known as 'toxic sound') emanating from a chain of sound which does not meet ISO standards.

Some institutions have acted to protect the hearing health of their staff by introducing various means (limiting the weekly interpretation time on platforms, generalising ISO microphones after intervention by the labour inspectorate, etc.).

The administration in charge of this file within the European Commission has been working on this half-heartedly for more than a year. It has only partially accepted the CPPT's (Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work) opinion on the auditory health of interpreters by committing to carry out a risk analysis of the sound chain, while maintaining its policy and practices in this area.

In this challenging context, **Union Syndicale** has recently supported a request for the recognition of occupational disease for a colleague suffering from tinnitus and hyperacusis. According to medical doctors, this is a warning sign of further internal ear injuries, which are still to be diagnosed.

Union Syndicale aims to ensure that its action carries a useful effect for all staff of the institution. While it is true that sound quality requirements are lower in the case of a simple exchange on Skype or Teams, the fact remains that we have all been developing in a new technological environment for a few years, without having the necessary information and training to protect ourselves. We regularly face poor sound technology in virtual or hybrid mode. We even find it difficult to concentrate, or experience fatigue, due to long or too many meetings using poor equipment.

In the absence of preventive measures on the part of our employer, you can make changes to protect yourself and your colleagues:

- Move away from your screens, decrease the volume of your headset or speakers (which compress the sound).
- Limit the duration of your remote meetings;
- prefer face-to-face meetings (and for those with interpretation, go to the conference rooms); it may also be beneficial to maintain social contacts.
- Otherwise, apply the measures recommended by the SCIC (Directorate-General for Interpretation) Code of Conduct (in particular, use their microphones) ([Recommended Microphone list.pdf](#));
- If in any doubt, make a general assessment of your hearing at an ENT specialist in order to draw up a picture of your hearing. In this context, you should be aware that mere audiometry will not make it possible to identify possible injuries. There are 8 tests in total, the number and nature of the tests to be fixed with your practitioner.
- If you have any problems, report your situation to the occupational physicians of the European Commission's Medical Service and contact us.

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