



Report on the **Survey on working conditions of AV translators in Croatia** conducted in November and December 2021.

Author: Dr Kristijan Nikolić

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb Croatian Association of Audiovisual Translators (DHAP)

1. Rationale:

The Croatian Association of Audiovisual Translators (DHAP), in collaboration with the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Zagreb University, conducted this survey in November and December 2021 with the purpose of investigating the working conditions of Croatia's audiovisual translators. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the perception among Croatia's audiovisual translators has been one of deteriorating working conditions, in particular regarding pay, while no concrete data has been collected. Secondly, there has been various speculation about the number of people who work as audiovisual translators in Croatia, and, according to some anecdotal assumptions, that number has been as high as five hundred. Thirdly, DHAP is a member of AVTE, the umbrella organisation of European national associations of audiovisual translators. This report will contribute to AVTE's goal of conducting both national surveys of this type across Europe, as well as conducting a Europe-wide survey.

2. Research questions:

The rationale led to the following main research questions: How many subtitlers are there in Croatia? Can they make a living as audiovisual translators? What is their legal status? How do they see the future of the profession and do they plan to stay in it long-term.

3. Hypotheses:

The two main hypotheses of this survey were:

- H1: There are around 500 subtitlers in Croatia.
- H2: Croatian subtitlers struggle to make a living.

4. Methodology:

The survey was conducted via Google Forms between 16th of November and 6th of December 2021 (three weeks). The survey was distributed via DHAP's social media channels, such as Facebook (over a thousand followers), and LinkedIn, as well as via social media channels of similar associations, such as the Croatian Association of Literary Translators (DHKP) which has over 2800 followers. The survey was also distributed via the Facebook group "Prevoditelji" (translators), which has over 4000 followers. In total, 111 responses were received.

5. Findings:





5.1. Age and gender

Demographic data was first collected regarding the gender and age of the participants. Most participants were female, 77.5%, and there were 21.6% male participants. One participant chose the option "other" for their gender. Gender distributions were as expected, confirming the anecdotal evidence that most subtitlers are women. As for the age of participants, most were between 29 and 48 years of age (72%). Fifteen participants (13.5%) were between 18 and 28 years of age, while 13 participants, or just under 12%, were between 49 and 58 years of age. Three participants are over the age of 59.

Since all figures will be taken directly from Google Forms, and since the survey was conducted in Croatian, the text on these figures will be in Croatian, and explanations will be provided in English for the purposes of this report. Figures 1 and 2 show gender and age distributions, respectively.



Figure 1, Gender Distribution

Source: the survey. "Spol" is gender or sex in Croatian. "Muški" is male, "ženski" is female, "drugo" is other.

Figure 2, Age Distribution









Source: the survey. "Dob" is age.

5.2. Educational background

We then wanted to find out the educational background of Croatian subtitlers. Our findings show that most of our subtitlers, 85%, have an MA degree in modern languages and/or translation, or in modern languages alone. Almost 10% of participants hold an MA university degree in a different field, and just over 6% hold a BA degree in modern languages and/or translation. Three participants hold a doctorate in modern languages/or translation, two have never finished their modern languages or translation studies. One participant holds a secondary school degree, one a specialist degree in interpreting and another a specialist degree in translation. There is also one participant with a two-year degree in a non-related field. Figure 3 shows the educational background distribution

Figure 3, Educational Background.



Source: the survey. "Obrazovanje" is education, red stands for MA in modern languages and/or translation, blue is for BA in the same fields of study, while green is for a university degree in a different field.

5.3. Language pairs

It is well-known that Croatian subtitlers mostly work from English into Croatian, but we wanted to find out how many subtitlers translate from Croatian into English, and how many work with other languages apart from English. As expected, our survey has shown that most Croatian audiovisual translators work from English into Croatian, 106 of them out of 111 (95%), and 37 participants also translate from Croatian into English, as seen in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4, Subtitlers Working from English into Croatian, and Croatian into English.



S kojih na koje jezike prevodite audiovizualne sadržaje? Ako prevodite s više jezika na više jezika, precizirajte to u sljedećem pitanju.

Source: the survey.





Regarding other language pairs, the data has shown that 34 participants work with other language pairs, while five don't work with English at all. Eight participants translate German into Croatian, and two work in the opposite direction. The same number work from French into Croatian, while one of them works in the opposite direction. Seven work from Spanish into Croatian. Five participants work from Italian into Croatian, and one of them works in the opposite direction. Four work from Portuguese, and one of those subtitlers works in the opposite direction. Two translators work from Turkish and also two work from Russian. There is one subtitler each working from the following languages: Catalan, Czech, Dutch, Romanian, Swedish and Ukrainian.

5.4. Croatian or international clients

We also wanted to find out how many of our participants work for Croatian clients, which may be directly with the broadcaster, mainly with Croatian public broadcaster HRT, or with other Croatian vendors. We also wanted to find out how many work for both Croatian and international clients, or solely international clients. By international clients, we mean LSPs or agencies, such as Deluxe, Iyuno SDI, Plint or TVT, etc., which largely do not have offices in Croatia. It is also worth noting that Croatian clients may be agencies owned by Croatian nationals and based in Croatia, largely the capital Zagreb, with the exception of Croatian Radio and Television, Croatia's public broadcaster, which directly hires freelance audiovisual translators. The results have shown that just over 35% work exclusively for international clients, 36% work for Croatian clients, and just under 29 % work for both international and domestic clients, as seen in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5, Clients Distribution.

Radite li trenutačno za strane ili domaće naručitelje?



Source: the survey. Blue is for international clients, red for Croatian and amber for both international and Croatian.

We also asked the participants to compare Croatian and international clients in an open, optional question. Nearly all participants who work for both Croatian and international clients decided to do so, or 29 out of 32 in total. Eighteen participants clearly stated that





international clients pay better. Four translators pointed out that international clients pay on time, which may not always be the case with Croatian clients. Some have also reported better software while working for international clients. One participant pointed out that their Croatian client offers a steadier flow of work. Here are some of the most detailed answers.

Answer 1

Working with international clients means the legal framework is clearer, and payments are regular. Working for Croatian clients means more uncertainty, starting with the legal framework, which means the client interprets rights, up to payments which may be delayed by many months.

Answer 2

International clients pay on time (the following month), they have their own free software, and they pay from two to six times more than Croatian clients. I also have much more support from international clients, better etiquette in terms of their communication with me, transparency, plus I am also credited for my translation at end of the video (if comparing the Croatian agency Mediatranslations with the international Iyuno).

The following answer is a bit different and more colourful.

Answer 3

Excluding a handful of international vendors that pay slightly more than peanuts and Netflix, which is the only client in my experience that pays the living wage, it is all the same sh**. Of course, vendors vary, but they all pay too little, have short deadlines, and hire unqualified translators (this is related to their competence, not academic qualifications). Luckily, international clients pay on time. However, some of them like to leave bank transactions charges to be covered by the subtitler.

Answer 4

International clients pay better. If you asked me last year, I would have said international clients were also better organised. Starting this year, the organisation has been horrible, regardless of whether it is high-profile translations for Netflix or other translations.

5.5. Types of contracts

In the following question, we wanted to find out what sort of contracts subtitlers sign with their clients. It should be noted that legal frameworks and contractual law differ from country to country, so these answers are specific to the Croatian context, where applicable. Most subtitlers who participated in the survey sign "autorski ugovor" or an author's commissioning





agreement. This type of contract in reality means that even though the subtitler is considered the author of subtitles, they have no rights over their translation once they have submitted it, and the translation becomes the property of the client. Just under ten percent of participants sign a contract called "ugovor u djelu" or service contract, which is a different type of contract. As many as 18 percent do not sign any contract, and eight percent of participants did not know the answer to that question. The remaining 21 answers varied. Eight participants said they only issue invoices, two participants said they sign "autorski ugovor" with domestic clients, and a more general service agreement with international clients.

5.6. Giving up rights

We then wanted to find out whether subtitlers give up their moral rights, such as the right to be credited, and material rights, such as royalties for reruns. Just over half of participants do not give up their moral rights, and almost 23.5% do, while as many as 12 participants did not know. The remaining respondents claim that giving up moral rights depends on the client. Almost exactly two thirds of our respondents give up their material rights, and just over 24% did not know the answer to that question, with only four participants confirming they do not give up their material rights. Seven participants gave more detailed answers, in which they mostly said it depended on the client, or that they work for a streaming service, with one participant claiming: "Yes, but not because I want to. I am mostly stripped of all rights."

5.7. Membership of DHAP

Figure 6 below illustrates the division between participants who are members of DHAP marked with colour blue, and those who are not, represented by the red field.



Figure 6, Membership of DHAP

Source: the survey.

Almost 35% of our participants are members of DHAP, and when asked why they are members, most pointed out the advantages of tax breaks they get as members, and of fighting for their rights with their colleagues. One participant said: "We are stronger together". Almost





two thirds of participants are not members of DHAP, and 52 of them, out of 73, also decided to answer the question about the reasons for not joining DHAP. While several participants said they had not heard of DHAP, that they were too passive to do that, or have a permanent job, and subtitling is just an extra source of income for them, several participants pointed out the selection process as the reason for not applying. To join DHAP, subtitlers must pass a selection test. One participant has given a detailed, albeit negative, view:

> I tried to apply last year to take advantage of tax breaks and better connect with fellow audiovisual translators. However, the process of joining DHAP consisted of copyright infringement, which had to be resolved, and that process took a long time. However, this is not the only reason. The point of having a professional association is to help its members, and, through its popularisation, increase the association's visibility and strength, which is unfortunately not a priority for some members. When the interest in the association increased, a high-ranking member said: "Why do we even need all these people", which is in line with the reputation of DHAP as a club for subtitlers who work for the Croatian public broadcaster, HRT, who are not interested in anybody else. Difficult communication supports this reputation of DHAP, and the complicated application process. It seems that DHAP is doing all it can to complicate the application process, to remain the exclusive club of people who know one another. Last year, when Netflix and their vendors arrived on the Croatian market, a real shockwave was felt among subtitlers, and many became more interested in joining the association. However, the association has about fifty members. Unfortunately, this is a bad reflection of the association when it should be at its peak.

The selection test was introduced when the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia refused to list DHAP on the list of artistic associations, claiming anyone can join the association. The association applied to the Ministry of Culture to be listed to enable its members to get tax breaks, and thus wanted to make the association more attractive for potential members. Even though there have been admission rules since the association's inception in 2012, the Ministry, knowing that listing DHAP as an artistic association meant tax breaks for its members, wanted to ensure there is a selection process before considering whether to list the association or not. This is why the selection process was introduced. Notwithstanding, the fact that there are subtitlers who consider DHAP an exclusive club means the association needs to work harder to shed that image.

5.8. Experience

The following question was about the amount of experience, and Figure 7 below illustrates the distribution.

Figure 7, Years of Experience





Koliko godina radite kao audiovizualni prevoditelj? 111 responses



Source: the survey. The term "više" means "more".

5.9. Payment

We then wanted to find out in which situations our subtitlers are paid more. Almost half of our participants (49.5%) are paid more if they work on rush translations, while 35% are paid more if there is no dialogue list, and 24% are paid more if the content they work on is more complex. Eight percent of participants are paid more if they translate from a language considered rare, and 30 percent of them do not get higher fees at all. It should be noted that only a few participants in the last group noted they almost never get higher fees.

5.10. Workload

When asked how many hours a week they spend working on audiovisual translations, just under a quarter of our participants said they worked 40 hours or more a week. Twenty-three percent of them work between 31 and 40 hours, 13% work between 21 and 30 hours, 19 % work between 11 and 20 hours, and 15 % work up to 10 hours. Seven participants gave more detailed answers, in which they expressed that the number of hours varies or depends on the period. Some of them also said they would like to work more and have a steady flow of work, but they do not have it.

Most participants spend up to an hour a week performing secondary tasks that are normal for freelance translators, such as issuing invoices and looking for new clients, while others spend up to ten hours a week working on secondary tasks.

One of the main goals of the survey was to obtain concrete information about how much audiovisual translators actually earn. The following question was about their average annual earnings before taxes from audiovisual translation for five years. All amounts are in Croatian kuna. Figure 8 shows the findings:

5.11. Earnings





Figure 8. Average Annual Earnings from Audiovisual Translation Over the Past Five Years, in Croatian kuna.

Koliki vam je prosječni godišnji promet od audiovizualnog prevođenja, u bruto iznosu u kunama za posljednjih pet godina?

111 responses



Source: the survey.

Almost 84% of our participants make up to 150,000 kuna, or roughly 20,000 euros a year before taxes, and almost 40% of those 84% make less than 50,000 kuna, or roughly 6,700 euros.

We then wanted to find out how much our translators make per programme minute working for Croatian clients. Thirteen and a half percent work for less than a euro, as many as 30% work for between one and two euros ppm, while 30% of the participants do not work for Croatian clients. Seventy-five participants work for international clients. When asked if they are paid more, 80% confirmed they are. Five did not want to specify that, only four said fees were roughly the same, while six answered negatively. Asked how much they earn per programme minute working for international clients, the answers varied, as seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Earnings Per Programme Minute Working for International Clients





Koliko ste plaćeni za svoj rad ako radite za strane klijente (primjerice po minuti u eurima u bruto iznosu)?

111 responses



Source: the survey. "Manje" means "less".

While 35.1% of participants do not work for international clients, 24 of those who do are paid over five or more euros ppm, 12 are paid between 4 and 5, 11 are paid between 3 and 4, eight are paid between 2 and 3, and as many as 13 are paid between 1 and 2 euros. It is also worth noting that 98% of participants who work for international clients do not have issues with payment delays. In contrast, 48% of those participants in the survey who work for Croatian clients experience payments issues.

5.12. Delayed payments

Our participants were then asked what steps they take if payments are delayed. As many as 55 % continue to work for the client and wait for the delayed payments. Almost 20% do the opposite, they stop working for that client until the overdue payments have arrived. Only five percent continue working while taking legal action, and the same percentage stop working while taking legal action. Several participants gave more detailed answers, explaining that they call their clients expressing their dissatisfaction. One participant said: "All the above, depending on how angry I am and how much money is in question."

5.13. Making a living

We then wanted to learn whether our participants working as audiovisual translators can earn an average monthly wage, which was at the time of the poll 6,763 kuna after, or 9,216 before taxes (TEB, 2021). Furthermore, some subtitlers live abroad, and their cost of living may be even higher. As many as 43.2% of our participants cannot earn the average salary, 28.8 % can make the average wage, while 27.9% earn more than the average salary.

5.14. Negotiating rates

Finding out whether audiovisual translators negotiate their rates was important, as it is directly relates to how much they are paid. Almost 40% of participants negotiate their rates at initial contact with the client, while exactly a third do not negotiate at all. Furthermore,





14.4% negotiate for special projects, such as complex materials and rush jobs, and just over five percent only negotiate with existing clients.

5.15. Legal status

The legal status of audiovisual translators was the topic of the following question. It is worth noting that the legal status is somewhat Croatia-specific, since both "samostalna djelatnost" (literally: free profession) and "obrt" (literally: trade or sole tradership) have a similar legal framework, and they would for instance in the UK fall under sole tradership. Most of our participants have "obrt" - 37% - while 19% have "samostalna djelatnost". Even though "obrt" and "samostalna djelatnost" are similar in their legal form, "samostalna djelatnost" means higher monthly outgoings for pension contributions and health insurance, which is why more audiovisual translators have opted for "obrt". Also, "samostalna djelatnost" is connected to one's name, while "obrt" can take any name the founder chooses. Traditionally, "obrt" was the form of registration for traderships such as shoe-repair shops, some hairdressers, tailors, etc. Furthermore, 26% of our participants have a permanent job, and audiovisual translation is an extra job to them. One person is retired, one is a student, one person said they were unemployed, and only one person is permanently employed in-house as an audiovisual translator.

5.16. Daily workload

The question of how many minutes of audiovisual content participants translate in a day has provided us with varied answers, as seen in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10. How many minutes of audiovisual content do you typically translate in a day?

Koliko okvirno minuta audiovizualnog sadržaja prevodite u danu? 111 responses



Source: the survey. "Do" means "up to".

Eight translators have given more detailed answers that can be summarized as "it depends". One translator has said: "I cannot answer, since there are periods when I work eight hours a day, and then there are weeks with no work at all."





Figure 11 below shows how much our participants work as audiovisual translators if that is an extra job for them.

Figure 11. If audiovisual translation is an extra job for you, how many hours a week do you spend working as an audiovisual translator?

Ako vam je audiovizualno prevođenje dodatni posao, koliko sati na tjedan provedete radeći taj posao, uz stalan posao?





Source: the survey. "Do" means "up to" or "from". "Više" means "over" in this context. "Sati" means hours.

The results show that just under half of translators for whom audiovisual translation is an extra job work up to ten hours a week, while 36% work between 10 and 20 hours. Eight percent of those translators work between 20 and 30 hours, and the same percentage of those translators for whom this is an extra job work more than 30 hours a week.

5.17. Software

The following two questions were about software. We wanted to learn what type of software our participants use. Figure 12 below shows what type of software our participants use in terms of software ownership.

Figure 12. Do you use your client's (clients') software or have you purchased your own?





Koristite li se vlastitim softverom ili softverom klijenta? 111 responses



Source: the survey.

Roughly an equal number of our participants, almost 37% in each group, use either their client's software (amber), or both (green), while nine percent use their own professional software (blue). Over 17% use freeware (red). As regards the specific software they use, Figure 13 below illustrates that. It is worth noting that participants were able to select more than one software, since there are many who work for more than one client. We did not list clients' software names, since we wanted to make sure the survey was completely anonymous. For instance, offering the option "Originator" would automatically mean the translator works for Netflix as the end client. We only gave the option "I use client's software", which was the last option in the graph, selected by 45 participants, or just over 40 percent of them.

Figure 13. Subtitling Software Used.



Kojim se softverom koristite ako nije klijentov?

Source: the survey. "Koristim se klijentovim softverom" means "I use my client's software".





The survey also showed that almost 77% of translators have a non-disclosure agreement signed with their client, while 20% do not have it. The remaining participants have said they sign NDAs for specific projects, while two participants answered "I don't know" or "Maybe".

5.19. Looking for a new job

Over half of our participants are not actively looking for another job in an unrelated field, while over a third indicated that they are. Eleven translators have given more detailed answers, specifying that they either sometimes look for new work, or just wanted to stress that they always look for new work. This question was ambiguous for some, as some of our participants misunderstood the question, which was not about whether they are looking for new clients, but for a new job entirely.

5.20. Views on technological advances

We wanted to learn whether technological advances have made the job easier or not. Figure 14 shows the distribution of answers.

Figure 14. Have technological advances (such as new software) made your job easier or not?



Je li vam tehnološki napredak (primjerice novi softveri) posao olakšao ili nije? 111 responses

Source: the survey. The blue field is for "yes", and red is for "no", while amber is for "I am not sure".

One participant specified that it depends on which advancement we have in mind. Machine translation was the next topic, and we wanted to both learn how many subtitlers use it. We also encouraged our participants to add a comment if they wished about machine translation. Figure 15 shows the distributions of answers.

Figure 15. Do you use machine translation while working on audiovisual translations? If yes, you can add a comment on machine translation, for example whether you find it useful.





Rabite li strojno potpomognuto prevođenje u svrhu audiovizualnog prevođenja? Ako želite, možete dopisati komentar vezan za strojno potpomognuto pr...ko ga rabite, primjerice smatrate li ga korisnim. 111 responses



Source: the survey. Red is for "no", while blue is for "yes".

The open question has revealed that only those audiovisual translators who work for Netflix use MT, which comes automatically with their proprietary software "Originator". Two translators consider it useful, while eight do not consider it useful.

5.21. The future and anything else

We finished our survey with two open questions. These two questions were optional. In the first one, we asked the participants to share their views on the future of the audiovisual translation industry, and whether they plan to stay in it. Ninety participants decided to share their views in this question. Some answers were brief, while others were longer. The answers can be grouped in three categories:

- a) Yes, I plan to stay in the profession, but I may have some reservations about the future or I am optimistic about the future.
- b) No, I don't plan to stay in the profession, and I have a pessimistic view of the future.
- c) I am not sure about the future, and whether I will stay in it depends on certain circumstances or prerequisites.

Most participants, 59 % of them, fall into the first category. They have expressed their huge interest in the profession, even love for the job, and some have stated that the arrival of Netflix on the Croatian market was a game changer in terms of working conditions, in particular, pay. Some of them have stated that the job of an audiovisual translator is beneficial if it is an extra job. One participant has said:

I have started a full-job this month. After 13 years of working as an audiovisual translator, I will have to lower the volume of work, but I still plan to work as an audiovisual translator. I don't see the future of the profession as very rosy, especially since our [Croatian] market is too small to be interesting for big clients, and the number of subtitlers, especially after last year's boom [the arrival of Netflix on the





Croatian market in 2019] is huge. But subtitling is still my first love, and I will remain faithful to it for many years to come. (Source: the survey).

On the other hand, 19 percent of participants have a clearly negative view of the future of the profession, and may not plan to stay in it. Some of these views are directly linked to the perceived threat of machine translation, which, some participants fear, may replace audiovisual translators entirely or partly. This answer best illustrates these views:

I see the future of the audiovisual translator in the darkest possible colours, somewhere between the complete extinction of the profession and complete degradation (be it the treatment of translators or translation quality in the light of the complete fall in literacy, and the profession). I plan to work in the profession if two conditions are met: 1) it makes any sense financially, b) if the content I work on is not an insult to basic human intelligence. *(Source: the survey).*

The third group of answers can be classified as purely conditional. Twenty-two percent of our participants are not sure whether they will stay in the profession, or will base their decision on whether certain conditions are met. The following answer is the best summary of these views:

I plan to continue working if fees and projects remain on the present, satisfactory, level. (Source: the survey).

At the end of the poll, we offered the option to our participants to add anything else if they wanted, and 25 of them decided to do so. One participant wanted to clarify that they had said their earnings were below average, but that was because they did not have enough work. Some translators reiterated the arrival of Netflix as a positive step in terms of the fees:

Regarding fees, I worked for Croatian agencies when they paid 1.5 euros ppm (1 euro if I worked with templates), but I hear from colleagues that rates are lower now. I also worked for 1.2, but I gave up quickly. Working for international clients brings variations in fees, from 1.5 euros ppm, which is peanuts, to 2.5 in a handful of agencies, up to 6 US dollars ppm in the agency through which I work for Netflix. *(Source: the survey).*

There were also four clearly negative views on the future of the profession, rates in particular, but one pointed out the negative attitude in the translation community towards those translators who work for Netflix.

6. Conclusions based on hypotheses:

Our hypothesis (H1) that there were over 500 subtitlers in Croatia has not been proven, according to the responses we have received in our survey. It is of course possible and likely that the number is higher than 111 audiovisual translators who responded to the poll. It is worth noting that audiovisual translators in Croatia are almost exclusively subtitlers, since





Croatia is a subtitling country. However, it is unlikely that the actual number is almost five times higher.

The second hypothesis (H2) that Croatian subtitlers struggle to make a living is correct for almost half of our respondents, at least financially. This hypothesis was only partly correct, since 43.2% of our participants cannot earn the average salary, 28.8% can make the average salary, and while 27.9% make more than the average salary. However, open questions have revealed that there is a clear disparity between those who work for Netflix as the end client, and those who do not work for Netflix in terms of earnings, but also that the supply of work may be an issue even if clients pay well. Earnings, understandably, are not an issue for those translators for whom audiovisual translation is an extra job.

7. The summary of main findings:

- 111 audiovisual translators participated in the survey.
- Most audiovisual translators have a university degree in languages and/or translation.
- International clients largely pay on time and mostly pay better than Croatian clients, while Croatian clients sometimes also delay payments.
- Over 40 percent of participants make less than the Croatian average wage.
- Many consider the arrival of Netflix on the Croatian market positive, as Netflix pays significantly more than others.
- The supply of work is an issue for audiovisual translators.
- Most audiovisual translators like their job, but some are worried there may be less work due to the arrival of machine translation.
- Many fear rates will be even lower in the future, while some hope Netflix's arrival has marked the beginning of an increase in rates.
- Most participants of the survey are not members of DHAP for various reasons.

References:

TEB, poslovno savjetovanje. (2021). Overview of gross and take-home Salaries in Croatia over the past 20 years. <u>https://www.teb.hr/novosti/2021/pregled-kretanja-neto-i-bruto-placa-u-rh-u-posljednih-20-godina/</u>