



Annual Magazine 2023

Understanding
is everything

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FOREWORD

Man and machine



Astrid van Rossum
CEO Global Talk

Global Talk has every reason to look back on 2023 with a sense of satisfaction: we achieved great results.

The number of requests continued to grow and we succeeded in providing clients with an interpreter in more than 95% of cases. Much of this annual report is devoted to how we have grown and how we will be doing everything possible to maintain this trend. We have strengthened several crucial aspects of our organisation and we are improving our services to guarantee quality and continuity. I would also like to touch on another development here – one that plays an increasingly significant role in society and business: generative artificial intelligence or GenAI for short. A form of AI that enables people to automatically generate copy, images, audio and other content. This topic dominated the agenda at many of the conferences and meetings I attended.

Game changer

The big question is whether this will turn the world of interpreting upside down? Not for the time being. Unlike the translation industry, where technology already plays a huge role, we don't expect GenAI to become a game changer any time soon. Interpreters are used in situations that matter substantively: a witness examination in court, an important interview at the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) or a consultation with a doctor about a medical procedure. These situations often relate to difficult conversations with people in vulnerable positions. Their health, staying in the Netherlands or perhaps even their lives are at stake. Where every word matters, where being nuanced matters. Where small differences in meaning or interpretation could have major consequences. In situations like this, there is no room for any misunderstandings. And certainly no legal wrangling over liability should something go wrong.

Breathing space

Will the machine ever win out over the interpreter? The risk is minimal. A legislative proposal is currently being drafted that prohibits civil servants from using AI tooling, at least for now. Government has hit the brakes or at least created some breathing space. Agreements have now even been reached about regulating AI at a European level. And rightly so because there are potential risks related to honouring human rights. Certainly in the sectors where we provide interpreting services, such as the asylum and healthcare.

People still make all the difference

Despite these considerations, some applications in our field are facilitated by AI. Take everyday situations where language barriers obstruct communication, where the stakes are less high. AI could certainly play a role in this area in the near future. This could include a translation device that directs you to the right department in a hospital or provides you with a general explanation of common disorders in your own language.

As experts, we were able to develop and test these kinds of applications for clients. In short, "man and machine" seems like a more logical scenario than "man or machine" for the time being. Still, we're keeping a very close eye on developments in the field of AI. We participate in public debates, visit conferences and talk with entrepreneurs and startups involved in AI wishing to share their vision with us. Developments in this field are progressing rapidly and no-one can predict the outcome. We have to accept our partial ignorance, which goes hand in hand with doing business in the interpreting sector. And, at least for the time being, that people still make all the difference in our line of work.

About Global Talk

What we do

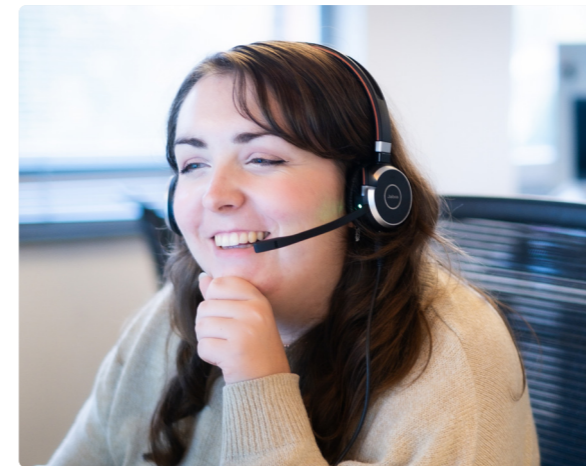
We transcend language and cultural barriers. We do so by deploying well-trained, highly experienced interpreters and cultural specialists. Because to really understand one another, you often need more than just a literal translation. Knowledge of someone's cultural background is also important. After all, there can be a world of difference between what someone says and what they mean.

Who we are

Global Talk is an international organisation. We work with 2,125 interpreters and cultural specialists in the Netherlands and Belgium. We speak over 200 languages and know a lot about many different cultures.

What drives us

We believe that everyone, no matter where they're from, deserves a chance to understand and to be understood.



INTERPRETER INTERVIEW

"I remember an interview at the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) that started off rather stiffly. The person in question, a man from Turkey, clearly felt uncomfortable. I suspected this might be due to his sexual orientation. Considering my duty of confidentiality, I asked the official if I could ask the man if everything was alright.

And guess what? In the previous interview another official asked the man if he had a partner, but the interpreter translated

'Girlfriend or partner? It makes a world of difference'

'partner' as 'girlfriend'. The man, who spoke English well enough to understand the word 'partner' clammed up because of this. He was afraid of the interpreter's attitude if he said he

was gay because this topic is still very taboo in Turkey. Although it's most certainly also relevant to his application for asylum. In this context, girlfriend or partner made a world of difference. I cleared up the misunderstanding and told him it wouldn't be a problem to express his sexual orientation. The tears welled up in his eyes. And from that moment on, the interview went on calmly and in a more relaxed atmosphere."

Leyla Gezik

Turkish and Kurdish (Zaza) interpreter

870.000

interpreting services performed



Total revenue

€70,3 mln

+ 41,3%



Performed services

+ 20,8%



Online requests

52,2%

+ 3,1%



On-site

86.800

+ 40%



Remote

783.100



Telephone

777.400

+ 19,3%



Video

5.700

- 13,5%



2.125

Registered interpreters

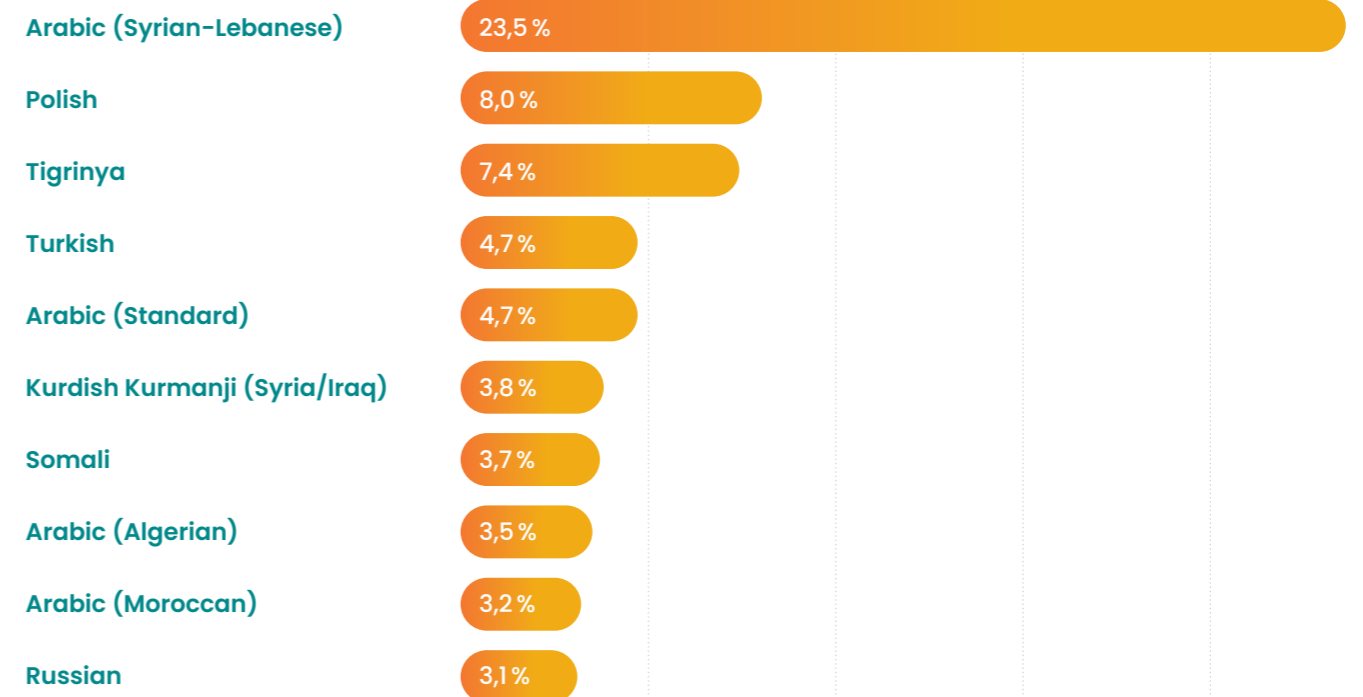


330

Newly signed interpreters

Telephone

Our telephone interpreting services have been widely used in the Netherlands for 48 years. We provide clients with an interpreter available on the phone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Growth was strong in 2023, with more than 777,400 telephone interpreter calls representing year-on-year growth of 19.3%. The most frequently requested language was Arabic (Syrian-Lebanese) followed by Polish and Tigrinya.

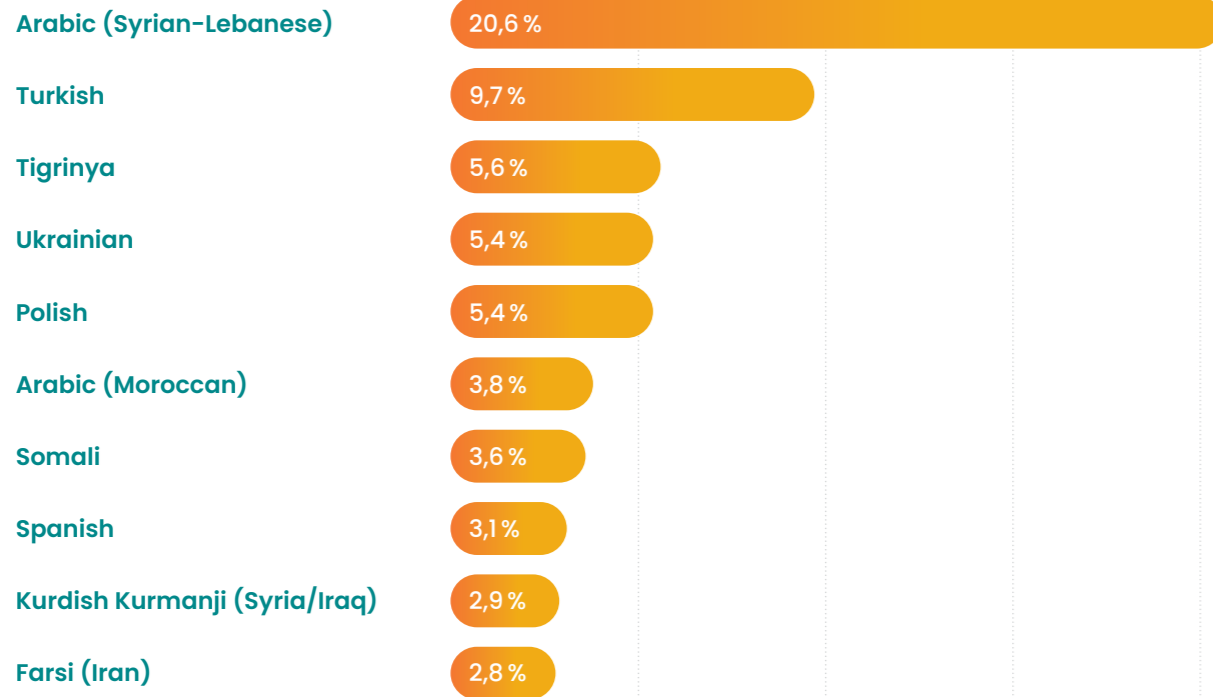


777.400 x

On-site

86.800 x

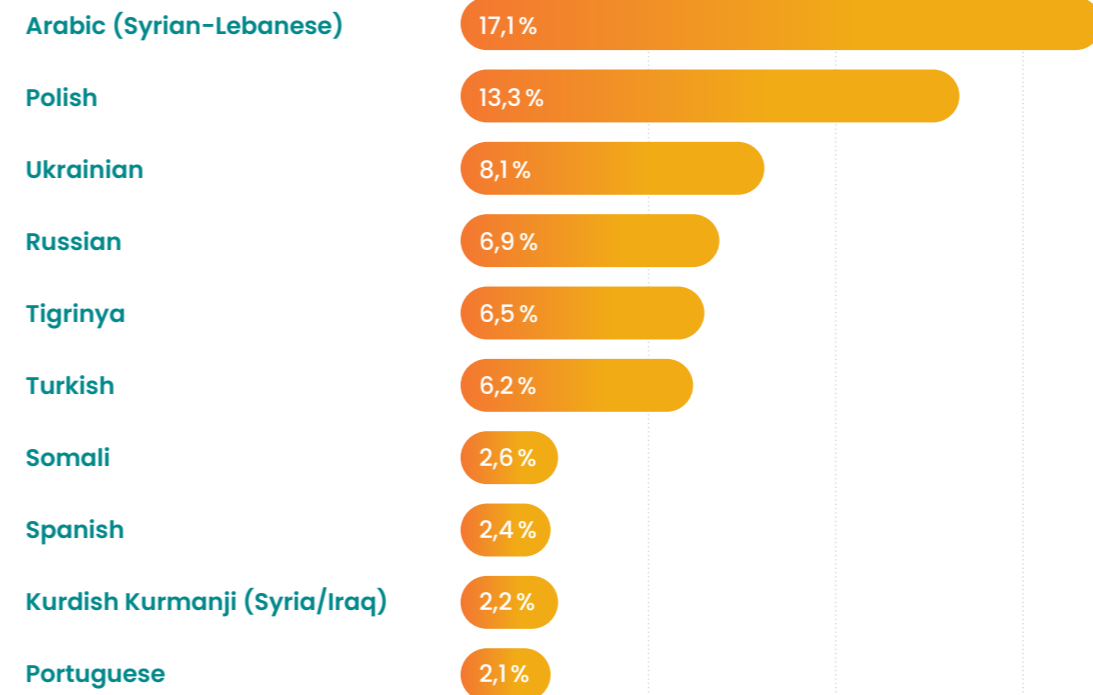
We were able to service many conversations on-site this year, breaking down language and cultural barriers. Whereas the deployment of video interpreters decreased, there was a marked increase in the number of on-site interpreting services. More than 86,800 on-site interpreting services were performed, representing a sharp year-on-year increase of 40%. Across practically all sectors, we saw more demand for on-site interpreting. The most frequently requested language was Arabic (Syrian-Lebanese), followed by Turkish and Tigrinya.



5.700 x

Video

A video interpreter was requested around 5,700 times in 2023, representing a significant drop of minus 13.5% year-on-year. During the coronavirus pandemic, video interpreters were engaged more often as an alternative for on-site interpreting. The pandemic has been behind us for two years now, and clients more often requested an on-site or telephone interpreter. Arabic (Syrian-Lebanese) still tops the list with Polish in second place. The demand for Ukrainian doubled in comparison with 2022, when it accounted for 4% of the total, making it the third most requested language.



CEO Astrid van Rossum about Global Talk Netherlands

Tackling the growing pains



Astrid van Rossum

In 2023, Global Talk paid a great deal of attention to strengthening its internal organisation. CEO Astrid van Rossum outlines key internal developments.

We focused on strengthening our organisation in 2023. Since our move to being independent five years ago, we've experienced rapid growth. Understandably, we've had to deal with growing pains. Important aspects including finance, compliance, quality and HR were assigned to colleagues tasked with different responsibilities. Over the past year, specialists were appointed to devote proper attention to these different aspects. We hired fifteen new people, bringing the workforce to ninety in our drive to achieve further growth.

"We're good at what we do because we interact naturally with both our clients and interpreters"

Safeguarding quality

Quality is one of the areas where we have improved. Recent studies show that we stand out from our competitors in this area. We're good at what we do because we interact naturally with both our clients and interpreters. We feel a strong sense of involvement in both respects; it's in our DNA. This also means that we don't shy away from entering into dialogue with clients if there's something wrong. So something we already do by nature is now also embedded in our processes, enabling us to achieve ongoing quality improvement.

Branding gains importance

We've also sought to strengthen our position in terms of HR. In a labour market characterised by increasing scarcity, you cannot just assume people will come and work for you. As we are growing, we need to consider how best to present ourselves as an employer.

Branding is therefore becoming increasingly important: what are our core values and how do we promote them? At the same time, it's equally important to ensure that the people who work for us continue to feel connected – it's important for us to retain talent. That's why we've assigned HR responsibility to a dedicated individual with a great deal of knowledge and experience in the field.



The third major pillar we've worked hard to strengthen is finance. Given our increased revenue, we wanted to increase professionalism in this area too. With the arrival of Rick Bolinde as our new CFO, I think we've certainly taken that step. It's essential that our financial processes run smoothly. We've achieved significant improvements in this area.

'We learned a lot from our first foreign acquisition.'

International ambitions

We also decided to withdraw from Sweden in 2023. Results there were disappointing and the investments needed to turn the tide became so high that we suspended operations there. Despite not achieving the desired outcome, we learned a lot from our first foreign acquisition. We're now more aware of what to look for to make a foreign acquisition successful and are open to new opportunities. Our international ambitions remain as high as ever. At the same time, we also still see plenty of opportunities for growth in the Dutch and Belgian markets.



INTERPRETER INTERVIEW

"It's amazing what an impact a 10-minute telephone call can have! I was providing interpreting services to an official who was taking a Syrian boy of around nine years old by car to a reception centre. The official wanted to give the boy some instructions, but they didn't speak a common language. The official was a bit blunt with the child, which I also understand. He wanted to clarify something, but could not do so without the services of an interpreter. My heart went out to the boy. He had probably just arrived in the Netherlands and everything was unfamiliar and strange. The language, the landscape and the man talking to him. He had no idea what to expect. My only tool as a telephone interpreter is my voice. I spoke to the boy in a calm, reassuring tone. I tried to draw his attention more to me. As if I was saying, it's going to be all right. You're safe. I spoke to the official calmly as well, using a more practical tone and subtly taking a slight distance. I had the impression I was on the right track with both of them. The communication became less emotional and the boy calmed down. At the end of the call, I sat motionless, staring at nothing for some time."

'My only tool was my voice.'

Moukelad Al Araki

Arabic interpreter

Commercieel Directeur Guido Vroman

Upholding customer centricity

Increasing numbers of widely different organisations are now working with Global Talk. From a commercial perspective, 2023 was an incredibly successful year.



Guido Vroman

We started working with new clients, contracts were implemented with ease and our clients were enthusiastic about everything we offer. "We're developing favourably," says Commercial Director Guido Vroman.

In 2023, Global Talk secured significant government tenders, making us especially well-represented in the asylum and security chain. "Over the past year, our client base expanded to include many more inspiring organisations. In addition to working for the Dutch Council for Refugees (VluchtenlingenWerk), the Legal Aid Board (Raad voor Rechtsbijstand) and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), we now also provide services to other organisations including the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)."

Our clients are always #1

It's no coincidence that Global Talk succeeded in landing numerous significant government tenders.

"Our tender desk is a formidable force: a highly experienced team of specialists who understand the government and its service needs. We're successfully managing to harness consistent growth. When new clients join us, we ensure effective, swift implementation. This makes it possible for them to make optimal use of our services."

Global Talk's growth has never distracted from its quality, Guido emphasises. "Quality of service is our top priority. To always be able to offer top-notch availability, we conduct an average of around 60 client interviews a week. We do more than just provide interpreters; we like to go the extra mile. It's very important for us to uphold customer centricity and we align our service offering to meet their needs."

For example, Global Talk works with specialised account teams for each sector. "These teams focus on clients including municipalities, central government, healthcare and education. We do everything for and with our clients.

We will continue to be a trusted partner for our clients

What's more, we're always open to feedback and ideas. This also means our clients enjoy cooperating with us. Our approach is highly valued, as borne out by our client satisfaction surveys. On average, clients give us a rating 8.4 for service quality."

Partnerships

Global Talk's close ties with its clients manifest in a number of amazing partnerships. Take Royal Kentalis, one of the largest audiological centres in the Netherlands. "Together with Kentalis, we've developed a special training programme. So far, we've successfully trained 23 interpreters in the audiological sector. Our partnership with the municipality of Almere serves as another example. They are hoping to elevate the quality of conversations where interpreters are needed. Around 100 consultants and account managers therefore followed our training programme, giving them the tools needed to hold discussions with non-Dutch speakers and sharing tips to take into account when dealing with different cultures."

We carried out similar projects in other sectors too.

"For example, in the education sector we joined forces with LOWAN, an organisation that supports the primary education given to newcomers on their arrival, and in terms of maternity care we did so with sector-wide organisation BO Geboortezorg and the Royal Dutch Association of Midwives (Koninklijke Nederlandse Organisatie van Verloskundigen or KNOV). These partnerships are of great importance. They enable us to customise the services we offer, to serve our clients in the best possible manner and to effectively cater to their needs."

Ongoing progress

But there's no time to sit back and relax at Global Talk. We're always looking for new ways to serve our clients even better. "To this end, we regularly consult with representatives from the Ministries of Justice and Security, identifying ways to further optimise our services. These discussions are important if we are to continue to progress as an organisation, while maintaining consistently superior service quality and facilitating further growth in the future. A future we look to with confidence."



Director Operations Esther ten Doeschot

An interpreter on the phone without delay?

From calling to clicking



During rush hours, 'everyone in the Netherlands' seems to need an interpreter.

Esther ten Doeschot

At the contact centre in Hengelo, Global Talk's Customer Care Specialists do everything to handle interpreting requests as quickly as possible. Although most requests come in via phone, nowadays more and more services are requested online.

As in previous years, Global Talk welcomed an increase in interpreting requests in 2023. The demand for Ukrainian interpreters remained consistently high. The number of requests for interpreters who speak Arabic dialects (especially Arabic-Syrian) also increased, practically doubling within a year.



Tasnet: An interpreter on the phone within minutes

Tasnet serves as the IT heart of our organisation. Tasnet is Global Talk's online platform, enabling us to connect the client to the right interpreter within minutes. Tasnet is used for all types of interpreting services: ad-hoc services, telephone bookings, on-site interpreting or video interpreting. Clients submit a request easily and quickly via the Tasnet app or the portal on our website. Thanks to Tasnet, we can manage the huge flow of requests.

In total, towards a million requests were submitted in 2023. "The increases were partly fuelled by the rising number of asylum seekers and because we now also serve the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). What's more, we're also seeing a rising demand for interpreters in healthcare, municipalities and education," says Director Operations Esther ten Doeschot.

Excellent client satisfaction figures

The sharp increase in requests led to unprecedented traffic at Global Talk's contact centre in Hengelo. Peak times are between 10:00 and 11:30 and between 14:00 and 16:00. At the busiest times, the contact centre handles around 500 requests an hour. This affects waiting times. "Of course there are clients who sometimes have to wait longer than desirable, but they are generally very satisfied. Even after having to wait a while, they still receive assistance and almost always get an interpreter on the phone. All this is reflected in our excellent client satisfaction ratings. On average, clients give Global Talk a rating of 8.4. And appreciation for Global Talk's service was even rated at 9."

Focus on automated requests

The organisation was strengthened to accommodate growth and be prepared for a further increase in the number of requests. Global Talk strengthened its workforce with the appointment of a Resources Manager (Mariëlle Wouters; see page 18) and an Operations Manager (Ersin Mangan; see page 20). Moreover, the contact centre was expanded in 2023 to include 34 instead of 29 FTEs. "We encourage our clients to make as much use as possible of the option to request an interpreter online. To make this possible, we even developed our own apps for some major clients. All in all, in 2023 we handled more than half of all requests without intervention from a specialist at the contact centre. In December, this figure was already over 58% and it is expected to rise further in the coming years. We intend to focus even more on automated requests. This can be achieved using a voicebot or offering menu options

'We're implementing all these changes with only one goal in mind: maintaining excellent service quality and client satisfaction levels.'

Dedicated client teams

Recent innovations include launching dedicated client teams aimed at improving our service levels. Teams of four specialists – on average – working exclusively for a particular client. Global Talk launched specialised customer teams last year for clients including IND. "This team serves as an extension of the client," explains Esther. "Staff can respond more effectively to specific questions and better understand what the client is facing. They maintain contact with the people who coordinate applications on the client's side. This raises the level of pro-activity. For example, if there's a high demand for a particular language, colleagues from the client team regularly liaise with our Resources department. They constantly re-assess how we can recruit and/or train more interpreters. We're implementing all these changes with only one goal in mind: maintaining excellent service quality and client satisfaction levels."

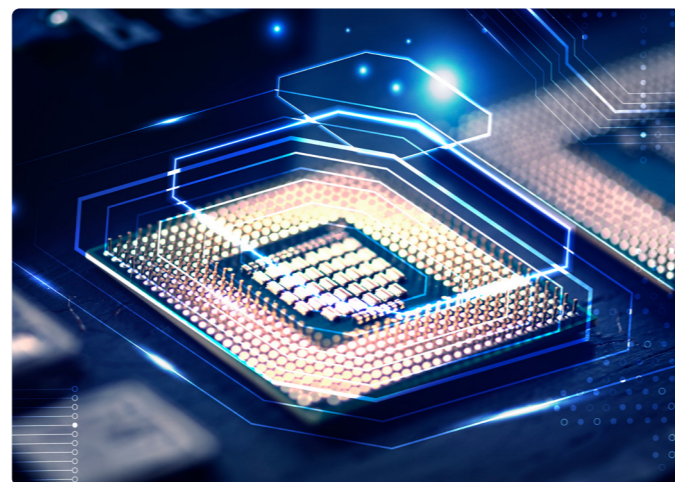
Director IT & Innovation Patrick van der Meulen

Growing our IT capabilities in line with the organisation



An interpreter on the phone within minutes, without reservation, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. We've been doing this for so long, it almost seems like second nature. But it isn't: it takes stable IT to guarantee service quality and continuity. "We improved IT professionalism significantly in 2023," says Director IT & Innovation Patrick van der Meulen.

"In order to guarantee the quality of our services, we need committed people as well as a stable, secure and robust platform (infrastructure, software and applications). We therefore invest heavily in



An increasing number of interpreting service applicants already use Tasnet, Global Talk's online portal. This affects the IT department. "There are plenty of ideas and initiatives directed at optimising operations for our clients and interpreters alike. In this context, we've been hard at work in recent months, updating the Tasnet platform. You could say we're refurbishing the shop while keeping the doors open. The results will be tangible by early 2024: a technically updated version, making further adjustment simpler."

Patrick van der Meulen

this area," explains Patrick. "In the past year, for instance, we introduced a new future-proof IT operating model, strengthened the department, gave business intelligence an even more prominent role and standardised our project approach. This complements our primary responsibility of guaranteeing optimal availability and accessibility."

Balance

On a daily basis, Global Talk's IT department seeks to find the right balance between a number of factors including system availability, renewal and security. "This makes our playing field incredibly challenging. Some security measures detract from optimal user experience, but are so important that they simply need to be implemented. We do, of course, always do so with the utmost care and coordination."

Data and AI

Data is regularly referred to as the new gold. And perhaps this is true, since data serves as the basis for Generative AI (GenAI). Over the past year, Global Talk has taken great strides in the field of data-driven work. "Today's dashboards and reports contain lots of relevant management information and prove their worth every day. What's more, we now apply data more intelligently to look ahead. This enables us to predict peaks far better, along with the demand for sufficient interpreters in a particular language. GenAI's role in this is growing."

Will AI take over our jobs altogether? Certainly not, asserts Patrick. "Take the latest developments surrounding the EU AI Act, which embraces agreements affecting the deployment of AI. AI is already supporting us and that's not going to change in the foreseeable future. We see it as an opportunity rather than a threat. Almost daily, LinkedIn presents a new Top 100 Best AI Tools & Platforms. This attests to both the pace and continuity of developments. We keep a close eye on trends and experiment with various models, but we're also adopting a somewhat cautious approach. The human factor remains pivotal."

Security and strategic partners

Systems security is another priority. "We do everything we can to ensure optimal data security. This requires more than just technical measures and protocols for our employees. It affects how we select partners as well as the choices we make concerning data storage. Security and continuity are top priorities."

The operating model outlined above also safeguards selecting several strategic partners. "Take partners needed for connections, data storage, digital workstations and security. This frees us up to focus on our primary applications and processes. In this context, sustainable IT is becoming increasingly important. Sustainability is definitely considered when selecting new partners. We weigh up what organisations do for society and the environment. Global Talk is undergoing a digital transformation and we hope to come out shining, also assuming corporate social responsibility."



INTERPRETER INTERVIEW

"The request came in for a telephone interpreter during a conversation between a remedial teacher, a mother and a four or five-year old child. Pretty early on in the conversation the teacher said to the mother: 'I'd like to speak to the youngster alone now. Could you leave the room for a while?' The child was given a few questions and was assessed. The suspicion was that the child was gifted and the issue was one of finding a suitable school. I felt a strong sense of responsibility to do my job properly: after all, the outcome would determine the youngster's future. I really needed to interpret accurately. For example, the boy was given assignments where he had to count the blocks. At the same time, I noticed how easily and smoothly the conversation went. The child and the remedial specialist: they genuinely understood each other. I've participated in quite a few conversations between adults that don't go that well. The teacher knew how to challenge the child and encourage him to do his best. After interpreting for an hour I noticed that I wasn't growing tired. On the contrary, I got loads of energy from the interaction. Perhaps it affected me more because I have a gifted child of my own and know first-hand how important it is to meet the right people at the right time in your life."

Larysa Dobra

Ukrainian interpreter



INTERPRETER INTERVIEW

"A request for an interpreter came in from an oncologist: 'I will soon be speaking to a middle-aged Ukrainian man with advanced prostate cancer. He does not wish to be treated, which means a rapid and painful death. We will not be able to communicate what we have to as doctors. The patient is behaving aggressively and has pulled all the tubes out of his arms.'

'I genuinely outdid myself.' I'd barely arrived when the patient began swearing at the doctors in a very uncouth manner.

He wanted to go to his father abroad and have a few beers instead of being treated in a hospital. After consulting with the doctor, I was given permission to speak to the patient in confidence. I explained that the doctor was only trying to save his life. And that unlike his father, who did not want to travel to see him from Ireland, the doctor was actually there for him. I managed to bring the man to his senses and he agreed to follow treatment. Some weeks later I was again asked to provide interpreting services for the same doctor and patient. The tumour had shrunk and the patient was therefore facing a far better prognosis. I didn't really pick up much from the patient, but I could feel the doctor's appreciation. I genuinely outdid myself."

Victoria Drobotushenko

Ukrainian interpreter

Manager Resources Mariëlle Wouters

Support for our interpreters

"The interpreters who work for us are overwhelmingly positive about our cooperation. On average, they give us an 8.6 rating. Naturally, we're happy with this," says Resources Manager Mariëlle Wouters. In order to strengthen our relationship with our interpreters and because we feel jointly responsible, we support their personal and professional development.

Interpreter Development Programme

Global Talk offers a loyalty programme for its interpreters: the Tolken Ontwikkel Programma (Interpreter Development Programme – TOP). Interpreters who work regularly with Global Talk and hardly ever cancel are awarded TOP points. They can use these points to attend webinars and courses through our own training institute: the Global Talk Academy. The points can also be redeemed for courses with other training partners. The Global Talk Academy has been accredited by the Agency Administering the Sworn Court Interpreters and Translators Act (WBTv).

"Some of the training programmes we offer through the platform were developed in-house in cooperation with specialists from the field," explains Mariëlle. "We also offer courses with external parties through the Global Talk Academy. These include subjects like personal development, language training and courses that help interpreters gain a better understanding of the field in which they operate."

Permanent education

TOP offers multiple benefits. "Global Talk supports interpreters in their personal and professional development and they can also earn PE points through the Academy. Based on the Permanent Education Act, interpreters listed under WBTv are obliged to earn eighty PE points every five years. Moreover, top-notch interpreters generate greater appreciation among our clients on the quality of our services. And finally, the programme strengthens our professional relationship with our interpreters."

Energetic interpreting

The Global Talk Academy is growing steadily. "Since we launched the Global Talk Academy in 2021, more and more interpreters are taking advantage of what we have to offer. For example, there was plenty of interest in the 'Energetic interpreting' webinar we organised in November. It focused on how, as an interpreter, you can stay energetic at work and at home after experiencing moving, impactful interpreting interviews."

During the webinar, guest speaker Evelien Moolenaar, Senior Coach at the Institute for Psychotrauma, gave interpreters hands-on tips and tricks to deal with these kinds of situations even better in the future. In the year ahead, more courses and training programmes will be developed in consultation with the interpreters. By the end of 2023, we had already researched the needs and interests of our interpreters to enable us to respond accordingly.

Training for aspiring interpreters

Global Talk is very active when it comes to training interpreters. "In 2022, we developed a new approach in response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees. We now use this approach to train interpreters in other languages where there are shortages. In 2023, we trained 131 aspiring individuals, focusing on training Arabic-Syrian interpreters."

Aspiring interpreters hoping to follow the training must have a demonstrable command of the Dutch language and the foreign language. During an information and selection day, they take a language test and participate in role-playing scenarios. If evaluated favourably, they can follow the three-month programme. During that period, they conduct low-threshold interpreting interviews that are evaluated by the client and a Global Talk supervisor. "By training interpreters, we contribute towards resolving scarcity: when aspiring interpreters take over some calls under supervision, more capacity is freed up to deploy our experienced, registered interpreters."



Mariëlle Wouters

Your Talk: mental first aid

Interpreters often experience intense situations. For example, they face child abuse, witness domestic violence or hear horrific, violent stories. Interpreters are professionals. They are trained to do their work under difficult circumstances and can take a few knocks. Still, it can help interpreters if they are given the opportunity to share their story with a colleague after an emotional assignment. For offering mental first aid like this, we started Your Talk,

which we set up with ARQ IVP (an institute focusing on psychotrauma). Through Your Talk, we put interpreters who need to blow off a bit of steam in contact with a fellow interpreter or Global Talk staff member. A number of interpreters and staff members have followed training for this. They don't offer coaching or assistance, but they do offer a listening ear. And they are alert: if they suspect more help is needed, they recommend contacting the family doctor or another counsellor.

Manager Operations Ersin Mangan

Work smarter instead of harder

At Global Talk, matching applicants and interpreters has become far more automated. This frees up time for our contact centre staff to focus on the complex requests. "An important development," says Ersin Mangan.

As Global Talk's Operations Manager, he is responsible for the contact centre and sees a strong shift from telephone to online requests for interpreters. More than half of all requests received by Global Talk are now handled automatically. This is facilitated by the Tasnet system or an app created specifically for clients. Global Talk expects the proportion of automated requests to increase further. "We want the people on the phone to have conversations that add real value," he says.

More creative

There's nothing more annoying for a client than being put on hold for ages, then submitting the request and finally being told that there isn't an interpreter available. Our automatic matching platform Tasnet does the matching faster.

While the platform is faster, it isn't always able to come up with a solution. Sometimes, fortunately, the human brain is still more creative.

"If the match isn't made automatically through Tasnet, staff can still ensure in various ways that the client gets a suitable interpreter," Ersin explains. "They can successfully make the system smarter in a number of cases. For example, if the system makes a schedule based on geographical data that seems optimal, while in practice things could be different. This makes it possible to assist even more clients. Sometimes the required language is unavailable, but an alternative is. A second language that would also suffice. Examples where our Customer Service Specialists can still engineer a smart solution to serve the client."



Voicebot

The first step in automating the request process further consists of plans to introduce an interactive voice response (IVR) system in 2024. "Some customers who call us will then be presented with menu options and encouraged to submit their request to the computer. Based on the required language and duration, they will be put in touch with the right interpreter. People who want to can, of course, always speak to a staff member. Clients are free to choose. At a later stage, IVR will give way to a voicebot."

"The people who work here are loyal to the organisation and want nothing more than to cooperate with the client"

Ersin stresses that introducing automated interpreter requests is anything but a cost-cutting exercise. "During peak hours, the contact centre can receive as many as 500 calls an hour. We could never cater to such a high demand using human resources. What's more, it's less challenging for colleagues to only run operations and make the connections like operators used to do."

More enjoyable and effective

The shift from human to computer is therefore in the interests of clients and employees alike. "The people who work here are loyal to the organisation and want nothing more than to cooperate with the client. That's why we call them specialists. They're highly driven and have often been with Global Talk for a long time. Thanks to automation, they can focus on the more challenging client requests.

This enables them to focus more on answering all kinds of questions that are not directly related to the request for an interpreter. In short, greater automation enables us to work smarter instead of harder. The work becomes more enjoyable and effective."



Ersin Mangan



INTERPRETER INTERVIEW

"I recall a conversation that really saddened me. Two youngsters from Poland were stranded at a train station. They had been promised everything. In the Netherlands, they were supposed to get work and a place to stay. Once they arrived, however, nothing had been arranged. It was pouring with rain and freezing cold. They had

'Nowhere to go and no one to turn to.'

nowhere to go and no one to turn to. They couldn't just stay at the station. They had asked their parents to send money so they

could get back to Poland. And that's what they were waiting for. It took place in the city where I live, but there was still nothing I could do. I have to be professional, I'm an interpreter, I only do what my assignments entail. These youngsters were the same age as my children. I can't imagine how awful it would be if something like this happened to them if they went abroad."

Alina Kater

Polish interpreter

Manager Global Talk Belgium Stefan Verbist

“They’re available, they’re at our disposal and you can employ their services!”

Changing the Belgian mindset

Things are going well for Global Talk in Belgium. The number of interpreting requests quadrupled in 2023 and the client base doubled. This means the organisation’s Belgian branch has grown substantially compared to 2022. “A great achievement, but we’re capable of helping even more people and organisations with our services,” says Manager Stefan Verbist.



Stefan Verbist

“Our most important achievement was changing the Belgian mindset. People there were used to services provided by public interpreting organisations. As a result, most potential clients had preconceived ideas about our services. They believed that interpreters were not available in a number of language combinations

and that availability couldn’t be guaranteed at short notice. But we do offer those services.”

“Global Talk’s story in Belgium sounded like a fairy tale: interpreters are always available, no reservation is needed, they are available at short notice and 24/7. Many potential clients

didn’t believe this was true.” Verbist shared Global Talk’s story, as he put it, “wherever people were willing to listen” and numerous marketing campaigns were launched.

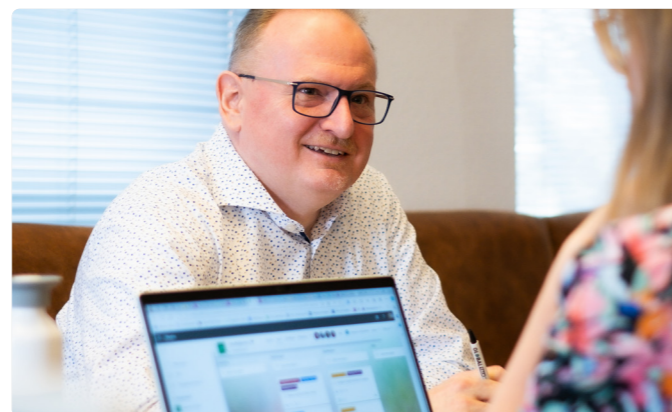
“Slowly but surely, we’re seeing a change. Greater numbers of clients are now engaging interpreters for language combinations they never booked before.”

‘Global Talk’s story in Belgium sounded like a fairy tale.’

Growth in different sectors

There’s been strong growth within the healthcare and education sectors. Global Talk succeeded in securing contracts with three quarters of the Flemish hospital sector. What’s more, numerous psychiatric hospitals and mental healthcare centres have also joined forces with Global Talk.

In the years ahead, Verbist expects a significant increase in the number of requests from the mental healthcare sector. “Whereas regular hospitals have been treating non-Dutch-speaking patients for some time, mental healthcare is now also catering to patients from diverse backgrounds. Even patients who speak Dutch perfectly may revert to their mother tongue in some serious situations, including states of psychosis. Language assistance then becomes a necessity.”



In the education sector, Global Talk is largely active at primary and secondary schools. “Interpreters are usually engaged when interacting with parents, during regular discussions or when children need extra care or supervision.” Cities and municipalities are a relatively new sector, where growth is expected in the future as well. “Along with the Netherlands as a whole, these authorities are also tasked with distributing and integrating newcomers. Cities also serve as the contact point for all kinds of organisations working with newcomers. Examples here include education, youth care and combatting poverty.”

Flemish interpreters

Along with growing numbers of requests and clients, there’s another important aspect: recruiting Flemish interpreters. We’ve succeeded in doubling our Belgian base. “We attach great importance to having access to as many qualified, proficient interpreters as possible. We’re a relatively new player in Belgium, so we’ve also had to invest in introducing ourselves to interpreters. We’ve booked moderate success and will continue to build on this base in 2024,” says Verbist.

Belgian interpreters who join Global Talk also benefit from being employed by some Dutch clients. This significantly increases the number of potential assignments for them. A win-win situation.



“For now, client numbers are relatively low in Flanders. This makes it more attractive for Belgian interpreters to work for us, because they can also take on some of the Dutch assignments.”

Verbist is happy with the steadily growing base of interpreters and has outlined an important mission for 2024. “We have access to a considerable number of excellent, community interpreters in Belgium. Unfortunately, in my opinion, they are not sufficiently utilised. My mission is to make Belgium aware of their added value. After all, they make all the difference in people’s lives every day. Our message is that they’re available, they’re at our disposal and you can employ their services!”

About Global Talk België

Global Talk Belgium was founded in 2020. Our offices are located just east of Antwerp.

In broad terms, Global Talk Belgium targets the same market sectors in Flanders as Global Talk does in the Netherlands: healthcare and welfare, youth assistance, the mental health sector, education and the asylum chain. Via an app (Tasnet) or by phone, clients are matched with one of Global Talk’s two thousand interpreters.



Global Talk Impact

Global Talk’s socially-oriented initiative Global Talk Impact enables us to selflessly deploy our expertise and support for socially engaging projects geared to breaking down and resolving language and cultural barriers. Over the past year, Global Talk Impact supported several ground-breaking projects. We set up our own children’s book campaign, participated in the Nacht van de Vluchteling (Night of the Refugee) initiative and committed to both the Kletsmaatjes (Chat buddies) project and the VoorleesExpress (Reading Aloud Express).



Children’s book campaign

The children’s book campaign is the most eye-catching project, intended to support language development among children who speak foreign languages. Reading and being read to is the best way for children to expand their Dutch vocabulary and develop a sense of language. For many of these children, reading and being read to cannot always be taken for granted. Heartened by this initiative, we will therefore be distributing book boxes in 2024 to institutions frequented by numerous non-Dutch-speaking children. Each box contains eight picture books that all children will be able to understand in their own language. The books come with a special QR code. Scanning this code will guide them to the translation and the book will be read to them in their own language. This project aims to inspire thousands of children to start reading.



BoekStart partnership

In addition to the children’s book campaign, we also collected and presented a huge number of foreign-language children’s books to the West-Achterhoek Library last year. The BoekStart programme hopes to stimulate non-Dutch-speaking children to start reading. Reading or being read to contributes strongly towards language development in both their own language and in Dutch. We are very happy to be able to contribute.

Nacht van de vluchteling

Global Talk Impact joined 5,500 walkers who set off to walk twenty kilometres for charity during the Nacht van de Vluchteling (Night of Refugees), an initiative launched by Stichting Vluchteling (the Refugee Foundation) to raise money and draw attention to the plight of displaced people. The proceeds are distributed annually to a variety of aid projects. The 2023 walk raised no less than 1.3 million euros, enabling more than 100,000 people in countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia and Syria to receive emergency aid.



We applaud social engagement at Global Talk. We therefore stimulate our colleagues to participate in volunteering projects. That’s why Global Talk offers its employees an opportunity to do volunteer work for a few hours during work time within the scope of the VoorleesExpress or Kletsmaatjes initiatives. We are making a joint effort to break down and resolve language and cultural barriers.

Global Talk sets its sights on leading Europe

Global Top 50

Global Talk is growing fast. It is also well on its way to becoming Europe’s largest interpreting agency. This is borne out by the Nimdzi Interpreting Index published in 2023. The index ranks among the world’s 34 biggest interpreting agencies. Global Talk rose to 9th place worldwide and currently occupies 2nd place in Europe.

The list is compiled by Nimdzi Insights, an international research agency for language services. Additionally, the agency ranks the world’s 100 largest Language Service Providers (LSPs) in The Nimdzi 100 based on annual revenue. Here too, Global Talk’s position rose slightly. It currently occupies 46th position.

Slator and CSA Research

Global Talk also achieved excellent rankings in the Slator Language Service Provider Index (LSPI) and the annual worldwide survey conducted by CSA Research.

In the Slator index, Global Talk ranks 31st out of 300 LSPs. CSA Research’s most recent international survey ranks Global Talk 29th in the world.

CEO Astrid van Rossum is thrilled with these results. “These rankings show that we’re definitely on the right track, providing worthy recognition for the work we do and level of commitment shown by all our interpreters and colleagues at Global Talk. We’re still aiming to become Europe’s #1 interpreting service provider. We’re well on our way, but we’re not there yet. We’re therefore going to continue pursuing our ambition unabatedly in the year ahead.”



Our certifications

At Global Talk, we're proud of what we do and the quality we deliver. Our ISO certifications are a logical consequence of this.

ISO certification proves our ability to continuously evaluate and improve processes, products and services, and that we fully comply with the applicable international standards. Besides the fact that more and more clients and suppliers require ISO certification, such as in tendering processes, ISO certification provides tools for constantly refining business processes.

We work with a management system designed and implemented in accordance with ISO 9001, 27001, 27701 and 18841. Based on risk inventories, privacy impact analyses, internal project evaluations, customer satisfaction analyses and internal audits, among other things, we work continuously to improve our processes. In 2023, we passed the recertification process for all our ISO certifications. These audits are carried out annually by an external auditor.



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Understanding
is everything

