

## 231009 Belgium and The Netherlands –

The minimum fees for interpretation and translation work are set by Ministerial Decree and are indexed annually.

### **BBVT UPTIJ - Professional Association of Sworn Translators and Interpreters**

In Belgium, rates for interpreters (and translators) in criminal cases were indexed by 11.11% in January 2023. With €58.63 for an hour (given the rate structure, it is more accurate to speak of €0.9771/minute), we are still far below truly viable rates, but the annual indexation provided for in our legislation ensures that purchasing power remains relatively stable. We hope that this will also happen annually for colleagues in the Netherlands from 2024 onwards.

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Increase minimum rate for sworn interpreters - effective 1 January 2024

In the November 2022 Government Gazette, it was already promised:

"In addition to the increase of the minimum rate on 1 January 2023, it was announced in the Parliamentary Letter of 22 June 2022 (Parliamentary Papers II 2021/22, 29 936, no. 65) that the minimum rate for sworn interpreters will be indexed annually from 2024.

This will be done in the same way as for Pro Justitia reporters. Currently, indexation is regulated in the contracts interpreters have with intermediaries and takes place at different times. With an annual indexation of the minimum rate, the indexation will be unified, thus eliminating differences in practice about the applicable minimum rate.

Various media reports indicate that this specific indexation figure for the past year is as much as 11%. This would increase the minimum rate from 55 to 61.05 euros per hour from next January 1. see: <https://lnkd.in/evYHbyzp>

That in itself is good news, although a flat rate of 85 euros per hour (indexed annually) for all levels of interpretation would be a better solution. This will put an end to the well-known 'race to the bottom' that has been in progress for interpreting services in the public domain since 2021. #interpreterfees

### [Dutch police interpreters dissatisfied with new translation agency | NL Times](#)

'Ewa, a Polish interpreter, agreed that Thebigword's rates were far too low. Once, while she was translating for a dangerous suspect, the man tried to intimidate her by talking about her children and saying he knew where she lived. "I think it's crazy that a foreign company is going to provide interpreting work here," Ewa said. "And they're never going to pay me more than 47.50 euros. I get too much shit for that."

Thebigword told De Volkskrant it would be happy to discuss the issues "in the future" after investigating the situation further. Meanwhile, Justice Minister Dilan Yeşilgöz raised the minimum rate for interpreters to 55 euros per hour, which is set to take effect next year. Many interpreters say this is still not enough.'

### [Brussels interpreters unionise for fair pay, better working conditions – EURACTIV.com](#)

27 Jan 2023

**Freelance interpreters in Belgium are organising to demand fair pay and improved working conditions against language service providers, building on the new European Commission's**

### **guidelines, which allow individual self-employed workers to organise and negotiate collectively.**

Most of the work of self-employed interpreters goes through language service providers (LSP) or companies specialising in conference solutions, which generally fix prices for interpretation services for their clients.

“It is very rare that you have a direct contract between the self-employed and the customer and in most cases, there is an intermediary,” Martin Willems, from CSC United Freelancers, told EURACTIV.

According to Willems, unionising is critical to balance out the varying degrees of economic strength and bargaining power between self-employed interpreters and intermediaries.

“If the turnover of the other party is more than €2 million, then we can say that there is a disproportion in turnover and it’s possible to have collective agreements on working conditions,” he explained.

### **EU guidelines**

Last September, the Commission published [new guidelines to allow collective bargaining for solo self-employed people](#), defined as “self-employed people who do not employ any workers”.

EU competition rules were previously preventing self-employed workers from organising as they were considered undertakings like other companies. This meant they were not in a position to push for better working conditions collectively as this would have been considered a colluding, anti-competitive behaviour.

The new guidelines, however, set out new rules for freelancers “in a situation comparable to workers”.

The Commission defined them as solo self-employed people who are economically dependent on a single counterparty, working side-by-side with normal employees under the direction of a company, or working through digital labour platforms. These criteria apply to the majority of interpreters working in Belgium.

According to Willems, the guidelines are helping to put pressure on language service providers.

“Now we can show official documents of the Commission saying ‘it’s a right, but at the same time it’s also compatible with competition rules,’” he said, adding that many intermediaries reacted with surprise to the interpreters’ collective action.

Peter Van Den Steene, CEO of interpreting service Presence, said “we take interpreters’ demands extremely seriously and at the moment, we are working with the official representative bodies to see how we can address this issue together” but declined additional comments on the ongoing negotiations.

### **Interpreters’ demands**

The interpreters are pushing for fairer fees for their work and respect of due dates for their invoices.

“Sometimes, if you don’t put [the due date] in writing, you have companies paying three months later,” Willems explained.

On top of this, as self-employed workers, interpreters’ salaries are not adjusted to inflation.

“Most of the interpreters have framework contracts with a fixed price but without a mechanism to adapt to the evolution of the prices,” Willems said, adding that “an automatic adaptation to the evolution of prices is a central point now to discuss with intermediaries.” Christophe da Silva, who works for interpreting provider Mister Light, said the company supports the demand for fair remuneration and has already increased the rates by up to 10% compared to the basic price at the end of last year.

“We know this is probably not enough but this is a first step,” he said. However, he added that it was not always possible to negotiate better working conditions as “clients do not always agree with all these conditions or do not accept the situation.”

Interpreters are also pushing for the right to have good technical conditions for interpretation, especially when it comes to remote interpreting.

Last year, EU interpreters staged a strike complaining about the poor sound quality conditions in which they needed to work when interpreting remotely.

*[Edited by János Allenbach-Ammann and Zoran Radosavljevic]*