



WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF



EUROPEAN UNION OF THE DEAF

Submission to the Day of General Discussion on the right to education for persons with disabilities

Summary

Education is very rarely provided in sign language. Although several countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the situation has not improved. In fact, educational opportunities in sign language have gotten worse in some countries in recent years. The [World Federation of the Deaf](#) (WFD) and the [European Union of the Deaf](#) (EUD) have grave concerns about the lack of possibilities for deaf children to receive qualified education in sign language. In the upcoming general comment on Article 24 of the CRPD, both organisations recommend the Committee to clarify what sign language learning environment means and urge national governments to collaborate with national associations of the deaf to implement changes.

Introduction

WFD and EUD are pleased to be granted the opportunity to contribute our views towards the forthcoming general comment on Article 24 of the CRPD. WFD works towards the global achievement of human rights for all deaf people. In realising this, the WFD develops its activities towards the goal of equalisation of opportunities and full participation in society by deaf individuals in every country and region. 134 national associations of the deaf from all continents are ordinary members of the WFD. EUD promotes, advances and protects the rights of and opportunities for deaf people in the European Union. Through its 31 member organisations, EUD works towards achieving equality for deaf people in all areas of life enabling them to become full citizens in their own right. WFD and EUD have [a co-operation agreement](#) to jointly promote human rights of deaf people. Respectively, both organisations have produced documents on how deaf education should be implemented, namely [the WFD Policy on Education Rights for Deaf Children](#) and [the EUD Education Position Paper](#). Sign language is considered as a fully operating language with its own syntax, morphology and structure. It is capable of functioning as a language of communication and instruction in all settings from educational to political. This fact has been accepted and enacted into Article 2 of the CRPD, which defines sign languages as equal to spoken languages. Another key point to note is that sign language is neither international nor related to spoken language and each country has its own sign language(s).

For this submission the WFD has included information from 46 countries¹, received via e-mail and video messages, about the respective situation of deaf education at national and regional levels.

Deaf children must have access to quality education on an equal basis with others. Accessibility is primarily ensured through national sign language(s), and when appropriate, complemented with written and spoken language(s). Education systems must cater to individual needs of each deaf child and take into account holistic aspects such as educational, social and emotional. Having access to quality and equity education has a pivotal

¹ Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, Chile, Congo, Croatia, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Egypt, Finland, France, Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, Haiti, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Jordan, Latvia, Liberia, Mauritania, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Palestine, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Seychelles, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Tunisia, Uganda, UK, USA and Zimbabwe.

impact on the employment situation. Likewise, access to education in sign language can ensure deaf people successfully transitioning into the labour market at a later stage. As such, education is an essential investment for anyone.² If families of deaf children are not willing to learn sign language, the children might have fewer educational opportunities and outcomes after being acquired to sign language only after the age of critical learning period.³

The right of deaf children to receive education in a national sign language was already addressed in 1994 when [the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education](#) (paragraph 21 in page 18) was adopted. Similarly, it was stipulated in two articles of the CRPD; Article 24.3(b) of the CRPD ensures the right to learn sign language and promotes linguistic identity of the deaf community; Article 24.4 of the CRPD requires teachers of deaf children to be qualified in sign language. Notwithstanding these framework, there are conflicting realities of perpetual exclusion and barriers faced by deaf people in several countries. Therefore it is paramount for the WFD and EUD to highlight the current situation and recommend how education should be provided to deaf children in sign language.

Even though situations vary significantly between countries, the WFD and the EUD are concerned about the lack of implementation of the CRPD Article 24 and the lack of opportunities for deaf leaders and deaf people to have a say in educational options. [The WFD Deaf People and Human Rights Report](#) (p. 29-30) revealed that education for most deaf people is provided in oral or total communication (simultaneous use of speech and signs) instead of a sign language approach. Since the report was launched in 2009, the situation has not improved. This was clearly noted in the information received from national deaf communities for this submission.

The lack of comprehensive data on deaf education is a problem. The available information is confined only to quantitative data such as statistics on the number of schools for the deaf and enrolment number of deaf students in schools. Qualitative data would be important as it reflects the success of educational approaches and learning outcomes. In view of this scarcity of information, the available data should then be carefully evaluated to avoid painting a too positive picture of the situation.⁴

Legislative and administrative issues

Several Deaf Communities in different parts of the world have reported on the lack of legislation and policy framework on deaf education. Commonly, countries that have existing legislation tend to have a medical approach on disability and use degrading terminology like deaf-mute, such as in the case of Mauritanian disability legislation⁵. Chilean legislation does not oblige the use of Chilean Sign Language in education settings. Even though legislation on the right to education in sign language might be in place, families of deaf children need to take extra effort to ensure the realisation. For instance Austrian and Finnish families have to seek kindergarten education in sign language as it is scarcely available nationwide.⁶

The implementation of legislation ensuring the right to education in sign language also needs improvement. For instance, in Finland teachers' sign language skills vary tremendously.⁷ Education in British Sign Language is possible to choose in principle but not in practise because schools for the deaf have been closed in the United Kingdom leading to a situation where it is not possible to have education in sign language environment.⁸ In the USA deaf children have the right to professional sign language interpretation in education settings but there

² <http://wfdeaf.org/databank/policies/education-rights-for-deaf-children> and http://eud.eu/Education_Position_Paper-i-559.html

³ Scoping support for New Zealand Sign Language users accessing the Curriculum. Part II: A New Zealand Overview. p. 7.

⁴ <http://www.wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Deaf-People-and-Human-Rights-Report.pdf> p. 31.

⁵ Ordonnance No 2006-043 relative à la promotion et la protection des personnes handicapées. Article 44.

⁶ Information for the World Federation of the Deaf on deaf education in Austria. Austrian Association of the Deaf. p. 2 and Deaf Education in Finland, Finnish Association of the Deaf. p. 6-7.

⁷ Deaf Education in Finland. Finnish Association of the Deaf. p. 1 and 3.

⁸ Legal Status for BSL and ISL. British Deaf Association. p. 30.

are cases where unqualified sign language interpreters have been used.⁹ French legislation ensures the right to choose between bilingual (French Sign Language and French) and oral French education¹⁰ but in practice bilingual education is available only in few schools and comprehensive information about educational choices are not offered to parents.

The lack of official recognition of national sign languages affects educational opportunities of deaf people. In Ethiopia, deaf people have fewer educational opportunities because Ethiopian Sign Language is not recognised by the government and the right to education in that language is not secured. Teachers in Indonesia use the lack of official status of Indonesian Sign Language as an excuse for not using sign language in schools. The government of Serbia does not provide sign language interpretation in universities due to the lack of official status of Serbian Sign Language.

A high majority of national governments do not have expertise on deaf education and it is extremely rare that they would employ a deaf person as an educational expert. The current system of educating deaf people has not been developed based on needs, wishes and opinions of deaf people. National associations of the deaf are sometimes even excluded when governments take action regarding deaf education. For instance, [the Argentinean government has told the deaf community that hearing education professionals know about deaf education needs better than the deaf community does](#). Including deaf professionals in decision-making process regarding deaf education is very important to ensure a sustainable system¹¹. Requests and motions of national deaf associations regarding deaf education have been ignored by governments in other countries.

Families of deaf children do not necessarily have the possibility to choose between schooling options for their children. In Finland, municipalities have the say due to their responsibility to finance child's schooling.¹² For instance, the wish to attend a deaf school in another municipal might be denied and as a result, a child can be placed in a regular school with sign language interpreter service.

Inclusive learning environment for deaf students

The concept of inclusion of Article 24 of the CRPD is often misunderstood by governments particularly in approaching deaf education.¹³ The medical view rather than the social view is still dominant in several countries because deaf students are expected to adapt to a regular school without access to a sign language environment instead of having a school to meet her or his needs. Deaf schools are viewed as the last and undesirable option where deaf students are sent after they fail to success in regular schools without sign language environments. As an illustration of the medical view blaming rather a student than an environment is the risk of deaf students being even physically punished by teachers if they cannot understand oral education.

The medical view on educating deaf children is dominant and the education system has not adopted social view on disability.¹⁴ Several governments have closed deaf schools down and placed deaf students in regular schools without consulting national associations of the deaf. Under those circumstances governments have not ensured that these deaf students would receive education in sign language environment. Information received from several countries reflected a situation where governments intended to take a low cost approach by assimilating deaf students in regular schools regardless of students' needs and outcomes¹⁵. Such a method is not in the line with Article 24 of the CRPD because it does not take sign language learning environment or promotion of linguistic identity of deaf people into account. Moreover, governments do usually not require advanced or even any sign language skills from teachers of deaf children, which is in conflict with Article 24 of the CRPD. Consultation with the deaf community before making any change in education is important to

⁹ Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. p. 2-3.

¹⁰ France. p. 1.

¹¹ See e.g. [http://www.sjis.net/documentos/documentacion/INFLenguaSignos\(online\).pdf](http://www.sjis.net/documentos/documentacion/INFLenguaSignos(online).pdf) p. 50.

¹² Deaf Education in Finland. Finnish Association of the Deaf. p. 1.

¹³ <http://wfdeaf.org/databank/policies/education-rights-for-deaf-children>

¹⁴ See e.g. Deaf Education in Finland. Finnish Association of the Deaf. p. 1.

¹⁵ See e.g. Loi no 007/PR207 Portant Protection des Personnes Handicapées, Republique du Tchad, Article 14, Deaf Association of Guyana. p. 1. (appendices) and <https://vimeo.com/120681750>

take experience and opinion of the deaf into account, and to ensure the implementation of Article 24 of the CRPD.¹⁶

Sign language learning environment that would promote academic and social development of deaf students is not a reality in these days in many countries. The Canadian Association of the Deaf sees schools for the deaf as the best option where deaf students are not considered “different” and they can communicate with all staff members and other students without barrier. According to the association, regular schools have barriers for deaf students because not all people in these schools know sign language proficiently. Deaf students do not have chance to participate in learning environment equally, comfortably and naturally nor access to deaf culture and sign language environment if they are placed in regular schools with e.g. one other deaf student without having any deaf adult role model.¹⁷ The Finnish Association of the Deaf shares same view with the Canadian Association of the Deaf as Finnish deaf students are placed in several schools and only three schools currently have more than five deaf or signing students. The Finnish Association of the Deaf is worried about linguistic, social and cultural development of deaf students in schools that have less than five deaf students.¹⁸ Having other deaf students and deaf peers in addition to adult deaf role models is important to facilitate academic and social skills.¹⁹

The use of sign language by teachers and students in all communication in a school would support the development of academic and social skills of deaf students.²⁰ The number of schools providing environment with access to sign language and deaf culture as per Article 24 of the CRPD has slowly been rising in some countries.²¹ Instead of placing deaf children with children who do not use sign language in same classroom it would be better to organise separate classes and schools for children who use sign language. The disadvantage of having students with different needs mixed is the use of different languages and communication methods that do not benefit deaf children who are native sign language users that affects the provision of tuition and learning outcomes.²² The British Deaf Association is calling for changing the whole education system to match needs of deaf students based on access to teachers who are deaf, British Sign Language and positive deaf role models.²³

WFD stresses the importance of having a totally supportive, signing and student-centred environment for a deaf student. Therefore mainstreaming a deaf student in a local regular school might not be the best option, if a sign language environment is not available. Under such circumstances a deaf student is physically present but may be mentally and socially absent due to facing barriers in communicating directly with peers and staff members in sign language.²⁴ A school offering sign language education environment should be considered an option even though it might not be located near deaf student’s home.

Oral approach in education may lead to illiteracy

Families of deaf children are **rarely** given the opportunity to learn a sign language. Therefore deaf children may learn sign language only at school where they start without having acquired any signed, written or spoken language.²⁵ Such late exposure to sign language may have serious impact on educational possibilities and outcomes or even lead to an identity crisis at later age. Unfortunately several countries reported on the continuous use of oral methods in deaf schools where the use of sign language is non-existent, minimal, unqualified or prohibited. The oral method is sometimes explained as a wish of deaf student’s parents who would like their child to be able to speak, reflecting a medical approach on disability. There are research studies

¹⁶ Edukacja głuchych. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich. 2014. p. 146.

¹⁷ <http://www.cad.ca/education.php>

¹⁸ Deaf Education in Finland. Finnish Association of the Deaf. p. 2.

¹⁹ Edukacja głuchych. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich. 2014. p. 143.

²⁰ <http://www.wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Deaf-People-and-Human-Rights-Report.pdf> p. 28.

²¹ See e.g. [http://www.sjis.net/documentos/documentacion/INFLenguaSignos\(online\).pdf](http://www.sjis.net/documentos/documentacion/INFLenguaSignos(online).pdf) p. 46.

²² Deaf Education in Finland. Finnish Association of the Deaf. p. 8.

²³ Legal Status for BSL and ISL. British Deaf Association. p. 30.

²⁴ <http://wfdeaf.org/databank/policies/education-rights-for-deaf-children>

²⁵ See e.g. [http://www.sjis.net/documentos/documentacion/INFLenguaSignos\(online\).pdf](http://www.sjis.net/documentos/documentacion/INFLenguaSignos(online).pdf) p. 45.

that prove that the use of sign language does not hinder the learning of a spoken language²⁶. By contrast, isolation from sign language environment during school time can cause long-term psychological problems.²⁷ Financial and political interests of decision-makers to save costs and to assimilate deaf children in regular schools may lead to limited information about educational options being provided to parents of deaf children.²⁸

Sufficient, neutral and comprehensive information about language choices and educational opportunities are not provided to families of deaf children. In the worst scenario families are ashamed of their deaf child and keep her or him hidden all her or his life without giving a chance to go to school.²⁹ In Gambia, parents of deaf children often think that educating their children is a waste of resources due to the mistaken assumption of deaf people not being able to contribute to society.³⁰ Many families do not learn sign language due to either negative attitudes or governments not providing sign language lessons. Because families are not aware of the positive aspects of using and learning sign language they do not consider sign language an option. Instead, many families regard learning sign language as a last choice, should a deaf child not learn to communicate using speech. When deaf children feel being treated inferiorly compared to their hearing siblings, they might not have confidence and motivation in education.³¹ The right of deaf child to sign language is not being sufficiently implemented e.g. in Finland where parents of deaf children have even been pressured not to learn sign language and the state-funded sign language courses provided to families is nowadays considered rather as a temporary solution until deaf children acquire speech skills than being valued as the child's first language³². Even if family is supportive to a deaf student, they might not know how to advocate for student's rights if she or he faces discrimination or other inappropriate attitude or behaviour in educational setting. Therefore governments need to address more support to families of deaf children through the provision of state-funded sign language classes and awareness-raising on deaf issues and human rights starting as early as possible.

Most learning material is not made deaf-friendly and teaching methodology does not necessarily develop literacy skills of deaf people. Almost all countries reported on high number of illiteracy among their deaf population due to inaccessible and unsuitable education system. For instance in Mongolia teachers of the deaf do not use sign language because the official education policy uses an oral education approach.³³ However, oral education results in limited linguistic and cognitive competence that often becomes a barrier for deaf people in pursuing higher education and seeking employment.³⁴ Instead of changing approach on educating deaf people, schools in e.g. Egypt and Argentina have given certificates to illiterate deaf students for completing education who later face problems such as unemployment.³⁵ Administrative bodies have been interested rather in enrolment and certificate numbers of deaf students instead of quality of education.

Not many deaf people complete schooling for various reasons. Education systems are usually not developed based on the needs of deaf students, which make it very challenging for deaf people to absorb education particularly when they face communication barriers due to oral method being used in schools or poor sign

²⁶ See e.g. Cramér-Wolrath, E. (2013). Signs of Acquiring Bimodal Bilingualism Differently. A Longitudinal Case Study of Mediating a Deaf and a Hearing Twin in a Deaf Family. Stockholms universitet, Specialpedagogiska institutionen and Schönström, K. (2010). Tvåspråkighet hos döva skolelever – processbarhet i svenska och narrativ struktur i svenska och svenskt teckenspråk (doktorsavhandling). Stockholms universitet, Institutionen för lingvistik.

²⁷ See e.g. Deaf Education in Zimbabwe. Educational Experiences of Deaf Adults in Harare. Deaf Zimbabwe Trust. 2014. P. 5-6, 9-11. Edukacja głuchych. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich. 2014. p. 142,

[http://www.siiis.net/documentos/documentacion/INFLenguaSignos\(online\).pdf](http://www.siiis.net/documentos/documentacion/INFLenguaSignos(online).pdf) p. 43, <http://www.cad.ca/education.php> and <https://vimeo.com/120681750>

and <http://www.cad.ca/education.php>

²⁹ See e.g. Request of Information on Deaf Education. Center for Aid to People with Auditory Problems. p. 2.

³⁰ Gambia Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

³¹ See e.g. Deaf Education in Zimbabwe. Educational Experiences of Deaf Adults in Harare. Deaf Zimbabwe Trust. 2014. p. 5 and Deaf education in Ghana.

³² Deaf Education in Finland. Finnish Association of the Deaf. p. 5-6.

³³ Deaf education in Mongolia.

³⁴ See e.g. Deaf Education in Zimbabwe. Educational Experiences of Deaf Adults in Harare. Deaf Zimbabwe Trust. 2014. p. 7. Edukacja głuchych. Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich. 2014. p. 140 and 145-147.

³⁵ Deaf Education in Egypt and <https://vimeo.com/120680038>

language skills of teachers. Bad experience leads to loss of motivation. Dropout rates are high in e.g. Nepal and Tunisia among deaf students. Deaf people in Ghana tend to see education as a path to nowhere³⁶.

Various struggles experienced by deaf people in schools

Deaf students experience negative attitude and atmosphere at schools.³⁷ Even if legislation entitles the right to education in sign language, deaf students are discriminated and they experience linguistic and pedagogic barriers.³⁸ Lower expectations are often set for deaf students than hearing students.³⁹

Educational professionals, including teachers, do usually not approach deaf education in way that would be compliant with Article 24 of the CRPD. Deaf-friendly learning material reflecting sign language and deaf culture is scarcely available. Pedagogical and sign language skills of teachers are often poor and do not respect linguistic rights of deaf students. For instance in Austria sign language is a part of a curriculum of deaf students but the implementation is inexistent due to lack of will and resources of schools⁴⁰. Consequently, article 24 of the CRPD requiring proficiency of sign language and suitability of learning environment is not implemented in practise.

Because the number of deaf teachers is limited, most teachers are hearing of which some may have learned sign language. Their skills are often ranked poor due to unavailability of sign language training, monitoring or evaluation of sign language skills⁴¹. Teachers are not required to know sign language to teach deaf people in several countries⁴² while teachers who are deaf struggle for the right to exercise their profession due to attitudinal and administrative barriers.

Article 24.4 of the CRPD obliges governments to train and employ teachers with disabilities, which is not being implemented in several countries. In Austria, deaf people cannot study university program that would lead to the profession of kindergarten teacher⁴³. [Argentinean deaf people who have degree in education are employed as assistants to hearing teachers instead of being allowed to become teachers themselves](#). There is a license system in Nepal for all teachers of deaf that does not require any knowledge in Nepalese Sign Language. The system is made for hearing teachers and therefore it is difficult for teachers who are deaf to obtain the necessary license to practise the profession of teaching in Nepal.

It should be noted that university education remains inaccessible for deaf people in many countries due to poor educational background received during primary and secondary schooling, the lack of professional sign language interpreter service or its funding. Therefore it is not possible for deaf people to complete necessary degrees to become teachers as long as the education system is not built to become deaf-friendly and compliant with Article 24 of the CRPD.⁴⁴

³⁶ Deaf education in Ghana.

³⁷ See e.g. Deaf Education in Zimbabwe. Educational Experiences of Deaf Adults in Harare. Deaf Zimbabwe Trust. 2014. p. 9.

³⁸ See e.g. Information for the World Federation of the Deaf on deaf education in Austria. Austrian Association of the Deaf. p. 1 (appendix)

³⁹ <http://www.wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Deaf-People-and-Human-Rights-Report.pdf> p. 30.

⁴⁰ Information for the World Federation of the Deaf on deaf education in Austria. Austrian Association of the Deaf. p. 2.

⁴¹ See e.g. Deaf Association of Guyana. p.1.

⁴² See e.g. Information for the World Federation of the Deaf on deaf education in Austria. Austrian Association of the Deaf. p. 1 and 9 and Deaf education in Mongolia.

⁴³ Information for the World Federation of the Deaf on deaf education in Austria. Austrian Association of the Deaf. p. 2.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Deaf Education in Zimbabwe. Educational Experiences of Deaf Adults in Harare. Deaf Zimbabwe Trust. 2014. p. 8 and 10-11.

There are further challenges for deaf students who manage to study at university level. In the United Kingdom, deaf students have sometimes been asked to take care of booking professional sign language interpretation and are burdened particularly when last-minute changes occur in university schedules. In such cases classes may become inaccessible for deaf students if changes are not notified early enough to make it possible to book professional sign language interpretation.⁴⁵ While hearing students might want to participate in an exchange student program studying a semester or two in another country, deaf students do not necessarily have the equal opportunity to do so. In Belgium, prospective deaf exchange students need to arrange funding themselves for professional sign language interpretation in the other country.

Professional sign language interpretation as a part of accessibility

The use of professional sign language interpretation is one of possibilities to make communication barrier-free but should not be the only measure. If a deaf child is the only deaf in a school and communicates with everyone through professional sign language interpretation, the environment remains inaccessible. A deaf student should be able to communicate freely with all peers and staff members of a school instead of relying on sign language interpretation. A hearing professional sign language interpreter cannot be seen as a deaf role model for a deaf student. Moreover, there should be more than one deaf adult role model and one deaf peer in a school setting.

The definition of quality of professional sign language interpretation varies greatly even at the national level if regional/provincial/state administrative bodies regulate the qualifications for interpretation in educational settings.⁴⁶ Professional sign language interpretation may be provided during class times only while deaf students are isolated during break times due to facing communicational barriers with hearing students. Such a system does not support social development of deaf students that is equally important as academic development.⁴⁷ There have been cases where deaf students have been asked to interpret for other deaf students during lessons due to teacher's poor skills in sign language and certain students' good lip-reading and speech skills that can be considered as unpaid child labour.⁴⁸

The difference between roles of professional sign language interpreters and teachers of deaf may not be clear.⁴⁹ According to [the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters' Statement on the Role of Sign Language Interpreters](#) the job of a sign language interpreter is solely to interpret communication between deaf and hearing people without adding or reducing any information. However, interpreters might do so in educational setting to "help" deaf people, which is inappropriate. Some interpreters even correct deaf students' homework, which they are not supposed to do. The need for a dual degree for Argentinean sign language interpreters could be questioned as they must have a certificate in sign language interpretation and another certificate in education of the deaf to interpret in a school.⁵⁰

The United Kingdom has a system of offering education communication support worker to deaf students in mainstream settings but this does not provide full access to sign language environment and poor performance of education communication support worker has negative impact on deaf student's education outcomes and future possibilities.⁵¹ The use of unqualified sign language interpreters such as replacing interpreters by educational assistant without proficiency in sign language is customary in regular schools in Canada.⁵² All parties in school environment need to know the role of interpreter to make communication efficient. The use of teacher aides who are not proficient in sign language does not benefit deaf students.⁵³ In this regard it is not noted that professional sign language interpreters are trained to interpret and not to teach or take any other

⁴⁵ Legal Status for BSL and ISL. British Deaf Association. p. 33.

⁴⁶ Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. p. 2.

⁴⁷ <http://www.cad.ca/education.php>

⁴⁸ Legal Status for BSL and ISL. British Deaf Association. p. 30-32.

⁴⁹ See e.g. Deaf education in Ghana.

⁵⁰ Resolucion no 2946, Dirección de General Cultural y Educación, Buenos Aires La Provincia.

⁵¹ Legal Status for BSL and ISL. British Deaf Association. p. 30 and 32.

⁵² <http://www.cad.ca/education.php>

⁵³ Scoping support for New Zealand Sign Language users accessing the Curriculum. Part II: A New Zealand Overview. p. 15-16.

assignment. The role of school assistants/teacher aides/communication support workers/educational assistants may be confusing as they are sometimes interpreting even if they are unqualified.

National governments might not allocate adequate financial resources to ensure that a deaf student in a regular school has full access to sign language environment and necessary support service. In some countries, teacher aides or equivalent are employed to interpret for deaf students instead of hiring professional sign language interpreters with motive of saving costs.⁵⁴ Another measure to limit financial burden has been using unqualified sign language interpreters instead of qualified ones who are trained to work in particular setting. For instance, in the Flanders of Belgium, deaf students have the right to use sign language interpretation for 70% of their weekly school hours leaving the rest of the time being inaccessible expecting the deaf students to speak and lip-read⁵⁵. Some countries such as Ireland and Sweden provide sign language interpreter service in public schools but schools or students need to find funding for studying at private schools. Deaf people have to pay sign language interpreter service in many countries making university education inaccessible for the population that cannot afford such service. In some countries deaf students can request for sign language interpretation should teachers' sign language skills not be sufficient but administrative bodies usually have the final say when a request may be denied.

Most marginalised/disadvantaged groups

Children with disabilities, including deaf children, have lesser opportunities.⁵⁶ Deaf girls have fewer educational opportunities than deaf boys. In Uganda, many deaf girls do not go to school due to parental neglect. In Saudi Arabia, education may be paid for but students need to take care of transportation between home and school. Because deaf women are not allowed to drive, they need to use public transportation or hire a chauffeur. Those girls whose families cannot afford transportation miss educational opportunities.

Deaf people belonging to minorities or indigenous communities might have no access to education in their own language. Several deaf indigenous people in Guyana do not go to school.⁵⁷ Finnish-Swedish deaf people have access to education in their own sign language at only one school in Finland. There is no clear and permanent system in Finland for providing education in Finnish-Swedish Sign Language.⁵⁸

Inaccessible education system leads to poverty due to barriers in late life including employment.⁵⁹ Poverty might make it impossible for deaf children to go to school because they may have to work to make a living for their families to survive. There are struggles to cover salaries of teachers of the deaf and other running costs to provide education for the deaf⁶⁰. Several developing countries reported the lack of governmental funding to e.g. cover transportation for deaf students in rural areas to attend school. Moreover, deaf schools are often located in bigger cities. Therefore less deaf people from rural areas have educational opportunities particularly in sign language.

Educational opportunities are even worse in countries where deaf people are not viewed as ordinary people. Eritrea has not taken steps towards the ratification of the CRPD and the situation of deaf community there is very disadvantaged as deaf people have no human rights. Iraq has ratified the CRPD but the negative attitude towards deaf people affects their educational opportunities.

⁵⁴ Legal Status for BSL and ISL. British Deaf Association. p. 36.

⁵⁵ The number of 70% is already an improvement from previous situation where less interpretation time was allocated. See Press Release of FEVLADO.

⁵⁶ CRC/C/GC/9. Paragraph 1.

⁵⁷ Deaf Association of Guyana. p. 2.

⁵⁸ Deaf Education in Finland. Finnish Association of the Deaf. p. 1.

⁵⁹ Deaf education in Mongolia.

⁶⁰ See e.g. Palestine Union of the Deaf.

Countries in which deaf schools are run by foreign organisations face the risk of having national sign language replaced by foreign sign language. For instance, deaf schools in Mauritania provide tuition in Unified Arab Sign Language⁶¹ and Haitian deaf schools in American Sign Language⁶². For instance, the government of Guyana does not provide sign language training and this responsibility has been taken over by international organisations that may lead to dominance of a foreign sign language in the country.⁶³ Such actions have threatened the position and development of Haitian, Mauritanian and Guyana sign languages, and moreover are against [the WFD Statement on the Unification of Sign Languages](#) and [the WFD Statement on Unified Arab Sign Language](#). Similar unfortunate development has taken place e.g. in Cambodia (American Sign Language) and Papua New Guinea (Australian Sign Language). National governments should be obliged to preserve national sign languages and to provide education in these languages.

Recommendations from WFD and EUD

- Governments should adopt and modify legislation in accordance with Article 24 of the CRPD to ensure the right to education in national sign language(s) and environment promoting linguistic identity of the deaf community. Consultation with national association of the deaf and deaf community is vital in this step. Public resources need to be allocated to nationwide implementation.
- Official recognition of sign language according Article 21(e) may affect possibilities of deaf students to receive education in sign language. For this reason governments should be obliged to recognise national sign languages.
- Public authorities should provide neutral, sufficient and comprehensive information to families of deaf children on linguistic and educational options.
- Governments should be obliged to provide sign language training to families of deaf children because early language acquisition affects educational possibilities and outcomes.
- Sign language training should be obligatory for current and future teachers of deaf children. Training should be included in university programs and also provided in-house at schools. Periodic evaluation of sign language skills should be mandatory.
- Deaf educational professionals should be recruited particularly to teach deaf children.
- Resources need to be allocated to the development of deaf-friendly teaching and examination material, and methodology.
- Sign language interpreter training programs and the use of professional sign language interpretation in educational settings where appropriate should be funded by governments.
- Schools should ensure that there are several deaf peers and deaf adult role models for deaf children.
- National governments need to pay special attention to deaf girls, deaf people belonging to minorities or indigenous communities and deaf children living in poverty in order to provide education in sign language to all deaf children.
- Data collection should cover quantitative and qualitative information on education of deaf people.

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European Union of the Deaf

⁶¹ Ordonnance No 2006-043 relative à la promotion et la protection des personnes handicapées. Article 42.

⁶² Request of Information on Deaf Education. Center for Aid to People with Auditory Problems. p. 3 and 5-6.

⁶³ Deaf Association of Guyana. p. 1.