



WORLD FEDERATION  
OF THE DEAF

# Together, We Have Achieved Much



REPORT  
2019 - 2023

*The WFD team visited Windhoek, Namibia for its 129<sup>th</sup> Board meeting. During this visit, the WFD and Namibian National Association of the Deaf met with multiple government ministers, hosted a community workshop, and celebrated the International Week of Deaf People with students at the Windhoek area school for deaf learners.*

*The cover photo shows students at the school embracing each other as WFD President Dr Joseph J. Murray signs "support" in the background.*

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# Message from the President



Dr Joseph J. Murray

WFD President

Dear friends,

The past four years have seen major changes in the world. And the WFD has stepped up to meet these changes. We have worked tirelessly to secure full human rights for all deaf people. Our social media posts often contain the hashtag #DeafStrong. This hashtag illustrates how we can achieve so much- through the strength of our global diverse deaf communities, through the cultural connections realised in the use of our 200+ national sign languages, and through the collaborative work of our associative movement.

Our work has expanded in the past four years. We have expanded our influence in international fora, participating in 21 international conferences, organizing five Side Events at United Nations events, and developing two toolkits, three research reports, and 19 policy papers.

We are the most broad-reaching international uni-disability organization. Since 2019, we have increased our membership base from 119 to 135 countries, our largest membership ever. We have provided virtual and in-person trainings to 62 Ordinary Members in 64 countries on 6 continents, and launched our virtual training platform, the WFD Campus, to foster a new generation of deaf leaders around the world.

We met the challenge presented by Covid-19, shifting online, quickly meeting with all our national members, issuing 10 policy documents and statements with our partners, and working with the WHO and other institutions to ensure deaf people did not suffer an information pandemic. Over 100 countries provided some form of national sign language interpretation on public broadcasts, an unprecedented expansion of access during a time of global crisis.

Alongside this, our Ordinary Members, national associations of deaf people, were on the front lines in ensuring access through national sign languages to health and safety measures. The pandemic taught us that we are our strengths. We know what deaf people need during crises. The WFD has expanded our work to support our Ordinary Members during times of humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters.

During our 70th anniversary year, we hosted a webinar series, with 11 webinars on core human rights topics. With over half the presenters from the Global South, and 1/3rd from Africa, we achieved our goal of ensuring a diverse array of deaf people's expert knowledge informs our work. We also celebrated with in-person events in the city of our founding, Rome, Italy, and high-level events at the United Nations in Geneva.

Our anniversary, 23 September, is also the United Nations-recognised International Day of Sign Languages, which we have made a global celebration for all peoples in all countries. We have lit the world in Blue Lights for national sign languages, and Presidents and Prime Ministers have taken our Global Leader's Challenge and signed our annual themes in their national sign languages. These celebrations lead to awareness, and awareness leads to change.

In the past four years, the WFD has grown and achieved financial stability. Our budget has doubled since 2019, and we have invested this in our projects and services to members. Our staff has expanded from 2.5 to 7 core staff, with 5 joining us for shorter term projects throughout the years. And we have become a more representative organization, with over half of those who have worked for us in the past four years coming from the Global South.

I'm proud to say the WFD is the only organization of peoples with disabilities with 100% representation of persons with disabilities in both our Board and staff, all of whom are deaf. The philosophy of nothing about us, without us is embedded in our organization.

It has been a great honor to volunteer in the role of President these past four years. I have been able to advocate for deaf people's equality at the highest levels of governments and international institutions. I have been fortunate to work alongside dedicated people in our Board, our staff, and our member organisations and partners. I am continually inspired by my many meetings with deaf people in local deaf communities across the globe. From Amman to Havana, from Geneva to Bangkok, from Bogota to Kyiv, we all share a passion for a better world for all deaf people.

Together, we have achieved much!







Meeting with the Minister of Persons with Disabilities - Thailand - April 2022

“ Anywhere deaf people are, the WFD is as well. And deaf people are everywhere! The WFD has access to a global network of experts on deaf peoples lives, and we are expanding our global human rights portfolio with new partners and new ideas to meet current challenges. ”

# Global Impact

The WFD works on a global scale, with a wide range of partners, from the United Nations and its agencies to national governments, human rights organizations, and national and regional associations of deaf people.



We expanded to **135** Ordinary Members in the past four years



**91** Countries were supported by WFD national human rights advocacy work



**38**

Collaborations with international organisations, in which we worked together to advance equality for all deaf people



**64**

Countries around the world participated in our trainings and workshops



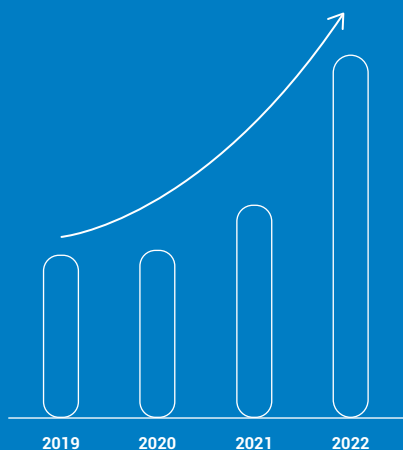
**19**

Policy documents issued on core human rights issues



**32**

Appearances at UN meetings and events by our team



**168%**

increase in funding in 4 years, providing us with more resources to support deaf communities around the world

# Timeline of Activities



## 2019

- 118th WFD Board Meeting in France
- 119th WFD Board Meeting in Georgia
- National Conference on Deaf Education in Quzhou, China
- 1st Regional Human Rights Training for the Southern African Region in Namibia
- WFD active at 12th Session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues, with Minority Rights Group International (MRGI)
- 1st WFD - IDA Bridge alumni workshop in Kathmandu, Nepal
- Baseline Data Collection Report on deaf education in Nepal
- Northeast Asia Conference on Disability in Seoul, Korea
- European Center on Minority Languages 25th Anniversary Conference

## 2020

- First visit by a WFD President to Cuba, meeting with the Regional Directors for Central America and Caribbean.
- COVID-19 pandemic, WFD meets with all Ordinary Members.
- Release of WFD-supported IDA Global Report on Inclusive Education
- UNESCO International Symposium on Inclusive Education, with Inclusion International
- Covid-19 and Inclusive Education seminar with World Bank
- Covid 19 webinar with Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)
- Webinar with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights- Guatemala
- Training with Discovering Deaf Worlds in East Asia
- United Nations 75th Anniversary Celebrations with United Nations Finland
- WFD Campus video recording in Stockholm, Sweden
- 120 - 122nd WFD Board Meetings shift online via video conferencing
- 1st year of The Nippon Foundation Sign Language Rights Project
- 13th UN Conference of State Parties Side Event

## 2021

- 70th WFD Anniversary year celebrated with monthly webinars
- Release of WHO World Report on Hearing with significant WFD input
- 123rd - 125th WFD Board Meetings via video conferencing.
- First post-pandemic in-person (126th) WFD Board Meeting in United Arab Emirates
- 2nd meeting of the Regional Secretariat of the Arab Region
- 14th Conference of State Parties online Side Event
- 2nd year of The Nippon Foundation Sign Language Rights Project
- First ever WFD Presentation at World Pride
- WFD/CBM Global Deaf women's access to health research project in Nigeria
- Training of Tunisian lawyers with MRGI
- WFD President elected Secretary-General of the IDA
- Launch of Deaf people's access to health during COVID-19 Pandemic Research project in Latin America and the Caribbean
- Global Covid-19 Toolkit released in multiple languages, with Danish Deaf Association



# 2019 - 2023



## 2022

- WFD mobilizes to support Ukrainian Society of the Deaf and Ukrainian deaf refugees.
- WFD participates in 2nd Global Disability Summit
- 127th WFD Board Meeting via video
- In-person 128th WFD Board Meeting in Thailand
- Three "Sign Language Rights" trainings in Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore
- 4th WFD Conference, hosted by National Association of the Deaf Thailand, shifts online due to Covid-19
- WFD meets with 10 governments and hosts Side Events at 15th UN Conference of State Parties
- 4th Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR Bali)
- National level training on inclusive education in Ghana and France
- Launch of WFD's online training platform, WFD Campus
- WFD participates in International Federation for the Hard of Hearing World's Congress in Budapest
- Resumption of in-person International Week of Deaf People events around the world, including at United Nations, Geneva.
- 129th WFD Board Meeting in Namibia
- WFD/CBM Global Report on deaf women in Nigeria
- IDA Report on Covid-19 in Latin America
- Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Meeting and Conference in Uzbekistan
- WHO Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities
- UNICEF LACRO-WFD first joint webinar on Access to Sign Languages for deaf children

## 2023

- 130th WFD Board Meeting in Colombia
- "Sign Language Rights" training in Malaysia & Laos
- Implementation of Deaf women's rights project and trainings in Southern Africa region
- Development of two new workshops and curricula for WFD Campus
- Sign Language Rights Toolkit launched
- 16th UN Conference of State Parties Side Event
- CBM Global-WFD project in Bolivia: Research on deaf women's access to health
- CBM Global-WFD project in Laos: Accessibility Go!
- WFD established nonprofit WFD-USA
- First joint position paper with Inclusion International and Downs Syndrome International
- 131st WFD Board Meeting in South Korea
- XX WFD General Assembly
- XIX World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf

# Covid 19: Meeting the Challenge

For more than two years, the global Covid-19 pandemic upended the world, with a dire impact on everyone, including deaf people. The WFD quickly mobilised to mitigate the potential lack of access to life-saving information and services in national sign languages.

When the pandemic first emerged, the WFD and its partner organisation, the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) quickly developed a statement on health access, being among the first global organisations to address the pandemic. This would be the first of what would be ten policy papers, letters and statements the WFD would release over the next two years.

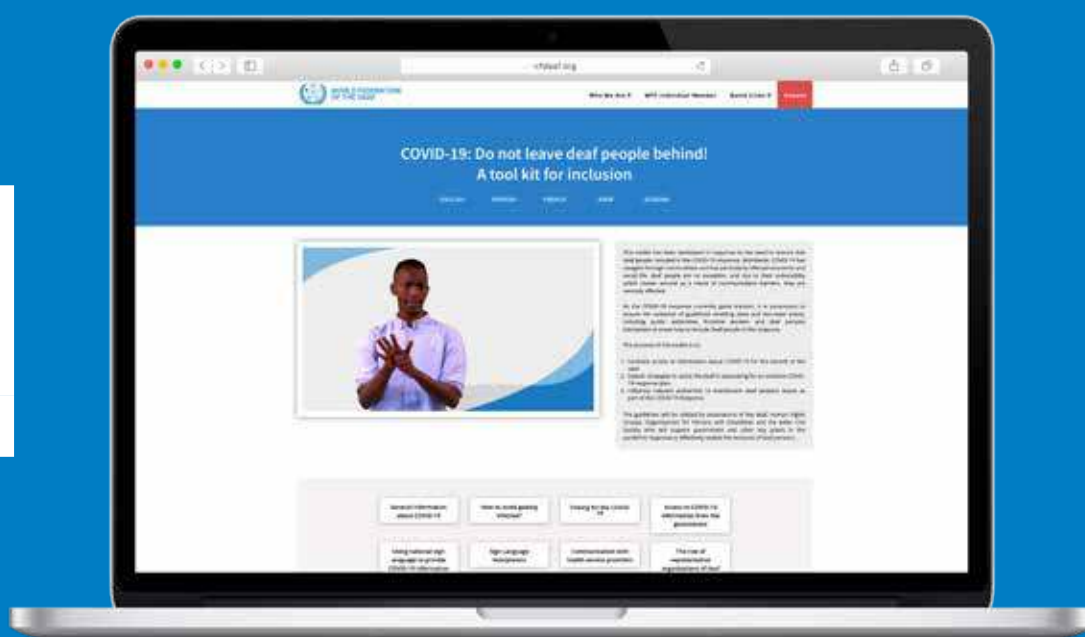
As the pandemic spread across the world, the WFD immediately set up video meetings with nearly all of its Ordinary Members on every continent. The aim of these meetings was to discover the situation of deaf people in vastly different areas of the world and to collect information on practices put in place to ensure the inclusion of deaf people in Covid-19 responses. Through these meetings, we recognised that deaf people were facing discrimination and marginalisation

when accessing services such as remote education, social assistance and health care services due to their lack of accessibility in national sign languages. This exchange of information and best practices assisted our members in their advocacy, and the WFD's fight for bringing the issues of equal access to information and health care access to the forefront of international pandemic responses.

These policy papers and statements have been instrumental in the advocacy work made by the WFD and deaf organisations around the globe. This advocacy has occurred at the global level through work with the United Nations and its agencies, as well as with other international organisations. These policies were promoted in numerous webinars with international agencies and partner organisations. The WFD also supported advocacy work at the national level, through supporting the work of our Ordinary Members in their countries. In addition, the WFD provided individual letters of support to nine Ordinary Members to underpin their advocacy work for the provision of professional and accredited national sign language interpreters during press conferences.



READ





Zoom meeting with the OMs of the Asia region - April 2020

As a result of this joint advocacy push, global and national Covid-19 policies progressively became more inclusive to deaf people. One milestone of the WFD's work in this period was our successful work to modify the WHO Disability Consideration during the Covid-19 Outbreak to include provisions obliging national governments to ensure live and recorded events and communications, including press conferences, were accessible via national sign languages. Indeed, data the WFD collected indicates over 100 countries have provided some form of access in their national sign languages at press conferences during the pandemic.

The pandemic taught us several lessons. Among these are that societies can be inclusive to a far greater degree than previously thought. The WFD aims to maintain these requirements in regard to future pandemics and disasters. Access is not an option, it is a necessity.

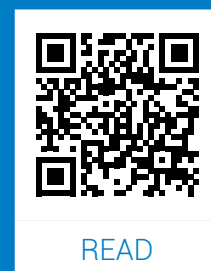
The pandemic has also brought into sharp relief the critical role national associations of deaf people have played in ensuring deaf people were not left behind. Our Ordinary Members developed and translated information into national sign languages, set up video chat helplines, ensured deaf people were given access to vaccines and food aid, and much more. The work of these associations must be incorporated into planning efforts for future pandemics or other natural and humanitarian disasters. With the support of the Danish Deaf Association, and working with seven Ordinary Members, the WFD released a toolkit on Covid-19 translated into five UN Languages and five variants of International Sign.

The WFD always stands ready to support our members and mobilise international networks in support of deaf people



**To provide further support to all relevant stakeholders at both the international and national levels, the WFD adopted several original statements and guidelines:**

- 1 WFD-WASLI Joint Statement on access to health services and interpreter occupational health during the Covid-19 containment efforts
- 2 WFD-WASLI Guidelines on access to information in national sign languages during emergency broadcasts
- 3 WFD Letter to the World Health Organisation about Covid-19 information
- 4 Examples of press Conferences on Covid-19 with national sign languages
- 5 WFD-WFDYS Statement on access to higher education for deaf students during the Covid-19 pandemic
- 6 WFD-WFDYS-Deaf Kidz International Joint-Statement on responding to the safeguarding protection needs of deaf children and youth during the Covid-19 pandemic
- 7 WFD Statement on equality & non-discrimination during the Global Covid-19 pandemic
- 8 WFD-WFDYS-IFHOH-IFHOHYP Statement on accessible communication for deaf and hard of hearing people during the Covid-19 pandemic
- 9 WFD Position Statement on educational rights for deaf learners during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond
- 10 WFD statement on the right of deaf people to equal treatment in the context of the global Covid-19 pandemic



# 70th Anniversary

The WFD commemorated its 70th anniversary in 2021. Founded in Rome, Italy on 23 September 1951, the WFD is the world's oldest continuously operated international organization of peoples with disabilities.

In 2021, the WFD celebrated its anniversary with both in-person and virtual celebrations.

The WFD created a unique 70th anniversary logo to commemorate our 70 years of work for national sign languages and deaf people's human rights.



This logo takes its inspiration from the Blue Ribbon, an idea developed by Deaf Studies scholar and activist Dr Paddy Ladd.

Launched at the XIII World's Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in 1999, the color blue in the ribbon is based on the WFD's official colors. The physical ribbon was then adopted by the WFD Youth Section and used at successive WFD Youth Camps during their closing ceremonies.

Adopting this ribbon as our virtual symbol of our 70th anniversary pays heed to our history and our future. The ribbon is a symbol of deaf communities' ongoing struggles against oppression and the centuries of attempts to abolish sign languages and eradicate deaf communities and cultures. The ribbon also symbolises the resilience and commitment of our communities and our allies to resist that oppression, and celebrates the flourishing of our communities and sign languages. The ribbon is also a celebration of our creation of spaces for sign languages and the many unique and diverse signing communities around the world today.

For more information on the Blue Ribbon, see Paddy Ladd (2003) *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, pp. 469-471

## Celebration in Rome, Italy

The WFD's Ordinary Member in Italy, Ente Nazionale Sordi, organised a celebration on 23 September 2021 in Rome, Italy. WFD President Dr Joseph Murray and the WFD Board Member Mr Florjan Robja were present. The day included a conference to commemorate the WFD's 70 years of work. It ended with a ceremony in honor of the first WFD President, Mr Vittorio Ieralla.



Celebration in Rome, Italy - Septembre 2021

## Celebration at the United Nations

The United Nations in Geneva hosted a virtual high-level panel during the International Day of Sign Languages, celebrating the WFD's 70th anniversary. Among the notable presenters were the Chair of the CRPD Committee, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and the Ambassador of Mexico to the United Nations and the Chair of the Human Rights Council Task Force on Accessibility.



# Webinar Series

As our gift to global deaf communities, the WFD hosted a 70th anniversary webinar series to highlight the work of deaf communities around the world and to strengthen our advocacy work through virtual means during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Presenters represented our diverse global deaf communities. The majority of our invited panelists (42 of 76) were from the Global South, with one-third being from the African continent. Over half were women or nonbinary. In this, the WFD aimed to showcase the broad capacities of deaf communities worldwide.

The webinars successfully brought together new and important views on key topics. 64,000 people from around the world watched our webinars during the first 24 hours of broadcast. The webinars are still freely available on our website.





# International **Week of Deaf People** International **Day of Sign Languages**

Every country on Earth has deaf people, and every country has one or more national sign languages, including languages used by different communities within the country. Each year, during the final week of September, the world unites to celebrate our diverse global deaf communities and our more than 200 different national sign languages. These celebrations encompass both the International Week of Deaf People (IWDP) and the International Day of Sign Languages (IDSL).

The International Week of Deaf People is an initiative of the WFD that was first launched in 1958 in Rome, Italy. It is celebrated annually by the global deaf communities in the last full week of September. As of 2021, the International Week of the Deaf was changed to the International Week of Deaf People (IWDP), following the decision of the XVI WFD General Assembly.

## **International Week of Deaf People Themes**

- 2022 Theme:** Building Inclusive Communities for All
- 2021 Theme:** Celebrating Thriving Deaf Communities
- 2020 Theme:** Reaffirming Deaf People's Human Rights
- 2019 Theme:** Sign Language Rights for All



We celebrate the deaf community's diversity and our different sign languages through the International Week of Deaf People and the International Day of Sign Languages. Both events continue to grow and develop, giving us more visibility. In 2017, the United Nations' General Assembly (UN GA) adopted Resolution A/RES/72/161, recognizing 23 September as the International Day of Sign Languages. In the Resolution, the UN GA stated the aim of this day is to "raise awareness of the importance of sign language in the full realization of the human rights of people who are deaf." As the Resolution states, this day reaffirms "the importance of preserving sign languages as part of linguistic and cultural diversity". The WFD aims to make

the IDSL a global celebration for all peoples, deaf and hearing, and the annual IDSL themes reflect this broad goal. To promote awareness, the WFD hosts annual IDSL day celebrations in collaboration with the United Nations in Geneva and UN Member States sponsoring these events. A beneficial feature of these annual events is the Sign Café hosted in collaboration with the Swiss Federation of the Deaf. During these events, UN Member States can interact with deaf people and learn sign languages.

## **International Day of Sign Languages Themes**

- 2022 Theme:** Sign Languages Unite Us!
- 2021 Theme:** We Sign for Human Rights!
- 2020 Theme:** Sign Languages are for Everyone!
- 2019 Theme:** Sign Language Rights for All!





## The WFD has expanded IDSL and IWDP celebrations

### 2019

- WFD produced seven videos to announce the daily themes of IWDP and IDSL, acquiring 23,000 views on Facebook.

### 2020

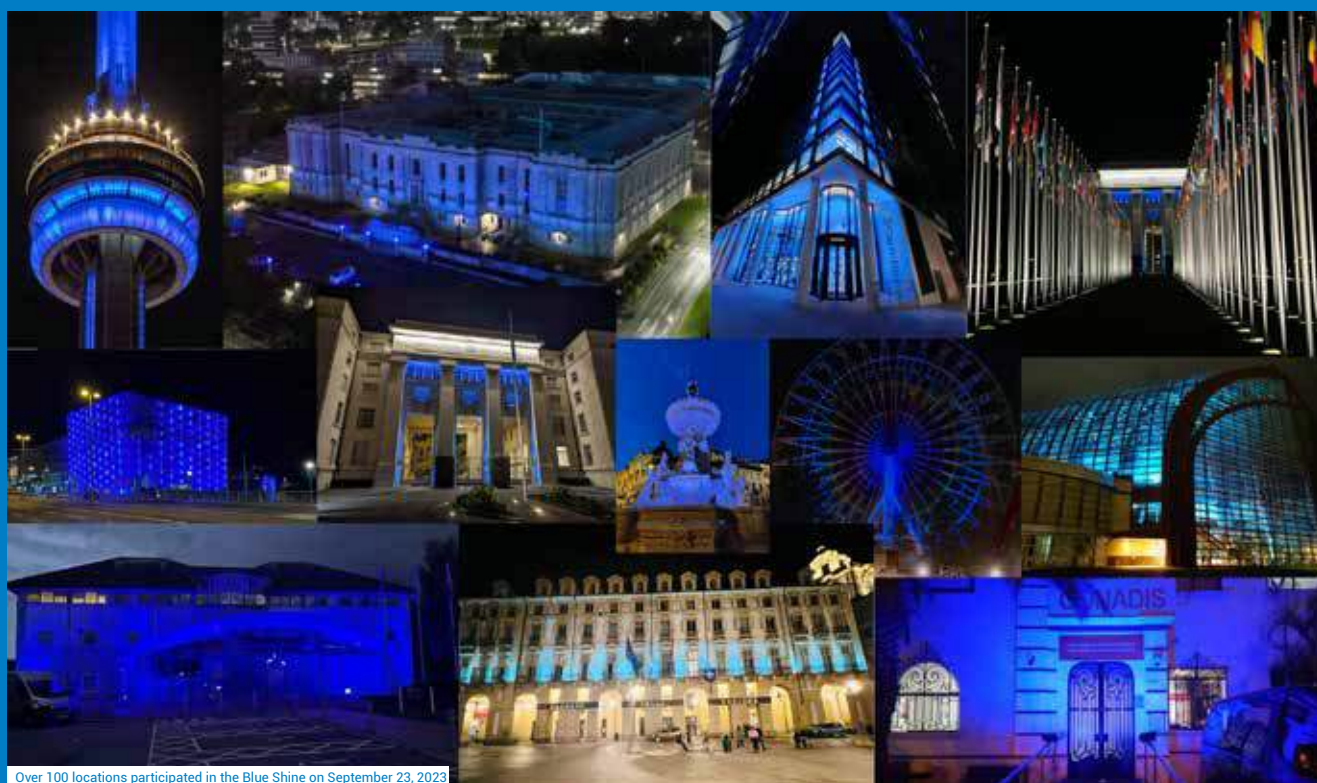
- WFD refreshed the graphic identity of IWDP and IDSL by launching new logos and visual materials.
- To make IDSL more visible, the Global Leader Challenge was launched. 80 leaders participated by signing "Sign Languages are for Everyone!"

### 2021

- We developed a toolkit with materials to enable our OM's to organise celebrations at national and local levels.
- On the occasion of IDSL, OM Italy invited the WFD for an in person celebration as it co-occurred with the 70th Anniversary of the WFD.
- We also hosted two webinars to celebrate the IWDP and IDSL. There were 11,000 views on Facebook.

### 2022

- We inaugurated our Shine a Blue Light on Sign Languages, and buildings around the world shone blue.
- After two years without an in-person event at UN Geneva, we were pleased to organise a High-Level hybrid panel in person and online.



Over 100 locations participated in the Blue Shine on September 23, 2023



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights signs the 2021 IDSL theme in International Sign.



The video of IWDP 2023 posted on social media

# Achieving the Action Plan

## 2019-2023

### Equal Opportunities

The WFD works towards a global society where all deaf people have equal opportunities without barriers. A key part of our work is ensuring the linguistic and human rights of deaf people are part of the international agenda. Through its consultative status in ECOSOC, the WFD contributed to various UN reports and events. In the past four years, the WFD submitted 38 contributions to UN reports, attended 21 International Conferences and organised five Side Events at four international conferences.



Official presentation at the UN General Debate - June 2022

Changes at the national level are influenced by recommendations made at the international level. We have provided four submissions to draft General Comments from 4 UN Treaty Bodies (*the Committee for the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, *the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*, *the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* and *the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*).

This is an expansion of the WFD's work from the CRPD Committee only. The WFD was also available to support 41 Ordinary Members reporting work before the CRPD Committee.

The WFD released three case study reports, on access to fair and inclusive labour markets and health care services. These studies show how we can all learn from case studies in different countries; information flows across the world and between South and North.

The WFD Charter on Sign Language Rights for All, launched in July 2019, received 13,000 signatures from individual persons and organisations, including four national governments: Iceland, Venezuela, Colombia and Bolivia.

The WFD believes in achieving its objectives through sustainable partnerships and cooperation with stakeholders with common values and goals. The WFD partnered with 38 organisations, including those representing and working with historically disadvantaged groups.



“The WFD has provided multifaceted support for our community. Our association has been strengthened by regional capacity training carried out by the WFD. The WFD's expert policy advice has boosted our national advocacy work, as well as our work in the CRPD Committee reporting process.”



Mr Paul Nanyeni  
Executive Director of Namibian National  
Association of the Deaf



## Recognition of Sign Languages

Recognition of national sign languages is fundamental to the achievement of full human rights, as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

From August 2019 to date, twelve countries have achieved legal recognition of their national sign languages (Canada, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Uzbekistan, Paraguay, Bulgaria, Italy, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, United Kingdom and Argentina) making it a total of 76 countries that have recognised their national sign languages.

The WFD partnered with The Nippon Foundation for the project "Securing Fundamental Access to Sign Languages". This project aims to promote sign language rights for all deaf people by supporting national deaf organisations in their efforts at local and regional levels to achieve legal recognition of their national sign language(s). This project was initiated in September 2020 for a three-year term that will end in December 2023.



Sign Language Rights training - Singapore - August 2022

Through the project, the WFD successfully delivered five capacity-building training in Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Laos, and submitted a proposal to recognise the 2nd International Conference on Deaf Education in Milan, Italy in 1880 as part of the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme. Its recognition is currently in process with the aim of being finalised in 2023.

In addition, the WFD organised three online Side Events at the Conference of State Parties (COSP) and attended the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th editions of the COSP between 2020 and 2023. The WFD delivered statements, contributed to Side Events and met with various government representatives to promote the recognition of national sign languages. At the 15th edition of the COSP in 2022, the WFD had the opportunity to meet and advocate to 10 national governments.

The WFD's new toolkit, "Guidelines for Achieving Sign Language Rights," is to be launched at the XX World Congress in July 2023. This toolkit will support national associations of deaf people, as well as relevant stakeholders and political and legislative authorities, to undertake meaningful recognition of their national sign languages.

Approximately 60% of signatories to the CRPD still have not achieved the legal recognition of their national sign languages. We still have work to do. The WFD continues to work to achieve full legal recognition globally.



“ The Filipino Sign Language (FSL) Act was recognized in 2018. The President of the WFD Dr Joseph Murray contributed to our very first Filipino Sign Language National Summit on February 21, 2021 as part of International Mother Language Day 2021. It was a huge impact for our deaf Filipino community to realise how our organisation, the Philippine Federation of the Deaf, has brought a lot of effort for the law to see its light. ”



Ms Carolyn B. Dagani  
President of Philippine Federation of the Deaf





## Leadership of Deaf Organizations

The slogan "Nothing About Us Without Us" requires strong deaf organisations. The full realisation of the human rights of deaf people can only be achieved through the leadership of deaf organisations.

Altogether, the WFD delivered trainings to 42 of our deaf-led member organisations in the past four years. This includes 18 onsite Human Rights and Sign Language Rights Training reaching 42 Ordinary Members. Responding to the Global Covid-19 pandemic accelerated our digital strategy, and the WFD designed and launched its own online training platform, the WFD Campus. The WFD Campus is a major new initiative that will allow us to expand our training activities in several ways. The virtual format allows for a wider range of participants. The platform can be used for focused training in one country or cross-national training. The latter format is one we have adopted in our first round of training, bringing together Ordinary Members from different continents to learn together and from each other.



The first WFD Campus training cycle reached 17 Ordinary Members, bringing the total to 62 Ordinary Members trained by the WFD. Additionally, the WFD provided individual support to 43 Ordinary Members and Associate Members through 50 letters of support. Furthermore, the WFD supported nine meetings with our Regional Secretariats and Regional Cooperating Partner.

The WFD is also conscious of encouraging and respecting the diversity existing within deaf communities. We organised a webinar in 2021 to highlight the diverse and various individual identities of deaf people and spread awareness of the potential multiple discriminations they might face. A Statement on Intersectionality was later approved by the WFD Board.

Responding to critical emergencies, the WFD organised two fundraising and advocacy campaigns to support deaf people in Haiti and Ukraine; respectively in response to grave findings on violence made towards Haitian deaf women, and to the war taking place in Ukraine.

3 March is World Hearing Day. Since 2021, the WFD has leveraged this day to highlight the importance of national sign languages as a human right for deaf people within a medical-centred framework. Since 2021, we have also released a video on social media each year promoting this message. These videos have had high visibility, regularly being among the most seen social media videos on World Hearing Day. This day has become a regular feature of our campaign to promote awareness of national sign languages to wider audiences.

As our human rights work is strengthened through partnerships, the WFD has expanded its network by signing Memorandums of Understanding with 19 new International Partners.



“ When our country was in its darkest hour, the WFD reached out to our organization to offer its support. With the WFD's coordination, we were able to support deaf Ukrainians fleeing the war and advocate for clear policies for sign language rights for deaf people in armed conflict and humanitarian disasters. ”



Ms Iryna Chepchina  
President of Ukrainian Society of the Deaf



## Full Inclusion of Deaf People

Sign language rights in all areas of life are central to achieving human rights for all deaf people.

With national sign languages being integral to the full inclusion of deaf people in their societies, the WFD embarked on developing training programs and tools for our Ordinary Members and other partners.

Among our major accomplishments in fulfilling this goal were:

Two full toolkits for our national member organizations to advance their advocacy work- a toolkit on Sign Language Rights and a toolkit on Covid-19. These have been translated into several United Nations languages and also exist in International Sign versions.

Two new Position Papers which address the epidemic of language deprivation as a health need for deaf children and the need to ensure deaf communities are respected as authorities on their national sign languages when it comes to teaching and researching these sign languages. These stances were developed after the request of our members in different regions.

Two new Guidelines: Access to Public Health Information During the Covid-19 Pandemic and The Use of Information and Communication Technologies for Deaf People.

**Inclusive education for deaf learners is a key area of focus for the WFD.** Two webinars and the 4th WFD Conference in Bangkok in 2022 focused on this theme. The WFD was a major stakeholder in an important International Disability Alliance Global Report on Inclusive Education. This landmark report makes clear deaf children learn best with other signing children. The WFD also published the Report on Baseline Data

Collection Report on Deaf Education in Nepal (also in International Sign and Nepali Sign Language), giving an evidence base and recommendations for inclusive education in the Global South.



4th WFD Conference - April 2022

The WFD has done national level training on inclusive education in collaboration with our national members. In 2022, in Ghana, the WFD worked with the Ghana National Association of Deaf people alongside teachers and heads of schools and government representatives to fully elaborate on the meaning of inclusive education for deaf learners. The WFD also participated in the 2022 Federation Nationale des Sourds de France (the WFD's OM in France) Congress in France with the same aims. Here the WFD fulfilled its crucial role of ensuring international policies and best practices can be understood and implemented at the national level.



“ Thanks to the WFD's work, we can now share with our governments that inclusive education for deaf learners does not mean closing deaf schools. It means supporting and developing national sign language schools where deaf children can thrive with their peers. ”



Mr Juventus Duorinaah  
Executive Director of Ghana National  
Association of the Deaf



# Learning and Improving

The WFD has grown in the past four years to respond to current challenges facing our global deaf communities, as well as adapt to a changing global environment.

The Covid-19 pandemic taught us that we are able to respond quickly in response to emergencies, both in response to deaf community needs and with our internal operations. The changes sparked by the pandemic have accelerated the pace of the WFD's digital strategy, and we have embraced opportunities to use video and virtual platforms to strengthen our human rights training and our global outreach to our 135 national member organisations. A major accomplishment has been the establishment of our virtual training platform, the WFD Campus. This unique platform offers human rights training in International Sign to a cross-national group of our members, who learn not only from the training, but also from each other's best practices.

The global pandemic and the war in Ukraine have highlighted the need to support deaf people in situations of natural and humanitarian disasters. This is a new area for the WFD and we are adjusting our capacities accordingly. The strength of our international networks can be seen in the rapid mobilisation of our European national members in support of Ukrainian deaf refugees in the early months of the war.

We supported these actions in a coordinating role, and served as a contact point with the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. We mobilised our experts and released a *Position Paper on the Situation of Deaf People in Armed Conflicts* in the first weeks of the war.



To further support our members, we have received the necessary legal permissions to support our Ordinary Members with fundraising campaigns. In this period, we undertook a successful fundraising campaign to support deaf people in Ukraine. Our priority is to work closely with our national members affected by disasters, not only via fundraising but also in shaping international and national policies in disaster risk reduction. This will be a key focus going forward.



130th WFD Board and 43rd WFDYS Board Meetings in Colombia - March 2023





Women's Rights Training in South Africa - March 2023

We embraced calls for dismantling structural discrimination by revising our internal policies and structures to ensure greater equity in hiring practices. We have removed residency requirements for the WFD staff, allowing us to hire a broader range of people from around the world. In 2018, the WFD staff were all from the Global North. Today approximately half of our core staff originate from the Global South, as do the majority of our short-term project staff. As of April 2023, 100% of our staff are deaf, making us the only international organisation of peoples with disabilities with their entire staff having personal lived experience of disability. This is in addition to our Board being 100% deaf.

Embracing our role as a global human rights organization, we have also worked across our regional secretariats and national members to highlight the many different intersectionalities within global and national deaf communities. We have held a webinar on this topic, and have worked with a large range of organisations, including those working with and representing traditionally underrepresented communities. Our communities can only thrive if all deaf people are included. This is an area we will continue to work on in our policy work and training programs going forward.



Coordination meeting about the reception of refugees from Ukraine - March 2022



# WFDYS Impact Report

The World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section (WFDYS) Board was elected at the Youth General Assembly in Paris, France July 2019. The board names as following:



**Ms Shirley Liu**  
(Australia)

Vice President until March 2021  
and thereafter President



**Ms Ashley Bergeron**  
(Canada)

Secretary until March 2021  
and thereafter Vice President



**Mr Douglas Izuchukwu**  
(Nigeria)

Secretary  
since September 2021



**Mr Rahul Jain**  
(India)

Board Member



**Mr Fernando Agudo**  
(Norway)

Board Member



**Ms Laure Abdelmoumeni**  
(France)

Board Member



**Mr Dario Castelli**  
(Chile)

Board Member



**Mr Mark Berry**  
(New Zealand)

President  
until March 2021

From 2019-2023, the WFD Youth Section (WFDYS), continued its work with global deaf youth empowerment, and expanded its presence in international fora.

The WFDYS expanded to 52 Youth Ordinary Members (YOM), consisting of national deaf youth associations in 52 countries across six continents. The WFDYS is the largest international youth organization of peoples with disabilities.

## Deaf youth representation in international fora

This term was marked by a new visibility of deaf youth in international fora. The WFDYS presented the views of deaf youth at the United Nations and World Health Organisation, among other major international events.



The WHO Youth Council - February 2023

A major accomplishment was the selection of the WFDYS to be one of only 22 global youth organisations on the World Health Organisation's Youth Council. This high profile platform will be used to advance the WFDYS's goal of human rights through sign languages. The WFDYS also worked with other organisations to present a session at the virtual 2022 Global Youth Summit and is a regular participant in United Nations Youth Envoy webinars and meetings. The WFDYS President, Shirley Liu, presented at the 14th Conference of State Parties (COSPP) to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in June 2021. The WFDYS is also a founding member of the International Disability Alliance's Youth Committee.

## Global Youth Empowerment

Due to the pandemic, WFDYS Board meetings from 2020-2021 took place through video conferencing. This allowed our YOMs to observe our board meetings, enhancing our contact with our global membership. The WFDYS also had regular one-on-one meetings with YOMs, providing insightful exchanges on national youth activities. The WFDYS maintained its support to our Youth Regional Secretariats as well, renewing its MOU with the European Union of the Deaf Youth.

The shift to virtual meetings allowed us to reach out in different ways, such as an 'informal' trial Youth General Assembly in April 2022, and numerous webinars open to all deaf youth. The WFDYS aims to empower youth organisations, and to do so, we surveyed our Youth Ordinary Members about their relationships with their WFD Ordinary Members, on genderquality in youth associations and preferred age groups for deaf youth activities. The WFDYS also delivered virtual and in-person presentations for various events and audiences around the world, in the USA, Colombia, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Costa Rica, France, and Germany.

To develop opportunities for young deaf individuals to grow their knowledge and skills, the WFDYS set up six Advisory Groups and a Media team. The WFDYS also signed a new MOU with Frontrunners, a deaf youth training programme in Denmark to advance a common goal of empowering deaf youth leadership.

## Global Deaf Youth Camps

The WFDYS organises three separate quadrennial camps for three age groups (9-12, 13-17, and 18-30). Due to the pandemic, our Junior Camp for the 13-17 age group had to be cancelled, but we were able to host 130 participants from 45 countries at the WFDYS Youth Camp in Paris, France, 2019 and our Children's camp saw 21 children from 10 countries participating at our 2022 Children's camp in Colonia, Uruguay. While the Children's Camp was smaller than usual, we are proud to have taken an important step forward back to regular camp operations.



Children Camp in Uruguay - October 2022

## 25 Years of international deaf youth leadership



A major WFDYS event was the celebration of our 25th anniversary in 2020, with our section being officially established in 1995. We shared the celebrations with deaf youth from around the world by recognizing their significant achievements and giving awards to individuals, while also participating in the arts and virtually exhibiting a special edition video of all momentous occasions and events from past years, such as camps, workshops, country visits, meetings and activities.

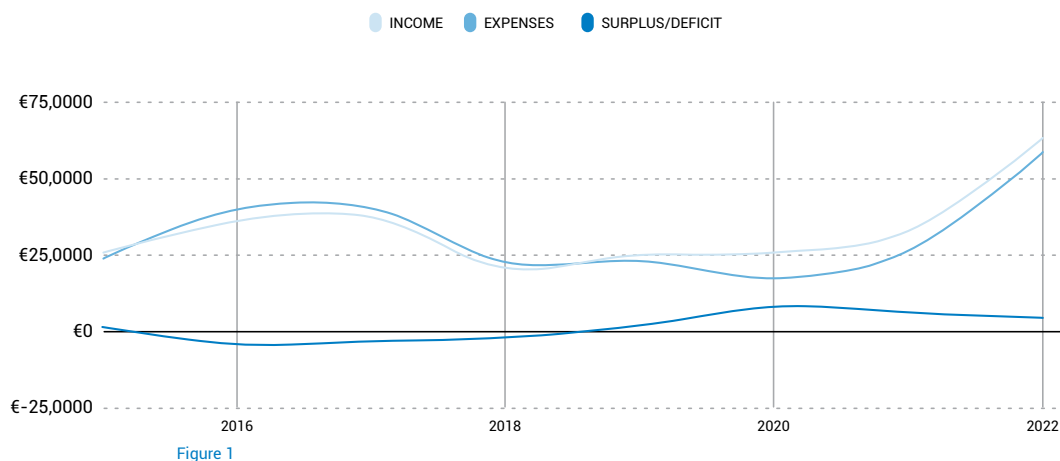
The WFDYS Board has had a good working relationship with the WFD Board. The WFD Board's support and cooperation is much appreciated.



# Financial Review

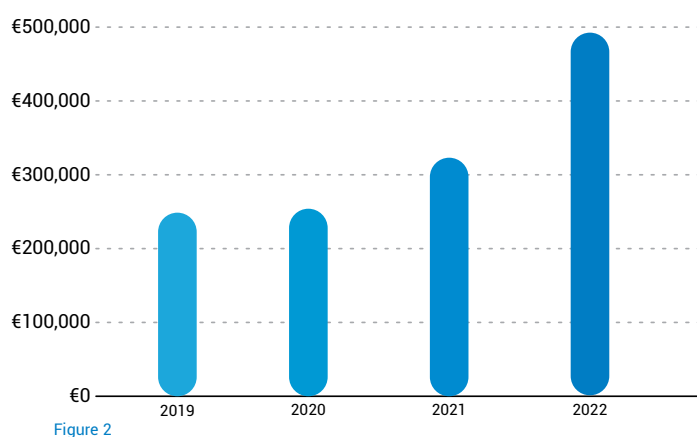
The WFD is now on sounder financial footing. In the 2015-2019 period, the WFD had deficits in three of the four years. Since 2019 the WFD has actively sought to expand our financial base in order to meet global challenges.

## INCOME, EXPENSES and SURPLUS/DEFICIT



As seen in Figure 1, our income increased from 2019 to 2022, allowing us to expand our staff and services. We have successfully stabilized and expanded our funding, with small surpluses each year since 2019. These surpluses have been used to rebuild our reserve funds.

## INCOME 2019-2022



A large part of this funding increase comes from more aggressively applying for project funding. As a measure of our success, our project income in 2022 is equal to our entire income from 2019.





## DIVERSIFIED INCOME BASE 2019-2022

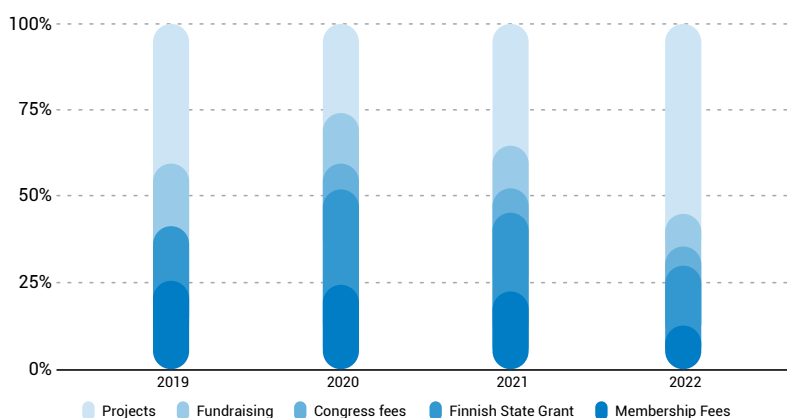


Figure 3

As Figure 3 shows, we are expanding our financial base, moving from an overreliance on Ordinary Member fees to more diversified funding sources. The WFD seeks to decrease its reliance on member fees as a primary source of revenue. This can be best achieved by growing our income overall, with the aim of supporting our members through new project activities.

The growth in project funding can be seen in Figure 4. This shows our income growth is being immediately reinvested in our human rights activities. We were successful in expanding our project funding, reducing the overall reliance on membership fees from 25% of the budget to around 10%.

## PROJECT FINANCING 2019-2022

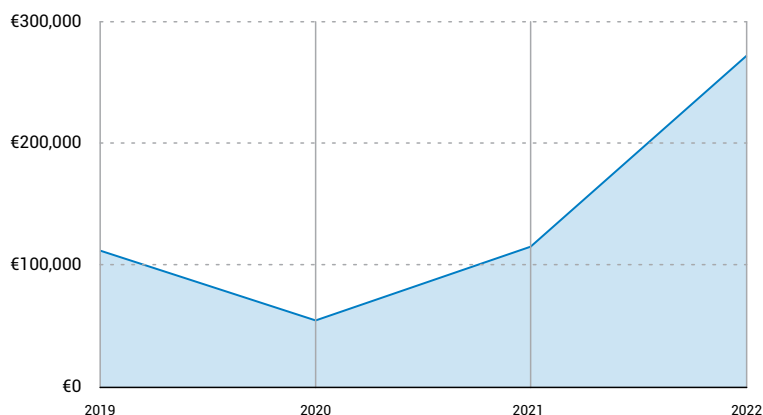


Figure 4

In March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world and impacted the work of the WFD, moving all our advocacy and capacity building activities to online platforms. Since the third quarter of 2020, significant funding received from the Nippon Foundation has allowed us to promote sign language rights around the world.

The WFD started 2021 with a strong strategy for its fundraising, donor recruitment and international partners for the WFD work. The contribution of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Disability Alliance, the Nippon Foundation, the Danish Society of the Deaf, the Christian Blind Missions Global Disability Inclusion (CBM Global) and other donors have been instrumental in our ability to achieve our work. As a result of this financial strategy, the WFD has expanded its operating budget by 168%. We have grown our capacity to handle large-scale projects and look forward to expanding to larger multi-year grants in the next four years.

2022 was marked by the active support of deaf people in Ukraine. We were able to fundraise over 100,000 euros to support deaf Ukrainians via the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf. These funds were collected not only from organizations, but also from the generous contributions of people from all over the world. Taking this into account, the WFD plans to include Disaster Risk Reduction as a new line of action and to attend to our deaf community members impacted by natural emergencies and humanitarian conflicts.

# WFD Board



**Dr Joseph Murray**  
(United States of America)  
President



**Mr Kasper Bergmann**  
(Denmark)  
Vice President



**Mr Withayoot Bunnag**  
(Thailand)  
Board Member



**Mr Juan Angel De Gouveia**  
(Venezuela)  
Board Member



**Mr Bruno Druchen**  
(Republic of South Africa)  
Board Member



**Mr Frank Folino**  
(Canada)  
Board Member



**Ms Hjördis Haraldsdottir**  
(Iceland)  
Board Member



**Mr Steffen Helbing**  
(Germany)  
Board Member



**Mr Stanilav Ivanov**  
(Russian Federation)  
Board Member



**Ms Victoria Manning**  
(New Zealand)  
Board Member



**Mr Florjan Rojba**  
(Albania)  
Board Member





## WFD Board Committees 2019 - 2023

Each Board Member has been involved with at least one internal committee with specific topics and items of current interest. All internal committees have their own terms of reference.

Internal committees had meetings in advance in order to prepare matters of relevance to their scope of work and to prepare proposals for the Board's consideration. Work has also been done via email and video meetings between Board meetings. Staff members of the WFD Secretariat have taken part to implement internal committees' work plans.

### HUMAN RESOURCES GROUP

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President Murray  
Vice President Bergmann

### FINANCE COMMITTEE

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Board Member Folino (Chair)  
Board Member Druchen  
President Murray

### HUMAN RIGHTS STEERING COMMITTEE

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Board Member Manning (Chair)  
Board Member Folino  
President Murray  
Board Member De Gouveia  
WFDYS representative

### LEGAL COMMITTEE

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Vice President Bergmann (Chair)  
Board Member Manning  
Board Member Folino  
**Legal Advisor:** Mr Howard Rosenblum,  
Executive Director of OM USA  
**Legal Advisor:** Mr Brett Casey,  
Executive Director of Deaf Services, Australia

### WFD CONGRESS

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Board Member Druchen (Chair)  
President Murray  
Vice President Bergmann  
Board Member Manning

### WFD CONFERENCE

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Board Member Haraldsdottir (Chair)  
Board Member Rojba  
President Murray  
Vice President Bergmann

### FUNDRAISING (2019-2020)

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Board Member Druchen (Chair 2020)  
Board Member Helbing (Chair 2019)  
Board Member Ivanov  
Board Member De Gouveia

### MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

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Board Member Rojba (Chair)  
Board Member De Gouveia  
Board Member Haraldsdottir  
Board Member Bunnag

### REGIONAL SECRETARIAT COMMITTEE

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Board Member Bunnag (Chair)  
Board Member De Gouveia  
Board Member Druchen

### DEAF FLAG AD HOC COMMITTEE

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Board Member Ivanov (Chair)  
Board Member Bunnag  
Board Member Haraldsdottir

# WFD Secretariat



**Ms Pamela Molina**  
(Chile/USA)

Executive Director



**Mr Alexandre Bloxs**  
(Belgium)

Human Rights Officer



**Mr Yauheni Koraneu**  
(Belarus/USA)

Chief Financial Officer



**Mr Alejandro Lopez**  
(Peru)

Logistics Assistant



**Ms Phillipa Sandholm**  
(Australia/Finland)

Administrative Secretary



**Ms Audrey Sangla**  
(France)

Congress Liaison Officer  
Media Coordinator



**Ms Susana Stiglich**  
(Peru)

Sign Language Rights  
Officer

## People who worked in the Secretariat between 2019 and 2023



**Mr Alessandro Abbate**  
(Italy/Spain)

Business and Development  
Officer



**Mr Ian Dhanoolal**  
(Trinidad and Tobago)

Fellow



**Ms Ashura Michael**  
(Nigeria)

Fellow



**Dr Jolene Ogunjirin**  
(Trinidad and Tobago/USA)

Project Manager



**Mr Raymond Rodgers**  
(USA)

Interim Executive Director



# About the World Federation of the Deaf

## LOCATION

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FINLAND

## POSTAL

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FIN-00401 Helsinki  
FINLAND

## FOR GENERAL INFORMATION

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[info@wfdeaf.org](mailto:info@wfdeaf.org)

## WEBSITE

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[www.wfdeaf.org](http://www.wfdeaf.org)

## SOCIAL MEDIA

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-  [Wfdeaf.org](https://www.facebook.com/Wfdeaf.org)
-  [WFDeaf\\_org](https://twitter.com/WFDeaf_org)
-  [wfdeaf](https://www.instagram.com/wfdeaf)
-  [wfdeaf](https://www.linkedin.com/company/wfdeaf)

## DONATION

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In order to support WFD's human rights work,  
donations can be made at  
[www.wfdeaf.org/donate](http://www.wfdeaf.org/donate)

**THIS REPORT WAS DESIGNED**  
BY JOSÉ AUGUSTO.



WORLD FEDERATION  
OF THE DEAF