



WORLD FEDERATION  
OF THE DEAF

## GUIDELINES FOR THE PROTECTION AND SAFETY OF DEAF PEOPLE IN ARMED CONFLICTS

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) calls on all relevant parties and stakeholders, including UN Agencies and International humanitarian movements and institutions to ensure the protection and safety of deaf people, including deaf refugees and displaced people in armed conflicts by respecting:

- 1** The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, more specifically Article 11 on situations of risk and emergencies, in conjunction with Article 21 to provide information in national sign languages.
- 2** The 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, more particularly paragraphs 7, 19(d), 30(c) and 36(d) on the inclusion of deaf people in humanitarian crisis responses by providing accessible information and communication in media, as well as in humanitarian infrastructure such as refugees camps, hospitals and schools.
- 3** The 2016 Charter on Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action fostering the rights of deaf people to protection, safety and respect for dignity as well as being humanitarian agents of their own rights.
- 4** The 2019 UN Security Council Resolution 2475 on Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflicts, more specifically Articles 5 and 7 fostering the rights of deaf people to have access on an equal basis with others to basic services provided in the context of armed conflicts, including accessible education and information and communication in the national sign language to ensure meaningful participation of deaf people through their representative organisation(s) in humanitarian actions.
- 5** The 2019 UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) which mainstreams disability inclusion throughout all UN agencies. This includes the obligations of providing humanitarian-related information in both International Sign and national sign languages.
- 6** The 2019 IASC practical recommendations for inclusion of people with disabilities and their participation and leadership in disaster and humanitarian contexts - including specifically mentioning sign languages.
- 7** International Humanitarian Law and Humanitarian Principles

In 2021, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) emphasised the need to provide access to services in sign language and in the languages of indigenous peoples in 'Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies'. National guides on the provisions for emergency services should include provisions for access to sign language including information on regional emergency locations where such services can be provided.<sup>1</sup>

In case of humanitarian crises and armed conflicts, the more than 70 million deaf people that live around the world do not have access to timely information and communication on the events occurring around them in their national sign languages. This puts them at further

<sup>1</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). *Thematic study on the rights of persons with disabilities under article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. United Nations A/HRC/31/30.*



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increased risk of marginalisation, abandonment, violence, and death, while perpetuating a lack of access to safety, relief and recovery support, including in humanitarian settings such as refugee camps. With crucial information on safety, evacuation and support services not being accessible in national sign languages, deaf people are constantly left behind.

Due to their unique situation in belonging to both the disability movement and the cultural and linguistic minority movements, deaf people and their communities are often facing additional and intersectional discrimination in accessing information and communication related to evacuation procedures and support in their natural language, the national sign language.

Based on the universal principle of equality and non-discrimination, deaf refugees and displaced people should not be treated adversely and discriminatorily compared to their hearing counterparts due to their disabilities coupled with their linguistic requirements and preferences. They must be provided with information in their national sign languages as well as with opportunities to access to relief information, communication and services in their preferred and most natural languages.

The WFD calls on the UN and its agencies, the political leadership and all humanitarian actors dealing with this humanitarian crisis to ensure deaf people:

- Have **full access to all information** and communication related to humanitarian aid, emergency responses, safety and assistance protocols, evacuation procedures and support in their national sign language - more information on accessible information and communication in emergency broadcasts can be found in [the WFD-WASLI Guidelines on Access to Information in National Sign Languages](#).
- Are meaningfully **involved in all humanitarian action**, through their representative organisations - the **National Associations of the Deaf** - at every step of the humanitarian responses through accessible consultations.
- **Have access** to humanitarian aid, in all settings and services **in their national sign languages**;
- Have **full access to basic services** including social and psychological support, education, healthcare, transport and information in their national sign languages, or in the national sign language of the country they are seeking refuge in, if they know it.
- **Have access to sign language interpreters** in their home national sign languages, or to deaf interpreters who are able to bridge linguistic gaps between deaf refugees and hearing national sign language interpreters if they have been resettled
- **Have access to deaf communities** in the countries where they are seeking refuge for peer-support.
- Have voluntarily mobilised from host countries and that there are government funded services to assist deaf resettled peoples in their countries. These efforts must **be funded through government** relief efforts and integrated into existing relief efforts, ensuring deaf people have access to local deaf communities and volunteers.



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- **Have all policies in place for refugees** and internally displaced persons, who should be met with unhindered access to services in mind **for deaf people who use sign languages**.

Increased attention must be brought to deaf people who are most at risk and vulnerable, such as those facing additional intersectional discrimination - including deaf people with intellectual disabilities, deafblind people, deaf women and girls, deaf BIPOC, deaf elderly people, deaf migrants and deaf LGBTQIA+.

## About us

The World Federation of the Deaf is an international non-profit and non-governmental organisation of deaf associations from 133 countries. The WFD has a consultative status in the United Nations and is a founding member of the International Disability Alliance (IDA). We promote the human rights of deaf people in accordance with the principles and objectives of the United Nations Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and other Human Rights Treaties. As the representative body, the WFD works to ensure deaf people across the globe are equipped with the knowledge, tools and strategies to advocate for, achieve and defend their rights.



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