

Guidelines for Achieving Sign Language Rights

A WFD Advocacy Toolkit



WORLD FEDERATION
OF THE DEAF

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Foreword

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) works with our 135 member countries around the world to ensure their national sign languages are fully acknowledged, respected, and safeguarded. I am pleased to share with you this important book, *Guidelines for Achieving Sign Language Rights*. This publication is an important advance for our efforts to advocate equal rights for deaf people globally, through the legal recognition of our national sign languages.

In this advocacy toolkit we have developed tools and strategies that will strengthen deaf communities and advance the adoption of robust and meaningful legal recognition of national sign languages.

This book is the outcome of a project funded by the Nippon Foundation, “Securing Access to Sign Language Rights,” carried out by the WFD between 2019 and 2023. The primary goals of the project were to provide national associations of deaf people with a set of resources that promote their aims of securing legal recognition for their national sign languages. In addition, the WFD conducted workshops to strengthen the capacities of national deaf associations, provide information and resources, and promote coordinated work on sign language rights and the underlying values of equality and nondiscrimination.

This toolkit advances our goal of imparting knowledge, empowering, and facilitating national associations of deaf people in their pursuit of sign language recognition. It promotes advocacy efforts by providing relevant references, and current practises from countries that have achieved legal recognition of their national sign languages. The WFD encourages national associations of deaf people, allies and advocates, policymakers,

and all other stakeholders to use this toolkit to ensure all deaf people can enjoy a fundamental human right: the right to a language.

The WFD would like to express our gratitude to the Nippon Foundation for their support, as well as everyone who has been involved in the development of this toolkit.

With this toolkit, we take a step closer to our vision: of a world where deaf people everywhere can sign anywhere.



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**WORLD FEDERATION
OF THE DEAF**



The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is an international non-governmental organisation representing and promoting approximately 70 million deaf people's human rights worldwide. The WFD is a federation of deaf organisations from 135 nations; its mission is to promote the human rights of deaf people and full, quality, and equal access to all spheres of life, including self-determination, sign language, education, employment, and community life. WFD has a consultative status in the United Nations and is a founding member of International Disability Alliance (IDA).

The Nippon Foundation is an organisation whose mission is social innovations aiming to achieve a society where all people support one another, reducing the burdens and challenges they face together. Doing this by forging networks by citizens, corporations, nonprofit organisations, governments, and international bodies.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction



1.1 - Purpose of the Toolkit

1.2 - Aims and structure of the Toolkit

Need for this toolkit

Deaf people worldwide have historically faced and continue to confront situations of discrimination with the use of their national sign languages. These situations of discrimination happen systematically and frequently at various times in their daily lives by not having equal and real time access to information and communication.

One of the most affected areas is education. Deaf children are put at risk of language deprivation due to the lack of quality education in their national sign language. WFD considers this a serious human rights violation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disparities of deaf people in accessing quality, reliable and life-saving information and services in their national sign languages. This lack of access has had a detrimental effect to deaf people's lives in some parts of the globe. This is caused by a lack of awareness by public authorities on the fundamental rights of deaf people to impart information in their national sign languages.

The right to use one's own national language, including national sign language, is a principle acknowledged in international human rights frameworks. This recognition must be translated and implemented at the national, regional, and local levels. Consequently, the XVIII General Assembly of the WFD in 2019 adopted its 2020-2030 Strategic Direction and the WFD Charter for Sign Language Rights called for further legal recognition of national sign languages.

With this toolkit, WFD affirms the commitment to support our Ordinary Members and general organisations led by deaf people, with the resources and tools necessary to support their advocacy efforts to achieve significant and adequate legal recognition of their national sign languages. Along with that, updated data to ensure national policies are put in place that implement these linguistic rights to use their national sign languages in all areas of life.

Aim of this toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide National Associations of the Deaf and any interested stakeholders, with information that empower them regarding the importance of the legal recognition of national sign languages as a means to safeguard the access to every sphere of life in national sign languages.

The readers of this toolkit will be able to access information and knowledge gained through best practices and case studies. The WFD and TNF hopes that this material will enable national associations to identify challenges and produce strategies towards the recognition of their national sign language using the information and resources that have been compiled in this toolkit.

The toolkit also provides a set of resources and concise information about human rights and sign language rights, taking into consideration the unique needs deaf people have for sign languages: the need for access and communication in their national sign languages. Without having full access to information and communication, deaf people face challenges for participating on an equal level with others, potentially facing discrimination and violation of their basic human rights.

Structure of this toolkit

The "Guidelines for Achieving Sign Language Rights" toolkit is designed to be user-friendly and accessible, providing individuals and organisations advocating for sign language recognition with valuable information and resources. Each of the twelve chapters is an independent unit, allowing readers to navigate the toolkit based on their specific interests and needs. The table of contents facilitates access reaching the targeted interest topics.

This is a bilingual toolkit, in accordance with the WFD's language policy of providing information in International Sign and English. Each chapter includes sections with QR codes. These QR codes provide direct access to informative videos presented in International Sign, allowing readers to engage with the content further and gain an increased understanding of key concepts and strategies.

Recognising the significance of practical resources, the toolkit also provides links to additional resources that can be downloaded. These resources serve as valuable resources to support the research, planning and development of sign language advocacy strategies to achieve legal recognition of your country's national sign languages.

We hope that this toolkit functions as a useful resource and enables deaf people and their organisations around the world to advocate for sign language rights.

CHAPTER TWO

Sign Languages



2.1 - Small glossary of key concepts

2.2 - Introduction to Sign Languages

2.3 - Considerations on sign language and education of deaf people

2.4 - Common misconceptions about national sign languages

Introduction to Sign Languages

Sign languages have existed for centuries and have emerged and been in use by deaf communities all over the world. In some countries there is evidence of sign languages that have been documented in several forms such as illustrations, engravings, photographs, and more recently through videos. Sign languages have been documented in ancient texts and by authors such as Socrates. In the *Cratylus* he wrote “If we hadn’t a voice or a tongue, and wanted to express things to one another, wouldn’t we try to make signs by moving our hands, head, and the rest of our body?” in reference to deaf people’s language¹.

In the 1960’s, William Stokoe studied American Sign Language (ASL) and proved that ASL (and any sign language) has a structure as complex as the oral languages display (Stokoe et al., 1960). With Stokoe’s breakthrough research and many more researchers who continued and followed, sign languages started to be viewed and considered as full languages with the same value as oral languages, giving them the attention and the status they deserve.

Sign languages are visual-gestural languages and are “highly complex natural languages with full expressive capacity with their own grammar, lexicon, humour, and associated performance forms” (WFD 2018²). In sum, they are as complex and sophisticated as spoken languages, sharing the same linguistic properties. Language can exist in different modalities, signed or spoken.

Those who use national sign languages can convey anything. Simple and complex thoughts, ideas, concepts, feelings: all can be done in national sign languages. Sign languages are acquired naturally by infants and children, and language acquisition in sign languages occur on the same timetable as spoken languages. There is no language delay for deaf children exposed to sign languages from birth. Through sign languages deaf people assert their identities and cultures as linguistic minorities. Sign languages provide access to important domains in life and the opportunity for full participation.

However, in several countries around the world, sign languages are still considered inferior and lack proper governmental and legal recognition. Currently, two of the most known and recent reference sources about languages of the world, *Ethnologue* (2022) and *Glottolog* (Hammarström et al., 2021), list around 157 and 210 sign languages, respectively. Nevertheless, not all sign languages have been documented yet, so the exact

number of sign languages in the world is yet unknown. However, as of 2023 76 countries have granted legal recognition of their national/regional sign languages (De Meulder 2015, De Meulder, Murray, & McKee, 2019; WFD 2023).

Deaf children do not have problems learning or acquiring language. They have problems with access to language. Around the world deaf children are still denied access to natural language input in the form of their national sign languages. Consequently they may face delays in language acquisition. This delay is not due to their lack of hearing but due to political factors that prevent them from being in sign language rich environments. Once exposed to natural sign languages, deaf children’s language acquisition proceeds smoothly and on the same development scales as all other children. Lack of natural language access may prevent deaf children from reaching their full potential. As a result, deaf people may remain left behind in full participation and inclusion in their societies.

Each sign language develops within a particular community of users. These communities develop sign languages that reflect the particularities of their cultures. It has been documented that some countries have more than one national or regional sign language (just as some countries have more than one spoken language). Moreover, some countries are making efforts to also document and preserve indigenous sign languages and officially acknowledge them (Snoddon & De Meulder 2020). Indigenous sign languages are the signs that were created naturally in ethnic minority deaf communities (McKee et al 2007) before having the influences of colonial sign languages (Adams 2021). One example is the influence of British Sign Language: BSL in Australia slowly over the years exerted influence over indigenous aboriginal sign languages and were relegated. Another example in Canada is engaging efforts to revitalise Plains Indigenous Sign Language (Rice 2020). In New Zealand, there are efforts to document and add Māori referents and concepts to New Zealand Sign Language (McKee et al 2007).

Deaf people who use sign languages gather themselves into deaf communities. Deaf communities are built upon the use of a sign language and a particular culture surrounding that sign language. In that sense, a deaf community can be defined as a “cultural and linguistic minority who use sign language as their primary language” (NDF 2019). Deaf culture is the culture deaf communities develop and share within the members of the community: it is formed around the use of a particular sign language and the perspective and life of deaf people in a particular context.

¹ A detailed analysis of the quote can be found in Bauman (2008).

² <https://wfdeaf.org/news/resources/wfd-wasli-statement-use-signing-avatars/>

Considerations on sign language and the education of deaf people

Understanding of sign languages have shifted over time. Sign languages are as old as the first humans, since we can trace extremely early allusions and descriptions in many different forms of these languages. Stokoe, Casterline, and Croneberg's pioneering work (Stokoe et al., 1965) is usually taken as a turning point in the history of sign languages because it recognised sign languages as genuine and comprehensive languages, even if expressed in another modality (visual-gestural against the oral-aural modality of spoken languages).

The way that national sign languages have been seen historically has had an impact on the educational opportunities available to deaf people. Humphries (2013) narrates a change in the education of deaf people in the US from a deficit model of "special education" to a bilingual education model paralleled the growing realisation of sign languages as natural and fully-fledged languages. According to Humphries (2013: 10), American Sign Language (ASL) was earlier not considered a language and consequently believed to have limited value for deaf children's cognitive development. ASL was seen as a 'last resort' for deaf children. As research on ASL showed it to be a full language, studies were conducted to see the influence of ASL in educational contexts. These studies showed that deaf children benefit from the inclusion of ASL in classrooms and in their homes³. Deaf children thrive and benefit from education in a sign language environment with signing peers, and with direct contact with deaf communities in their lives.

The history of deaf people's education is long and complex, but we will consider only five fundamental moments. For this section, we are taking information from van den Bogaerde, Buré & Fortgens (2016). First, in the 16th century Pedro Ponce de Leon in Spain is recognized as probably the first teacher of the deaf we know of: he considered deaf education to be primarily concerned with learning to speak, in accordance with the needs of his students, wealthy nobles who needed to speak to show legal capacity. The establishment of a school in Paris under the Abbe de l'Épée in France is often seen as a starting point of a period of widespread use of sign languages in deaf education, as deaf schools were introduced around the world (but primarily in Europe and the Western Hemisphere). This period saw the use of sign languages in congregated school settings and with some notable deaf teachers serving in schools for deaf children. Speech instruction remained, and some schools, particularly in German-speaking countries, still did not use sign languages in the classroom. Shifts in social discourses in the late 19th century, including the social Darwinism and nationalist thought, brought a renewed emphasis on deaf people learning to speak

the national spoken language (Murray 2007, Baynton 1996). These trends emerged most prominently at the the Second International Congress of Teachers of Deaf-Mutes in Milan, Italy in 1880 (otherwise known as the 'the Milan 1880 Congress'. At this Congress, a "pure oral" method of instruction, denying deaf children access to sign languages, was promoted. This philosophy remained dominant for decades and the use of sign languages in deaf education was much diminished. In the 1970s, a Total Communication approach was created and adopted. This approach allowed for the use of signs, alongside any form of communication. But the goal still was to learn the spoken language. Finally, from the 1980s up to the present, bilingual education in sign languages and spoken languages has reasserted itself. Since bilingual (or multilingual) education for deaf people uses two modalities (oral-aural and visual-gestural), it is also known as "bimodal education" (see e.g., Snoddon & Weber 2022). From this brief history, we see sign languages have seldom been accorded a full role in the education of deaf people. Today, we know national sign languages are fully fledged languages, and deaf children thrive when educated in their national sign languages. The paradigm shift in our understanding of sign languages has led to meaningful change in deaf communities around the world, but has not yet fully transformed deaf education.

Common misconceptions about Sign Languages

In this section, you will find what are the most widespread misunderstandings and misconceptions about national sign languages. Some of these myths have been around for a long time and continue to date and each one will have an explanation that explains why they are incorrect.

"Sign languages are all alike" - Many people consider sign languages to be alike because, in their eyes, they are quite similar or exactly alike. While sign languages resemble each other as to the use of the hands, the face, and the body to make meaning, detailed descriptions of these languages show that they differ from each other just as spoken languages do. Lexicon, vocabulary and grammar all vary across sign languages, just as they do with spoken languages. (Zeshan & Palfreyman 2017). Thus, the Finnish Sign Language (Suomalainen Viittomakieli) differs from the Namibian Sign Language and the Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO), just as English differs from Spanish and French. Some commonalities do exist across some national sign languages as a result of a history of language transmission, but these do not necessarily parallel spoken languages. For example, ASL has roots in French Sign Language (LSF) and Finnish Sign Language has roots in Swedish Sign Language (STS), despite the spoken languages of these countries being quite different.

³ See Humphries (2013) for more details about these studies

“There is an international sign language which every deaf person knows and uses” - Related to the previous belief is the idea that there is one sign language - an international sign language - which is supposedly known and used by deaf people all over the world. This is only partially true: there is a language contact phenomenon called ‘International Sign’ that functions as a “set of conventions” for signing, as stated by the WFD (2019), in contexts where deaf people may not share the same national sign language. These scenarios include international gatherings, congresses, events involving deaf individuals from all over the world. However, it is not known by every deaf person. The lexicon of IS depends on the context in which it is used and for some contexts, expansive IS lexica have emerged over time (Kusters, 2021).

“Sign languages have no grammar” - Grammar is the collection of rules a language uses to produce meaning. As Spanish and English have their own grammatical rules, so do sign languages. Sign languages have their own set of grammatical conventions. Researchers sometimes work on studying the specific grammatical rules of a particular national sign language but are also interested in analysing and comparing these rules to those of other sign languages.

“Signs are only gestures” - Usually, the word “gesture” refers to nothing but random expressions and motions using the body, and, in that sense, it is believed that signs are non-linguistic units, but random movements of the body. In his recognized work of the 60’s, Stokoe established that signs could be analysed considering three features: the handshape, the movement and the place involved in the production of the sign (Stokoe et al. 1965). Further research established modifications to Stokoe’s work, but his work is still the basis for sign language phonology as it can effectively describe many signs as combinations of different features. Therefore, signs are not merely gestures but structured linguistic units. However, current research recognizes both the linguistic status of signs but also the need to recognize and study the gestural component of signs and how signers use their full linguistic repertoire to communicate (Kusters & Sahasrabudhe 2018; Kusters & Lucas 2022; Wilcox 2004).

“Sign languages are artificial” - All languages have emerged naturally for reasons of representation and communication of some form of reality between human groups. Sign languages are no exception: where deaf people exist, at least one sign language will emerge.

“National sign languages delay or impede speech development” - this is a common and harmful misconception rooted in 19th century oralist ideologies. This myth still exists today, promoted by those who seek to focus only on spoken language development. No credible study has proven this point. As a matter of fact, all reliable studies show the opposite (Caselli et al., 2023). This misconception has historically done serious

harm to deaf children, leading to language deprivation (Henner et al., 2016, Hall et al., 2017, Gulati, 2018). The evidence is overwhelming that the use of national sign languages enhances deaf children’s language development and learning, including for deaf children who use cochlear implants. Hall, and Caselli (2019) suggests that deaf and hard of hearing children need to acquire and master at least one language to reach their full potential and they must learn it spontaneously in language rich environments. However, there is still a long way to go to raise awareness and explain the importance of national sign language from a human rights perspective. For more information on this false misconception, please see the WFD Position Paper on Inclusive Education (WFD 2018). The CRPD recognises that national governments have the obligation to promote the rights of deaf people to use their national sign language and to benefit from their linguistic identity.

“National sign languages are difficult to understand and learn by hearing people” - This is a common myth, in which people think that sign language is very difficult for hearing people to learn. This often occurs when families of a deaf child receive information for the first time from health professionals, without getting a complete orientation about deaf people and national sign languages (Humphries et al. 2015). If confronted with this type of comments or statement, it is best to educate by explaining the reasons for the importance for the deaf child to access all the information that surrounds them, especially in family settings where the learning of national sign languages is crucial and of the best interest of the child to access full communication in the early childhood years. The WFD Position Paper on the Language Rights of Deaf Children (WFD 2016) brings a large amount of evidence to support that “early exposure to sign language within the family, best prepares deaf children for their future effective participation in society.”

Some recommended studies

On sign language linguistics

Baker, A., van den Bogaerde, B., Pfau, R., & Schermer, T. (Eds.). (2016). *The linguistics of sign languages: An introduction*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Hou, L., & de Vos, C. (2022). Classifications and typologies: Labeling sign languages and signing communities. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 1-8.

Kusters, A. (2021). International Sign and American Sign Language as Different Types of Global Deaf Lingua Francas. *Sign Language Studies* 21(4), 391- 426.
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On deaf communities and cultures

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CHAPTER THREE

Human Rights



- 3.1** - Introduction to human rights
- 3.2** - Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 3.3** - Nine international treaties
- 3.4** - Pyramid of norms
- 3.5** - The CRPD

What are human rights?

Human rights are a set of rights inherent to every human being, regardless of their gender, religion, nationality, ethnicity, race, disability or social status, from their birth to their death. These rights are inalienable, indivisible and interrelated, and cannot be removed from the individual (UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights).

To have a better grasp of this concept, it is necessary to make a short detour to other types of rights such as civil and political rights. A civil right, in the sense of the Civil Code, is the right of a person to undertake any act or contract as a person such as getting married, buying a good, adopting a child or owning a property. These rights are often conditioned to an age - the legal majority - oscillating from 16 to 21 depending on the country. This means that people acquire and can use their rights to buy a property or get married only at their legal majority and not before (with the exception of parental authorisation).

Another set of rights are political rights. The political right of people is their right to stand for elections or to vote for a preferred political candidate or party. This right is also correlated to a condition of legal majority. It is also related to a condition of nationality and residence: a Belgian citizen cannot vote for a candidate for the presidency in Peru. Furthermore, in some legal systems, a criminal condition resulting in incarceration in prison might result in the loss of the political right for the duration of the imprisonment - the prisoner cannot vote or stand for election. These two illustrations are brought to better explain the specific uniqueness of human rights: they are inherent to all people (irrespective of their nationality), at all times (from birth to death without any condition of legal majority) and they are inalienable (people cannot lose their rights in any situation, even in cases of criminal condemnation). The idea that every person and their dignity should be respected throughout their whole lives is the core of human rights. It begins with the basic premise that every single individual is an ethical and rational being who has the right to be treated with dignity and respect. **Everyone has an equal and indiscriminate entitlement to fundamental human rights without discrimination.**

Human rights share the specificities of being inalienable, indivisible and interrelated.

Human rights are **inalienable** in the sense that they cannot be removed from people holding these rights. They are rights that cannot be lost or acquired at a specific moment in their life. Birth is the only condition for the acquisition of these rights and death is the only condition for their loss.



Human rights are **indivisible**. It means they constitute a set of rights inherent to the person that cannot be divided. Unlike a restaurant menu where one can choose the meal of their choice, governments cannot grant people the rights they would decide. Human rights are a package of indivisible rights.

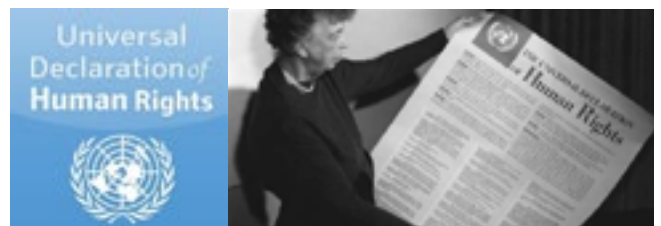
Human rights are **interrelated**. They are a package of several rights that are interdependent and connected to each other. The removal of a right would impair access to the other rights. As human rights are indivisible, their division compromises the enjoyment of the inherent rights of all people.

The United Nations initiated the modern conception of human rights. The United Nations is an international organisation founded in 1945 by 51 nations and gathering, today, 193 Member States. It has the purpose of maintaining international peace and security, being a platform to develop and maintain sustainable partnership among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights.

Find out whether your nation is a member of the United Nations system by searching in this link:
<https://www.un.org/en/member-states/index.html>

The modern conception of human rights saw its birth in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The text was designed in direct response to the calamities and barbarous acts experienced by the people of the world during World War II. These nations made a commitment to uphold international peace and security, cultivate friendly relations among nations, and promote social progress, improved living standards, and of course, human rights.

In 1946, in the wake of the deadliest conflict the world has ever seen, the newly established United Nations Economic and Social Council established the Commission on Human Rights to conceive and draft the text. It was voted at the UN General Assembly by 51 nations. It is constituted of 30 articles compiling what are the modern conceptions of human rights. Today, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stands as the most translated text in the world.



Full list of human rights can be read here: https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf

However, the Universal Declaration is not a treaty and, therefore, its provisions are not legally binding. It is a political commitment, meaning that States Parties to the UN are not legally obliged to respect the provision of the Universal Declaration. Thus, to solve this issue, the declaration has been largely incorporated into two international treaties in 1976 that has been accepted by most UN Member States: The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The UN refers to these covenants and the Universal Declaration as the International Bill of Human Rights.

When undertaking policy and advocacy work, including in the area of sign language rights and achieving the human rights to sign language through the legal recognition of your national sign language, it is crucial to grasp the difference between two kinds of instruments: **legally-binding instruments** and **political commitments**.

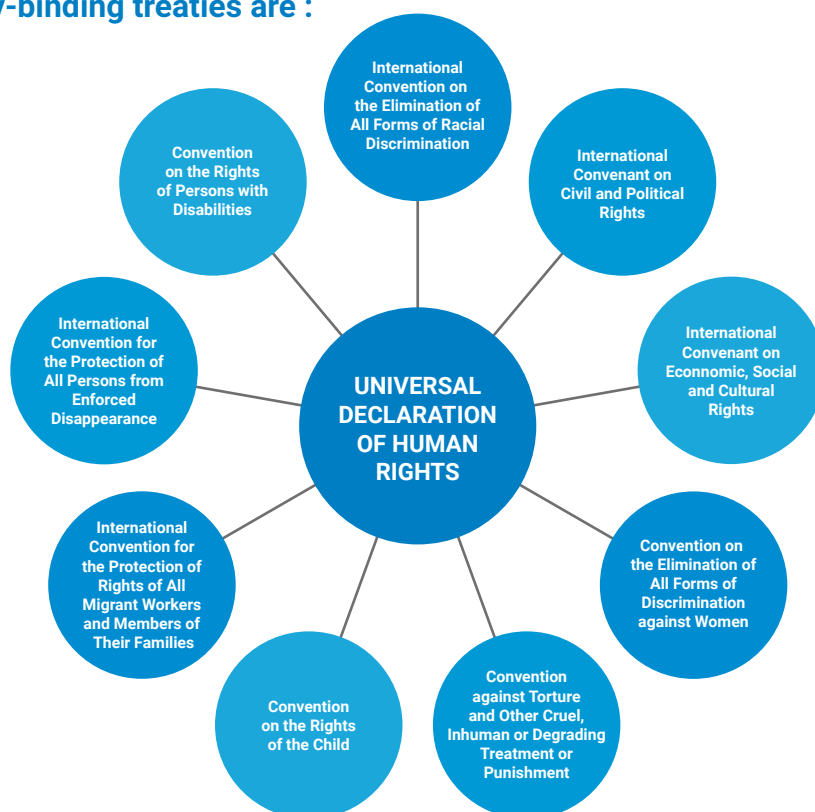
Legally-binding instruments are made of laws and national governments are bound by them. It means that it is possible to invoke the legal provisions from an instrument against the national governments, public authorities, organisations or individuals before a court. Some examples of legally-binding instruments include the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Political commitments are non-binding documents that serve as proof of goodwill from the UN Member States. These serve to guide them in specific areas. Their provisions cannot be invoked by individuals to force or prevent a Member State from undertaking an action. The realisation of political commitments depends on the goodwill of national governments. However, there is a growing willingness from national governments in promoting and implementing political commitments compared to implementing legally binding instruments. Examples of political commitments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Throughout the first two decades of the existence of the United Nations and the release of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, it became clear to some Member States, as well as to the UN, that while human rights is a universal principle, its implementation and implications weren't universal. In fact, several categories of the population continued to be denied their human rights, such as persons of colour, women, children, and persons with disabilities. These groups wanted to be able to enjoy their human rights on an equal basis with others.

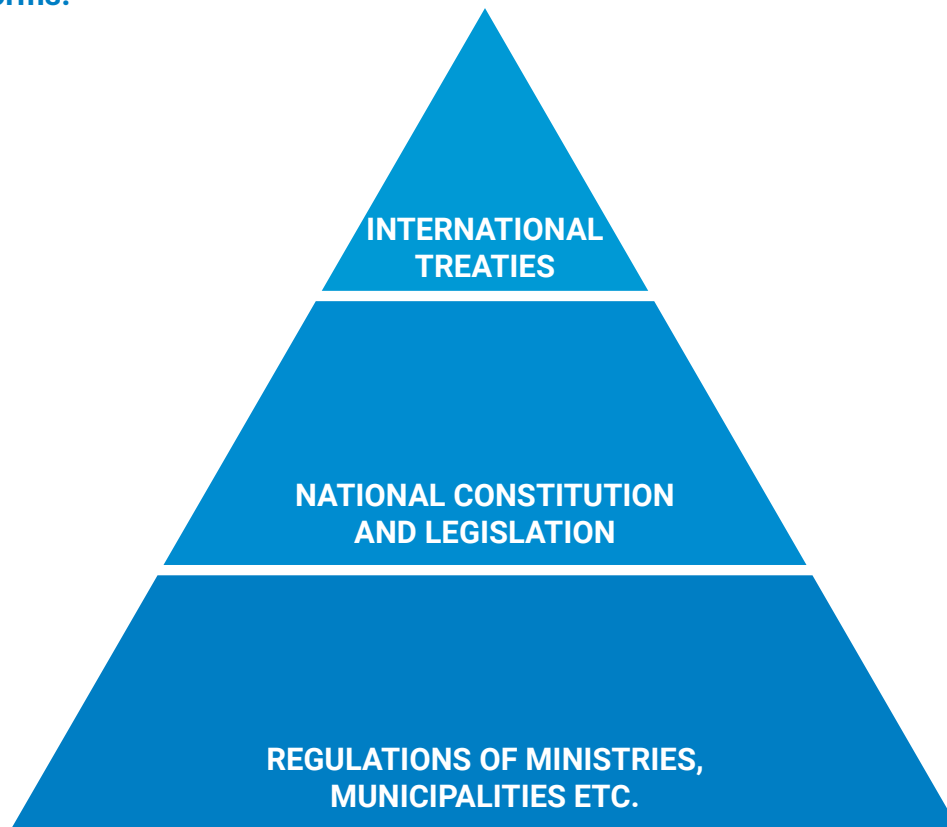
Therefore, starting from 1965 to this date, the United Nations has adopted 9 legally binding International Treaties which transpose the principles outlined in the Universal Declaration to protect various minorities and marginalised groups. This is in addition to the two international covenants mentioned earlier.

These nine legally-binding treaties are :



READ

Pyramid of norms:



In a legal system, each norm is placed in a pyramidal structure according to its source and its primacy. In this hierarchical organisation, the international convention prevails over internal regulation. Therefore, an international Treaty ratified by a government will have primacy over the national legal system; all the national legislation should abide by it. After the international treaties come to the national constitution. After the national constitution, come the laws. After the laws, comes the regulation and so on. The lower level of legislation must follow the principles and the content, and the limits set by the hierarchically superior legislation.

Therefore, when ratifying a new international convention, a national government should make sure its internal legal system must comply with the minimal standards set by the newly ratified convention. Thus, the national government must either adopt new legislation that implements the provisions of the convention if such legislation did not exist prior to the ratification or abolish/modify existing legislation that does not comply with the convention.

Illustration1: A national government X has national labour legislation allowing child labour as early as the age of 12. It ratifies a new legally-binding international treaty which places the legal age to work at 16. Thus, as the international convention is legally superior to the national labour law, government X must reform the national labour legislation to shift the legal age to work from 12 to 16.

Illustration 2: A national government Y has national labour legislation for young people to work only at the age of 18. It ratifies a new legally-binding international treaty which places the legal age to work at 16. The government Y does not need to reform its legislation as the convention set a minimum of 16 that cannot go below but could go up such as in this case, the age of 18.

Illustration 3: A national government Z does not have any labour law legislation setting a legal age to start working. Virtually, anyone could work at any age, as early as 2 years old. It ratifies a new legally-binding international treaty which places the legal age to work at 16. Government Z must pass a new labour law to implement the content of the Convention.

Through these three illustrations, we could see that when ratifying an international convention, national governments must reform their existing legal system to comply with the new international instrument. This reform could either go by adopting new laws or modifying existing legislation that are not compliant with the newly ratified convention.

To summarise, human rights are as follows:

- All human beings are born with the same basic set of rights.
- There is no discrimination between any of us; we all have the same rights.
- It makes no difference where we are from or where we live, our gender, the colour of our skin, our religious or spiritual beliefs, our ethnic background, our disabilities, or the language we use..
- Every single human being child, woman, and man are entitled to the same universal human rights and are held accountable for the same responsibilities.
- The eradication of all forms of discrimination is a precondition for the global upholding of human rights. No individual, for any reason at all, should be treated differently than others.
- There are legally binding instruments and political commitments. Only legally binding instruments can render human rights effective. Most of actual human rights are to be found in legally-binding instruments
- When ratifying a new international convention, national governments must reform their existing legal system to comply with the new international instrument. This reform could either go by adopting new laws or modifying existing legislation that are not compliant with the newly ratified convention.

You and your organization will be able to become more effective advocates and bring about substantial change to advance the human rights of deaf people if you understand and are knowledgeable about your human rights.

For further information and a more in-depth education, check out the "Know and Achieve Your Human Rights Toolkit" that can be found in the "Resources" section of this toolkit.

The human rights treaty bodies are committees of Independent experts that monitor implementation

of the core international human rights treaties. State parties nominate and elect independent human rights experts to serve four-year terms on ten human rights treaty organisations.

The Geneva-based Office of Human Rights Human Rights Treaties Division supports all treaty bodies. The treaty bodies analyse States parties' reports, complaints, inquiries, adopt general comments, and organise thematic discussions to interpret their treaty or treaties and meet annually. In the following illustration, are the treaty-based bodies:

Human Rights
Committee (CCPR)

Committee on
Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights (CESCR)

Committee on the
Elimination of Racial
Discrimination (CERD)

Committee on the
Elimination of
Discrimination against
Women (CEDAW)

Committee against
Torture (CAT)

Committee on the
Rights of the Child
(CRC)

Committee on Migrant
Workers (CMW)

Committee on the
Rights of Persons with
Disabilities (CRPD)

Committee on
Enforced
Disappearance (CED)

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006 and ratified, to June 2023, by 186 UN Member States, is the latest International human rights Convention emanating from the UN. It is also one of the most ratified conventions in the UN legal system.

The CRPD initiated, at the international level, a paradigm shift away from a medical model of disability that sees individuals with disabilities as “not normal” and needing to be cured or rehabilitated. Through this lens, deaf people have been seen as people that are unable to hear and speak and should be cured and rehabilitated. This led to a denial of basic human rights, including the right to natural access to national sign languages.

The CRPD brought about a shift to the human rights and social model of disability. This model recognises that disabilities are a natural part of human diversity; that persons with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else; and recognises the inherent dignity of all people equally. Furthermore, the situation of disability is not caused by the person’s inability but rather by the inaccessibility of the built environment. A deaf person doesn’t have a disability because they cannot understand the news on TV. The TV news is made inaccessible when it is not captioned or not accessible through national sign languages or sign language interpretation.

The burden is not put on the persons with disabilities to adjust to society. Instead, societies must change and be made accessible to all.

When the CRPD entered into force, it was stated that the CRPD does not create new rights for persons with disabilities. Instead, it articulates how human rights can apply to them and the steps that governments can take to ensure persons with disabilities are able to enjoy their human rights. Thus, the term “disability rights” is the application of inalienable, indivisible and interrelated human rights to persons with disabilities.

The CRPD is also the first international legal instrument explicitly mentioning sign languages and recognised them as full languages. It is composed of 50 articles with 8 mentions of deaf people and sign languages in five distinct Articles. Deaf people and sign languages are mentioned more than any other group of peoples with disabilities in the document. The content of these five Articles will be further explained in the next chapter. However, the entire CRPD is applicable to deaf people, not just these five Articles.

The motto of the CRPD is “Nothing About Us Without Us” places persons with disabilities, including deaf people, and their representative organisations- national

associations of deaf people- at the forefront of the decision-making processes related to them. CRPD Article 4.3 recognises the obligation of national governments to actively consult and collaborate with national associations of deaf people for any legislation, programme and policies related to deaf people and national sign languages. This consultation must be accessible (such as through the funding and provision of professional national sign language interpreters) and at every step of the initiative, from the outset to the conclusion. This legal provision enables deaf people a status of self-determination. Deaf people, through their representative organisations, are given the opportunity to share their perspectives and to decide what is best for them.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sign Language Rights



- 4.1** - Sign language rights
- 4.2** - Article 2: Definition of language
- 4.3** - Article 9: Accessibility
- 4.4** - Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information
- 4.5** - Article 24: Education
- 4.6** - Article 30: Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport
- 4.7** - Homework: what are sign language rights?
- 4.8** - What are minority language rights?
- 4.9** - What are linguistic human rights?
- 4.10** - Homework: Views on sign language in your country

Linguistic rights are the human and civil rights concerning the individual and collective right to choose the language or languages for communication in private or public settings.

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1948, linguistic rights have been considered a component of the cultural rights of individuals.

In addition to this Declaration, a number of other international treaties and declarations also recognize the significance of linguistic rights of persons. These include the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (1989), the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), the Convention Framework for the Protection of National Minorities (1994), as well as the International Labor Organization Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006.

In most cases, the jurisprudence on language rights is related to or recognized as a part of the framework for cultural and educational rights. The rights to sign language had not been included in any of the treaties that pertain to ethnic minority languages until the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention has references to deaf people and sign languages in five distinct articles:

ARTICLE 2: DEFINITION

“Language” includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken languages ”

According to Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), sign languages are considered languages. Additionally, under the same article, a crucial difference is drawn between language and modes of **communication**

“Communication” includes languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology. ”

ARTICLE 9: ACCESSIBILITY

“9.2.e) To provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public. ”

This legal provision concerns the provision of accessibility through professional and accredited national sign language interpreters. The use of “professional sign language interpreters” as stated in 9.2 has been interpreted to mean sign language interpreters are properly trained with deaf community participation, certified according to a neutral certification mechanism in which deaf people are represented, and are paid in accordance with their professional status. Deaf people have the right to live in a society that is fully accessible to them through the use of their national sign languages. One way to achieve this accessibility is through the use of professional national sign language interpreters.

Article 21 of the CRPD, addresses the issues of access to information as well as freedom of expression and opinion. This Article specifically references sign languages. This article recognises the right of deaf people to receive official and governmental information in their national sign language.

Therefore, to safeguard the respect of the linguistic rights of deaf people to choose their language in official interactions with their governments, the latter must provide information and services in the national sign language. For this reason, it is a legal obligation for the news to be presented in the national sign languages, whether by deaf people or by professional and accredited national sign language interpreters. In addition, deaf people have the right to interact with public administration and services in the national sign language, either directly in their national sign languages or through the use of professional and accredited national sign language interpreters.

ARTICLE 21: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OPINION, AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

“ b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions. ”

“ e) Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages ”

As can be seen in section 21(e), this provision clearly recognises the obligation of State Parties to legally recognize and promote their national sign languages. This article can be used as the legal rationale by national associations of the deaf towards their governments for the legal recognition of their national sign language as an official language, alongside the spoken language(s).

While Article 23 of the CRPD does not directly mention deaf people or sign languages, it is important to mention here. This Article is concerned with the home and the family. It states that governments have to provide early and comprehensive information, services, and support for children with disabilities and their families. This means that deaf children should not be left behind in achieving their full potential, and their families should receive information that is in the best interest of their deaf child. This information includes access to sign language, deaf culture, and bilingual education-based programs.

ARTICLE 23: RESPECT FOR HOME AND THE FAMILY

"23. States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have equal rights with respect to family life. With a view to realizing these rights, and to prevent concealment, abandonment, neglect, and segregation of children with disabilities, States Parties shall undertake to provide early and comprehensive information, services, and support to children with disabilities and their families. "

ARTICLE 24: EDUCATION

"3. States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:

b) Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community "

This provision on inclusive education recognises the right of deaf persons, including deaf children, to access education in their national sign languages.

No children with disabilities, including deaf children, should be denied the access to quality and inclusive education in the educational setting of their choice, on the principle of equality and non-discrimination. This legal provision is the result of a consensus adopted by several international non-governmental organisations and national governments.

The **WFD Position Paper on Inclusive Education**, which provides an interpretation of this legal provision, highlights that education to deaf children is best achieved through bilingual education in the national sign languages and national written language(s). These inclusive educational settings must follow the official national educational curriculum as well as teaching the national sign language and deaf culture. Teachers must master sign language with native-level fluency and deaf children must be surrounded by their signing peers in inclusive settings. The **International Disability Alliance's 2020 Global Report on Inclusive Education** recognizes quality inclusive education for deaf children consists of congregated settings where they are able to interact with deaf peers in their national sign languages.

The WFD advises against the outplacement of deaf children in local schools with sign language interpreters as a viable solution. Access via a national sign language interpreter means deaf children are not receiving direct information from the teacher and are not able to communicate directly with other students. Children participate via sign language interpreters are at risk of missing out on peer to peer interaction, not to mention information happening in their direct environment.

In addition, the CRPD Committee's General Comment N°6 on equality and non-discrimination⁴, in its point 65, recognises that the lack of proficiency in sign language skills of teachers of deaf children and the consequential inaccessibility of school environments effectively excludes deaf children and is considered discriminatory.

ARTICLE 30: PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL LIFE, RECREATION, LEISURE AND SPORT

"Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture. "

This Article legally recognised deaf communities as part of a cultural and linguistic minority, with their own unique cultures. States Parties should foster the development of deaf culture and the linguistic identity

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no6-equality-and-non-discrimination>

of deaf communities through, among other activities, the use of their national sign languages. However, this Article also recognises the rights of deaf people and their communities to participate in any cultural and leisure activities in their societies on an equal basis with their hearing counterparts.

This framework established by the CRPD enables the development of an agenda for the promotion of the linguistic and cultural rights of deaf communities. These communities not only seek to promote their linguistic rights, but they also seek to draw attention to the importance of early acquisition of national sign languages for children and the promotion of their linguistic and cultural identities.

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) has emphasised, across multiple Position Papers, that national sign languages are distinct and interdependent from spoken languages, have the same status as spoken languages, and need to be treated similarly to spoken languages in legislation. Deaf children who are not given the

opportunity to learn sign language at a young age are deprived of a solid foundation in language, which is a violation of their fundamental human rights.

In addition to concentrating on the language, identity, and culture of deaf people, the concept of Sign Language Rights also includes the right of deaf people to be educated in their native language and to learn other languages while taking into account the cultural context of both of those languages.

What are sign language rights?

The ability to express ourselves in our natural language is a fundamental right because of the intimate connection that exists between language and other aspects of culture, identity, and involvement in the life of a community. If we are successful in achieving it, we will be able to reach our maximum potential, not just as individuals but also as a community.

Before going any further, let's take a moment to answer and reflect on these questions listed below:

What role does Sign Language play in your daily activities?	How do you affirm your identity as deaf person through sign language and culture?
What is your government doing so that you can freely express yourself in your national sign language?	What is your government doing so that children in your country can access quality education in your national sign languages?
What is your government doing regarding public information in official broadcasts, do they include sign languages? What regulations exist for this?	Are there regulations regarding deaf children's right to learn your country's national sign languages? Are there government programs for families to learn sign?
What existing laws exist in your country, mentioning your right to communicate in your national sign languages?	What academic evidence about your country's national sign languages exists?

Develop a format to answer each question as a guide for discussions in your organisation. Use the following example with the first question.

Instructions:

You can write, draw or annotate key words in groups.
Compare responses and prepare one page with group results.

What role does Sign Language play in your daily activities?



After you have had a chance to review these questions– both on an individual and collective level inside your organisation– you should either film a short video or write a short document with your findings and conclusions from each question. You are going to need them later when you will start writing and drafting ideas for a sign language rights bill.

What are minority language rights?

According to international treaties, language rights, sometimes known as linguistic rights, are human rights. They have specific implications for the language choice of members of minority groups, as well as the prohibition of discrimination, freedom of speech, and the right to communicate in their language with other members of their group.

Certain minority languages, including sign languages, have frequently been subject to restrictions, even outright bans, and a lack of promotion in several countries all over the world.

The United Nations, UNESCO, and a number of other international bodies have all recognized the significance of minority language rights and helped increase awareness of issues related to these rights. There are a number of principles, instruments, and policy papers that aim to promote and explain the execution of rights for minority languages. For example, UNESCO outlines the importance of protecting the rights of linguistic minorities in their book “Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: A Practical Guide for Implementation.” (2017⁵) states in a direct manner:

“Language is central to human nature and culture and is one of the most important expressions of identity. Issues surrounding language are therefore particularly emotive and significant to linguistic minority communities seeking to maintain their distinct group and cultural identities, sometimes under conditions of marginalization, exclusion and discrimination.”

In accordance with this notion, international treaties call on the authorities of national governments to not compel or interfere with the language choices or linguistic expressions of minority communities, who are often indigenous peoples. Additionally, the scope of this right is broad, and it includes the acknowledgment and support of educational rights to receive instruction in the individual's native language.

The following is a list of some of the other important treaties and guiding documents that pertain to the rights of minority languages:

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/language-rights-linguistic-minorities-practical-guide-implementation>

- UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992⁶)
- European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992⁷)
- UNESCO's Three Principles of Language and Education (2003⁸)
- Several recommendations of the UN Forum on Minority Issues on Implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities ⁹
- The Council of Europe's Thematic Commentary No. 3 on the Language Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities under the Framework Convention (2012¹⁰)
- The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities (1998¹¹)

Since 2005, the United Nations has had a Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. This Rapporteur's role is to guide the work of the Forum on Minority Issues and to promote the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities. For a very long period of time, the United Nations and various international organisations dealing with the topic of minority issues did not recognise national sign languages as minority languages. This had the effect of denying deaf communities the status of cultural and linguistic minorities. This has changed with Special Rapporteur Dr Fernand de Varennes. In a 2018 Report¹², he recognised that national sign languages are full languages which are used by a minority group of a given country and, therefore, deaf communities are minorities under the framework of the 1992 UN Declaration on Minorities. Thus, deaf people have the right to use their national sign languages in their societies. Dr Fernand de Varennes has been a longstanding ally to the global deaf community by opening the mandate of UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues to deaf communities and national sign languages.

For more by Dr. de Varennes, see his participation in a webinar on the 2020 [International Day of Sign Languages](#).

The United Nations is not the only organisation that monitors issues pertaining to national minorities. UNESCO, the Council of Europe's Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities all do so as well. UNESCO's Languages and Multilingualism Section is responsible for this. However, the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is yet to recognise national sign languages as minority languages. As of

today, the scope of this Charter doesn't include national sign languages despite the UN mechanism having recognised it. This is evidence of sometimes having disparities between regional and global entities.

What are linguistic human rights?

Linguistic human rights are a recent concept developed at the intersection of linguistic rights and human rights. This concept has been advanced by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas in 1989. She argues that language rights are one category of human rights, and its deprivation would deprive the linguistic minority users of the full enjoyment of their human rights.

This concept is crucial to deaf communities since it has been recognised that the lack of provision of national sign languages to deaf people would bring a deprivation of their most fundamental human rights. Without national sign languages, they will not be able to access quality and inclusive education; without national sign languages, deaf people won't be able to access fair and inclusive labour market necessary to sustain an economic life in line with dignity; without national sign languages, deaf people won't be able to communicate with public authorities in cases of disasters and emergencies. The examples are numerous.

There are several countries that have legislative frameworks supporting people's linguistic human rights (mostly referring to spoken languages). In most cases, this refers to legislation granting the right to use the language of their choice to some or all areas of society. The scope of these legislation often covers the right to education, healthcare, the legal system, employment as well as official interactions with public authorities and services.

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-persons-belonging-national-or-ethnic#:~:text=Article%202-Per-sons%20belonging%20to%20national%20or%20ethnic%2C%20religious%20and%20linguistic%20minorities,and%20without%20interference%20or%20any>

⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/text-of-the-charter>

⁸ <http://www.inarels.com/resources/unesco2003.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/minority/pages/forumindex.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/16800c108d>

¹¹ <https://www.osce.org/hcnm/oslo-recommendations>

¹² <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1800879.pdf>

The underlying idea of linguistic rights is that, by granting the right to people to choose their own language, this would respect and fulfil their human rights. In addition, this would foster their inclusion and participation in society through a common feeling of identification and mutual respect. In most linguistic legislation, it is recognised that users of minority languages and their communities must be consulted with for any issues or initiatives related to the use of their languages by their government. This reminds us of the Article 4.3 CRPD which obliges States Parties to the CRPD to consult with representative organisations of persons with disabilities for any initiatives related to persons with disabilities.

Documents containing solid evidence on the significance of linguistic human rights in education have been released by UNESCO¹³, UNICEF¹⁴ and the

WFD¹⁵, respectively. Learning in a person's native language has been shown to increase educational outcomes, higher literacy levels, and a person's ability to communicate fluently in both their native tongue and the language spoken by the majority of the population. These findings are consistent with one another. In each of the three texts, the necessity of having linguistic and cultural models, as well as the need for families and communities to be engaged, is emphasised.

In conclusion, the principles governing sign language rights that we have elaborated earlier must be aligned with the general principle of linguistic human rights.

The following **guiding concepts** should be included in any sign language rights legislation, since they are reflected in the linguistic human rights framework:

- Respect for dignity and identification as a minority community of sign language users
- Respect for the cultural identity and language identity of a deaf person.
- Opportunities for early and natural acquisition of sign languages, from identification of deafness or birth, as well as for deaf people's families and caregivers.
- Access to quality education in the national sign language(s), which includes having qualified teachers that are fluent in the national sign language and the promotion of their linguistic identity and culture.
- Access to information and communication in public services,
- Accessing judiciary systems with sign language interpreters and having legal capacity recognised.
- Highlighting that the denial of providing national sign languages would bring the consequence of deaf people not being able to enjoy their fundamental human rights.

Homework:

Conduct a survey in your society by respectively asking your deaf community and hearing people their knowledge about their national sign languages. One possible survey format is displayed in the sample chart below. Use the quotes and answers received to fill out the graph.

By engaging in this activity, your organisation will have a more comprehensive understanding of how members of your community understand your national sign languages. This survey should also gather perspectives from persons outside your deaf community. Additionally, this will provide a clearer overview on the areas to

tackle when developing awareness and education campaigns regarding national sign languages and deaf communities.

This will ensure that everyone is on the same page when beginning the advocacy work for the legal recognition of your national sign language.

¹³ UNESCO Principles of Language and Education (2003), Reaching the unreached: indigenous intercultural bilingual education in Latin America, UNESCO Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010.

¹⁴ UNICEF, Action Research on Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education: Improving the equity and quality of education for ethnic minority children in Viet Nam, September 2012, available at http://www.unicef.org/vietnam/Edu_Pro_Brief_3_-_8_pages.pdf

¹⁵ <https://wfdeaf.org/news/wfd-position-paper-language-rights-deaf-children/>

Sample annotation chart for your survey Example of possible responses:				
	Sign languages as gestures	Sign languages as a communication tool	Sign language as a language	National Sign Language as official language of deaf community
Views of sign language in your local community. Add quotes from survey responses from different persons surveyed (families of deaf children, public, teachers, etc.)				

CHAPTER FIVE

Best Practices on Sign Language Rights Legislation



- 5.1** - Summary
- 5.2** - Introduction to recommendations
- 5.3** - Language policy and liberty
- 5.4** - Equality and non-discrimination
- 5.5** - Education
- 5.6** - Sign language interpreters
- 5.7** - language use and promotion of identity
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In the prior chapters, we examined the importance of the linguistic human rights to sign languages for deaf people. This chapter will present a collection of what the World Federation of the Deaf considers to be best practices on sign language legislation. This will allow countries that are just beginning their activities to have a model that would serve as a basis in drafting their own national sign language legislation.

The right of deaf people to use sign language in legal, administrative, and juridical acts, the right to receive an education in sign language, the right to develop their full cultural identity, and the right to participate in all aspects of society without being discriminated against, marginalised, or excluded is a matter of human rights.

Summary of how many countries have already recognised their national sign language.

The World Federation of the Deaf has been collecting data from countries that have already obtained the recognition of their national sign language through a legal instrument. These results will be highlighted in this chapter.

There has been significant progress being made in a number of countries around the world toward recognising their national and/or regional sign language(s) and the cultural rights of deaf people.

“ Meaningful legal recognition of national sign languages leads to better enjoyment of human rights ”



Description of legal framework categories:

Legal systems around the world present differences and similarities as well as different approaches. De Meulder (2015)¹⁶ presented a classification of the different types of law which are used in this toolkit. As De Meulder has noted, this does not constitute a hierarchy or ranking, but rather a simple description of distinct legal structures. The importance is that the goal of legislation is that it

recognises sign language as a full language and that deaf people are entitled to it, and through this legal framework, linguistic and cultural rights are respected in all aspects of daily life, as have been analysed in the previous chapters. Remember that we have the right to express ourselves in our language, to receive a quality education in our language, and of course, we have the right to have accessible means to access information with qualified sign language interpreters.

Colour	Title	Description
Blue	Countries with Sign Language Recognition	Highlight all the countries that have any kind of sign language recognition. This recognition takes various forms and confers different rights in different countries.
Grey	Countries without Sign Language Recognition	Countries that have not yet achieved national-level legal recognition of their national sign language are depicted in this color. Some countries may have recognition on sub-national levels.
Orange	Constitutional Recognition	Countries that have achieved national sign language recognition at the Constitutional level.
Yellow	General Language Legislation	Countries that have included their national sign language in their general language legislation.
Turquoise	Sign Language Law or Act	Countries that have achieved legal recognition of their national sign language in the form of a law passed by the national legislative body.
Green	Sign Language Law or Act including other means of communication	Countries that have achieved the legal recognition of their national sign language in a law that also recognises other forms of communication used by deaf persons and usually includes communication used by deafblind persons. This type of recognition can be in the form of a law passed by a parliament or a decree or a governmental regulation.
Purple	National Language Council Recognition	Countries that have achieved legal recognition of their national sign language in legislation based on a functioning of a language council.
Red	Disability Legislation	Countries that have achieved legal recognition of their national sign language in the form of general disability legislation. This can be a law passed by a national legislative body or executive regulation.

In the resources part of this toolkit, see the full list of countries that have achieved legal recognition of their national sign language in alphabetical order.

¹⁶ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26191000>

Recommendations of what good legislation on sign language rights should include.

Legal systems around the world present differences and In this section we provide a list of the minimum standards that should figure in a legislation recognising your national sign language.

This is relevant in case if your government is working toward the recognition of the national sign language or wants to reform the existing legislation.

These are the themes that should be considered as an absolute minimum to reach:

- legal recognition and promotion of the national sign language,
- provisions on education for deaf students in their national sign language,
- teaching of the national sign language,
- preparation, funding and accreditation of national sign language interpreters,
- promotion of the linguistic and cultural identity of deaf people
- involvement of the deaf community in any decision-making processes concerning their national sign language

When designing your national sign language legislation, it is crucial to add references to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, its guiding principles as well as its key concepts such as non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation, accessibility and the linguistic status of national sign languages.

Below is a list of guiding concepts to be used to design a robust national sign language legislation.



Language policy and liberty

Sign languages official recognition and promotion

The process must be in accordance with minority languages and international conventions such as the CRPD. Legislation regarding the rights of sign language users should include the following guiding principles:

- Recognise and declare your national sign language (or sign languages if more than one) as cultural and linguistic rights of the deaf community.
- Ensure the realisation of basic principles guaranteed by the constitution related to the full enjoyment of human rights and prohibit discrimination on the grounds of language or disability. If discrimination occurs on those grounds, it is a breach of human rights.
- Address the right to sign language in a comprehensive legal approach involving the national constitutional, civil, criminal, and administrative law guaranteeing the full respect of human rights through sign languages, including sign language interpreters.
- Contain provisions ensuring that deaf people can use their national sign languages in justice systems through direct communication or via sign language interpreters.
- Contain provisions ensuring the monitoring of implementation of the national sign language law involving representative organisation(s) of deaf people.
- Contain provisions ensuring the full and sustained funding for the implementation of the sign language legislation.
- Highlighting the respect for dignity and belonging of the deaf community as part of a linguistic and cultural minority group.
- Recognition of the official status of the national sign languages of the country, benefitting the same rights and privileges as the other national official languages (if any). This means that deaf people must be able to use their sign language in both public and private spheres.
- Be able to receive public services from government agencies in national sign languages, either directly or with sign language interpreters that guarantee the exercise of their rights in all areas.

Equality and Non-discrimination

- Non discrimination- The legislation must include a clause on linguistic equality and the prohibition of discrimination, exclusion, or unreasonable disadvantaging on the grounds of language
- National sign language must be promoted and considered as a national cultural heritage, and deaf people should be recognized as promoters of this heritage, in charge of its preservation, documentation, study, dissemination, and revitalization.

Educational provisions

Educational provisions in education in sign language for deaf children

Education is a fundamental human right recognised in several international human rights instruments, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant for Economical, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Right of the Child (1979), among others. Quality and inclusive education for deaf children is also a right highlighted in Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Despite this, millions of deaf children, adolescents, and adults continue to be denied lifelong quality and inclusive educational opportunities. Furthermore, when offered, the quality of education is worse than that which is provided to other learners. The majority of these reasons may be attributed to social, linguistic, cultural, and access issues. One means to mitigate this issue is to include provisions on quality and inclusive education in the legislation.

The national sign language legislation has to include a chapter or part that is specifically devoted to the educational concerns of deaf people. Because this is one of the most significant components, it is essential that these provisions are drawn up with extreme care and precision so that there is no place for misunderstanding. The WFD has recommended a minimum set of considerations regarding education of deaf children in the Position Paper on Inclusive Education.

These are:

- Inclusion is an experience, not a placement.

Deaf learners have a unique need for instruction in sign language and opportunities to participate with their deaf peers in congregated settings that allow for linguistic and cultural development

WFD believes that to reach quality inclusive education for deaf children, the educational setting must fill **four criteria**:

- 1) Education must be provided in the national sign language(s) and national written language(s);
- 2) The school must follow the official governmental curriculum and maximise the learning potential of deaf children;
- 3) Teachers must master the national sign language(s) with a native-level proficiency;
- 4) Deaf children must be surrounded by their deaf peers and deaf adult role models.

Here we place the most important guidelines that this bill should have:

- Deaf children must have access to natural and spontaneous acquisition of national sign languages. They should be able to be around deaf signing role models in schooling and their families must have opportunities to access sign language education at the earliest possible opportunity. Language rich environments increase the chances for deaf children to thrive and reach their fullest potential as multilingual individuals.
- Education for deaf students must be of good quality, free, accessible, mandatory, and complete including early childhood education, primary and secondary education. There should be no kind of discrimination in education of any nature, including on the grounds of disability and or sign language usage.
- There should exist provisions to implement educational programs for deaf people who have not completed a full cycle of education and need to complete it. These provisions must also implement programs focused on achieving literacy for those who have not achieved both the learning of sign language and the written language aiming to access higher education having better chances of entering fair and inclusive labour markets.

- There should be adequate allocation of resources for teacher preparation, curriculum development materials in national sign language(s), resources for reasonable accommodation for all deaf students, resources to include deaf sign language models and qualified sign language interpreters when necessary.
- There should be provisions related to the development of educational materials for deaf students in the national sign languages, as well as documentation and expansion of registers in sign languages led by deaf signers.
- Educational provisions in times of crisis or emergency situations should include and foresee reasonable accommodations for deaf children in virtual education settings, also there should be provisions ensuring the continuity of accessible educational services in times of crisis.

Sign language Interpreters

Professional sign language interpretation preparation, certification, and accreditation

It is crucial to include provisions, or a chapter devoted to professional sign language interpreters. Poor sign language interpretation services are often experienced by deaf people. These services do not permit or ensure proper communication or full access to information.

Yet, the CRPD states that state parties are responsible to fund training and services of professional sign language interpreters. However, this responsibility is frequently overlooked, violating the rights of deaf people in light of the CRPD. The World Federation of the Deaf has issued the following recommendations as a minimum of considerations for sign language interpreters:

- The profile of the sign language interpreter and guide sign language interpreter guide (for DeafBlind individuals) should be clearly established so that their role, responsibilities, training, continuing education, certification, and accreditation are both mandatory and clearly defined.
- Some countries don't have professional sign language interpreter training programs. However, they have training programs which do not award degrees, perhaps run by deaf associations. If this is the case for your country, the sign language bill should clearly state the definitions of non-degreed sign language interpreter, the time frame for training, the evaluation they should undergo to be able to work and show the process they will have to undergo in training to become professional and fully certified interpreters.
- Guidelines should be established for the scope and obligation of sign language interpreters and guide interpreters in providing accessibility in the judicial system, broadcasting, public services, health services, emergency services and all other areas after the adoption of the bill.
- Provisions must be in place for the national, regional, and local governments to have the responsibility of funding positions for professional sign language interpreters in the various public services. In the same way, payment mechanisms should be in place for private entities providing services to the public. In some countries this is covered by a central government fund, in other countries the private entities cover this as part of their overall budget. Deaf consumers should not be responsible for paying for access to public services. The implementation of this should be progressive, ie: gradually increasing access over time, and further regulation or directives should be implemented.
- It must clearly establish that the National Association of the Deaf should be included in the evaluation and accreditation of professional sign language interpreters.

Language use and promotion of identity

Provisions that support deaf culture and the linguistic identity of the deaf community

- There should be guidelines to preserve and promote sign language as part of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the country through specific government funded plans and programs. These should be led by experts from the deaf community.
- States can undertake and adopt measures to promote cultural expressions from the deaf community by valuing its sign languages. Also, the national governing bodies promoting linguistic and cultural identities should include national sign languages in their mandates.
- There should be provisions ensuring minority groups are not denied the right to enjoy their culture and languages.

Access to information (include emergency situations)

Access to information and services in sign language including in emergencies

Information provided by public authorities must be accessible to all citizens, including deaf people. Sign language legislation should provide guidelines for governments to guarantee accessibility in all communications and services, including broadcasting, administrative services, public transportation, social services, telecommunications, water, and electric supply services, as well as other areas.

In times of potential danger, such as those brought on by natural or humanitarian disasters, armed conflict, climate change, or bio sanitary hazards, governments are obligated to make all information and communications available to the general public in the national sign language(s). The needs of deaf people should be considered while planning relief operations, evacuation efforts, emergency psychological assistance, emergency medical treatment, temporary refugee or victim housing, and any other initiatives intended for vulnerable groups.

Deaf community participation in decision making process

Deaf community participation in decision making processes regarding sign languages

Participation by members of the deaf community in the legislative process is seen as one of the elements that contribute to the favourable outcome of efforts to protect sign language rights. This stems from Article 4.3 of the CRPD.

It is essential that legislation governing sign language makes specific provisions involving the deaf community. The bill must guarantee procedures for the participation and inclusion of deaf people, through their representative organisations, in the implementation of the sign language bill. In some countries, this has been accomplished through the establishment of a national council on sign languages; in others, it has been accomplished through the establishment of an entity in charge of the national sign language that includes the participation of the deaf community. Another illustration can be found in the establishment of a provision compelling the government to reach an agreement with the deaf community on how to implement the law. A robust sign language legislation must outline the methods of engagement of the deaf community. The following are some standards that should be included in a law or act regarding sign language.

- Establish the obligation for the acting national government, regional and local governments, and their public authorities to consult the deaf community in all issues related to deaf persons, sign languages, and culture.
- Create or commission an entity, to lead the planning, study, dissemination, revitalization, preservation, protection of the national sign language(s) and deaf community empowerment.
- The legislation should include an accountability or reporting mechanism on an annual basis in order to best monitor progress, compliance and transparency in achieving the rights to sign language for everyone. This should be made in both the national signed and written languages.

Legal Capacity

Deaf persons and legal capacity

- There should be provisions regarding the legal capacity of deaf people, so there is no doubt on this matter. Deaf people should have the benefit of the freedom of expression and opinion in their national sign language. Furthermore, they must have the right to use their national sign language to exercise their legal capacity to self-determination by undertaking any civil legal procedures such as contracting, obtaining a driving licence or getting married.

When lobbying for a sign language bill, it is in the best interest of the deaf community for the bill to be as exhaustive as possible, according to the country's needs. This means it should include as many provisions covering different aspects of the inclusion of deaf people in society as possible. Issues such as bilingual education for deaf people, sign language interpreters, sign language development and research, access to public information, monitoring, and implementation mechanisms, if not already in other laws, should be codified into law in this sign language bill.

It is crucial that your organisation takes into consideration the fact that the advocacy process will involve extensive negotiations, back-and-forth discussions with politicians and decision makers. Much time will be spent reading the proposed bill and making corrections, and participating in public consultations at different levels of government.

Therefore, prior to beginning the process of lobbying for sign language legislation, you and your organisation should do an analysis of all of the issues and subjects that should be included in the legislation. After completing this list, determine which topics are non-negotiable and call for particular wording to be included in the law.

It is important for National Deaf Associations to explore the language policy and legal landscape of their country and make the decisions which issues should be included in the sign language bill.

Case studies of sign language legislation

In this section of the toolkit, we will present a review of five countries and their laws (one per continent), each of which we believe has some provisions which exemplify best practices in enacting national sign language legislation. No law fully exemplifies best practices. Some provisions in some laws could be bettered, but these laws were selected to highlight some provisions that can be used by other countries as best practice.

We will focus on the most important provisions in each of these countries. Each country's analysis takes into consideration the following aspects:

- An analysis of the background and objectives of the law
- Language policy and liberty
- Equality and non-discrimination
- Policy on the use of the sign language and promotion of cultural identity
- Educational provisions in education in sign languages for deaf children
- Professional sign language interpreter training, certification, and accreditation
- Access to information and services in sign language during emergency situations
- Deaf community participation in the decision making process.

You may look up the material that has been provided here in the bibliography, which is also where you can get a link to review the complete law.

Africa - Kenya



In 2010 Kenya enacted a new constitution and mentioned Kenyan Sign Language in three different articles. This Constitution recognised Kenyan Sign Language as a language as indigenous language under article 7(3)(b) that textually says:

“Promote the development and use of indigenous languages, Kenyan Sign language, Braille and other communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities.”

Moreover, in article 54 (1)(d) it states that a person with any disability is entitled to:

“to use Sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication”

And lastly in article 120 (1) of that same constitution, Kenyan Sign Language is considered as an official and working language for the Kenyan Parliament:

“The official languages of Parliament shall be Kiswahili, English and Kenyan Sign language, and the business of Parliament may be conducted in English, Kiswahili and Kenyan Sign language.”

This advocacy work for including Kenyan Sign language in the constitution was made possible through the financial support from the Nippon Foundation, and vigorous advocacy by the Kenyan Deaf community under the Kenya National Association of the Deaf (KNAD).

Its implementation took longer than expected and Deaf people in Kenya still presented difficulties to access qualified KSL interpretation, having difficulties getting a job, accessing education, receiving public information and others. For this reason, the Kenya National Association of the Deaf with support from other organisations like MIUSA and the National Association of the Deaf from the United States, who supported them with legal training sessions and supported them during the process with the objective to have a more comprehensive legislation. This process demanded a lot of work, cooperation, trading, and consulting with the deaf people and sign language interpreters. The KNAD, hired a legal drafter, who attended all meetings and training and formulated a proposal following recommendations from participants. After a bill was drafted, they undertook validation meetings to receive feedback, opinions and suggestions with both the deaf community and local authorities.

This intensive work, finally paid off with the enactment of the Kenya Sign Language Bill of 2019¹⁷ which is now the 2021 Kenya Sign Language Bill¹⁸.

This Bill has two sections and a total of 19 articles dedicated exclusively to the Kenyan Sign Language.

Objectives of the law:

The KSL Bill 2021 has seven objectives, and they ensure fundamental rights for deaf Kenyan people in society. They are aligned with the general principles of the CRPD and the relevant provisions on KSL of the 2010 Kenyan Constitution from 2010 which equalise the rights of deaf people in Kenya by granting the necessary means for their full participation.

The Objectives of the Bill are the following:

- (a) ensure that persons who are deaf or hard of hearing integrate into society;**
- (b) protect and promote the right to justice and fair administration action with respect to persons who are deaf and hard of hearing**
- (c) promote access to quality education by learners who are deaf or hard of hearing;**
- (d) provide for the recognition and regulation of sign language interpreters;**
- (e) promote access to public services by deaf persons;**
- (f) promote the inclusion and diversity in the workplace by creating opportunities for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing to compete for employment opportunities; and**
- (g) promote literacy development of learners who are deaf or hard of hearing.**

Language policy, liberty, and identity:

Language Policy of the Kenya Sign Language Bill, first of all, is mentioned in the first part of the document citing the Constitution calling for the promotion and development of the use of Kenyan Sign Language for both education and for legal capacity (legal proceedings) of deaf persons.

Additionally, in Articles 4(1) and (2) the KSL Bill provides clear and direct recognition of the language used by deaf and hard of hearing persons in Kenya which is KSL for both expressing themselves and communicating with others.

According to this provision, Kenyan deaf people have the freedom to communicate in KSL. An important aspect of this law is that it grants deaf people the responsibility for the development and preservation of the Kenyan sign language. Deaf people must be consulted in any aspect related to their language. This is a crucial feature of this legislation.

The article in mention is:

- 4. (1) The Kenya sign language is the language used by the deaf or hard of hearing in Kenya for expressing themselves and communicating with others.**
- (2) The community of deaf persons in Kenya shall have the right to use and preserve Kenyan Sign Language.**
- (g) promote literacy development of learners who are deaf or hard of hearing.**

This Article establishes that the preferred language of deaf people is KSL, being the central part of their identity. This provision lays out the responsibility to preserve and promote KSL.

^{17 18} <http://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2019-09/The%20Kenyan%20Sign%20Language%20Bill%2C%202019.pdf>

Equality and non-discrimination:

The 2021 KSL Bill does not specifically mention equality and non-discrimination. However, in the final section of the law, it recalls article 10 (2) of the Constitution that specifically mentions the principles of equality and non-discrimination as part of Kenya's national governance values. Therefore, no person, including deaf people, can be discriminated against and has the right to be treated the same as others.

Deaf people are entitled and protected in the use of their sign language. Therefore, authorities must respect and implement the right to equality on linguistic matters in all aspects of life such as the access to administrative services, judicial system, or public education for example.

Educational provisions in sign language for deaf children:

The 2021 KSL Bill establishes various provisions regarding the education of deaf people. It also points out various measures so that deaf students learn the dominant language of the country with the support and adjustments to achieve it as needed. Likewise, the Bill also dictates that for achieving this, the state will guarantee having qualified teachers for the teaching of both the majority language which is Kiswahili and the Kenyan sign language. According to that disposition, both languages are treated as equally important in the education of deaf children.

Additionally, the KSL Bill establishes the obligation to use funds for the development of instructional materials including digital materials for the learning of Kenyan sign language, which must also contain English as a learning medium. Deaf students should have access to three languages: Kiswahili, English and Kenyan Sign Language, so they will become multilingual.

Another important aspect of the law regarding education is that it states that teacher training entities will include Kenyan sign language courses and courses to train sign language interpreters as part of the curriculum.

The Bill also mandates that there should be sufficient teacher placements for teachers of deaf and hard of hearing schools, meaning that deaf children will have trained professionals in the schools they attend. Finally, the 2021 KSL Bill mandates the design of a scheme for families of deaf children and or their caregivers to attend Kenyan Sign Language Classes. This is truly important as a means of promoting their identity and culture Education articles:

7. The cabinet secretary for education shall—

- (a) ensure that deaf learners and learners who are hard of hearing are taught in a manner which they are able to understand and use the dominant language of instruction in the education system;**
- (b) ensure that teachers of deaf children assist learners to acquire sufficient competence in the use of the English and Kiswahili language including ensuring that Kenya sign language is taught in sign form and not written form;**
- (c) ensure development of supportive instructional materials for the education of deaf learners and learners who are hard of hearing;**
- (d) set aside adequate funds for the development of educational materials for deaf learners and learners who are hard of hearing;**
- (e) ensure that Kenya sign language in digital form contains inscription in standard English as a medium of instruction;**
- (f) institutions of education for deaf people cater for formal and non-formal education, skills development and self-reliance for deaf learners as appropriate;**
- (g) ensure that institutions offering teaching training offer, as part of their curriculum, courses on Kenya sign language and interpretation;**
- (h) ensure that there are sufficient number of placements for teachers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and who are attending recognized schools; and**

- (i) establish a scheme for the provision of Kenya Sign Language classes to— (i) the parents, siblings and grandparents of a child who is deaf; and*
- (ii) other persons who may serve as a guardian or primary care giver to a child who is deaf or hard of hearing.*

Professional sign language interpreter preparation, certification, and accreditation:

The 2021 KSL Bill has several articles detailing the scope, profile and work of sign language interpreters. Sign language interpreters will have to become professional, accredited and follow a work code of conduct as shown as follows:

9. (1) The Cabinet Secretary for matters related to persons with disabilities shall, in consultation with members of the deaf community, develop a national system of standards, accreditation and procedures for Kenya sign

language interpretation.

Standards, accreditation, and procedures.

(2) For purposes of subsection

(1) the cabinet secretary shall—

- (a) regulate the provision of Kenya sign language interpretation;**
- (b) establish additional procedures and criteria for registration of Kenya sign language interpreters;**
- (c) establish and maintain a register of Kenya Sign Language interpreters; and**
- (d) determine the education, training and qualifications required for a person to be registered as a Kenya sign language interpreter.**

10. (1) A person who wishes to provide Kenya sign language interpretation services shall apply for registration by the Ministry in accordance with the criteria and procedures determined by the Cabinet Secretary under section 8. Registration of sign language interpreters.

(2) An application under subsection (1) shall be made in a form prescribed in Regulations by the Cabinet Secretary.

11. (1) The Cabinet Secretary shall appoint a public officer within the Ministry as the registrar Kenya sign language interpreters.

(2) The Cabinet Secretary shall, in consultation with the most representative registered association for sign language interpreters, determine the conditions and qualifications for registration as a sign language interpreter.

12. (1) The registrar shall keep and maintain a register in which the name of every person registered by the Cabinet Secretary to provide sign language interpretation services shall be entered showing-

- (a) the date of the entry in the register;**
 - (b) the address of the person registered;**
 - (c) the qualifications of the person; and**
 - (d) such other particulars as the Cabinet Secretary may prescribe. Register of sign language interpreters.**
- (2) A person whose name is entered upon the register under subsection (1) shall inform the registrar of any changes in the particulars set out under subsection (1).**

13. (1) The registrar shall issue a certificate of registration to a person whose name is entered into the register. Certificate of registration.

(2) Where the name of a person is removed from the register, the registrar shall give notice to that person, or if the person is dead, to that person's legal personal representative, requiring surrender of the certificate of registration to the registrar.

(3) A certificate of registration issued by the registrar shall be valid and shall remain in force for one year.

14. A person may, during normal office hours and on payment of the prescribed fee, inspect the register and any document relating to an entry and may obtain from the registrar a copy or extract from the register of any such document. Inspection of register.

15. (1) The Cabinet Secretary shall, in consultation with the most representative registered association of sign language interpreters, publish in the Gazette a code of conduct for sign language interpreters. Code of conduct.

(2) The code published under subsection (1) shall act as a guide for the provision of quality sign language interpretation services.

(3) A person who contravenes the provisions of the code under subsection 1 may be removed from the register of sign language interpreters.

Access to information and services in sign language during emergency:

The 2021 KSL Bill only has provisions regarding accessibility in public services and information. There are no mentions of access during emergencies or crises.

5. (d) information relating to public services shall be made accessible to the deaf community through the use of appropriate means including Kenya sign language.

Deaf community participation in decision making process regarding sign languages:

In article 5 (a), the 2021 KSL Bill mentions specifically that members of the deaf community will always have to be consulted in all decisions public authorities take on sign languages:

"5. The national government and county governments when exercising their powers and functions under the Constitution or any other written law shall, so far as is reasonably practical, ensure that—

(a) members of the deaf community are consulted on all matters related to the development, use and promotion of Kenya sign language;

(b) Kenya sign language is used in the promotion to the public of government services and in the provision of information to the public"

This provision is aligned with the principles of the CRPD with regard to implementation of legislation and policies that mandates that state parties closely consult and actively involve organisations of persons with disabilities. Deaf people through their representative organisations are the ones who best know issues related to sign languages and their communication and information needs. Therefore, they are best to support their government.

With this, the Kenyan government will have to implement the necessary means to involve the deaf community in the design, development and implementation of all dispositions stated in the Bill. The Kenyan deaf community through their representative organisation will have to respond and advise the government in the best interests of deaf persons and Kenyan Sign Language.

Furthermore, the 2021 KSL Bill, in that same article 5 (c) the government mandates that to guarantee active participation of the deaf community, they will assume the costs related to providing accessibility as required by deaf people:

(b) Kenya sign language is used in the promotion to the public of government services and in the provision of information to the public"

South America - Colombia



The Colombian Congress in 1996 approved the law No. 324 dictating regulations regarding deaf people. It was an important law because it explained that the Colombian Sign Language (at the time it was called manual language) is the natural language of deaf people. Secondly, it obliged the government to guarantee accessibility in television broadcasting programs, education of deaf children, and the responsibility of the government to fund sign language interpreters.

The Colombian deaf leaders from FENASCOL (the national association of deaf people) and other organisations supported the government initiatives to implement the law and continued advocating for more comprehensive legislation regarding deaf persons, sign language, education, and others. Since law 324, the following laws have had stronger regulations regarding the rights to sign languages: No. 982 in 2005- regulations in favour of deaf community, No. 1618 in 2013- regulations to guarantee full exercise of rights for persons with disabilities and No. 1804 in 2016- state policy for integral development of children since birth. The last one is the Law No. 2049 of 2020 which approved the creation of the National Council on Sign Language Planning and recognised 23 September as Colombian Sign Language Day same as International Day of Sign languages.

So, the work towards sign language recognition has been an ongoing process, with several pieces of legislation approved strengthening the importance of Sign Language in deaf people's lives.

Objectives of the law:

The main objectives of Law No. 324 are:

First, the legal recognition of Colombian Sign Language as a language used by deaf people. Second, guaranteeing accessibility to television media with sign language interpreters. Third, educating deaf women. Deaf students have the conditions to be able to learn on equal terms with other students. Ultimately, the Colombian government will oversee and guarantee funding for the payment of Colombian sign language interpreters wherever needed in which they are required.

Language policy and liberty:

This law and the following laws approved in Colombia regarding Colombian Sign Language, allow and guarantee absolute respect for the use of the language and the right to learn it from an early age. This law also sets a precedent obliging the Government to protect and provide families with a deaf child to necessary support services. Thus, they can receive guidance, education, and sign language learning at an early age.

Equality and non-discrimination:

Law 324 does not establish any specific provision regarding equality and non-discrimination. However, it is implicit in the recognition of the Colombian sign language for deaf people. In the regulations and laws that have been passed years after Law 324, there are specific articles related to this issue.

Additionally, Law 982 of 2005, states the following regarding non-discrimination:

Article 34. Any discrimination against a signing deaf or deafblind by virtue of his linguistic or cultural identity, or of a speaking or semi-lingual deaf person by virtue of his deaf condition will be sanctioned in accordance with the corresponding legislation, even though the nature of the type of discrimination is not provided for in this law..

Policy on language use and promotion of identity:

This law sets a precedent obliging the Government to protect and provide families with a deaf child access to necessary support services. That is, the government must provide services for families of deaf children, receive guidance, learn to sign the national sign language, and deaf children must access education, and learn the national sign language at an early age. This achieves the rights of deaf children to grow up in sign language environments and with families that receive support, thus this will allow that deaf children to develop their linguistic identity and access education in sign language. This is then further reinforced in the following laws after Law 324 and with the enactment of the CRPD.

Law No. 982 that was enacted in 2005 clearly states the following:

Article 21. Respecting their linguistic and communicative particularity, the deaf and deafblind person will have the inalienable right to access a form of communication, be it oralism or Colombian Sign Language, as the two forms with which they can be rehabilitated a person; respecting the characteristics of deafness and its possibilities. Even if it is a minor, the State will ensure that no one deprives him of this right."

Article 25. The National Government will institute programs so that hearing parents of deaf and deafblind children who use Sign Language to communicate can have time to learn Colombian Sign Language and live with the deaf and deafblind community. These programs will include the financial support that is necessary.

Those provisions grant specific linguistic rights of deaf persons in Colombia.

Educational provisions in sign language for deaf children:

Law No. 324 establishes that the government will progressively guarantee and provide the necessary resources and support for the education of deaf people. Several years later, this law was strengthened with laws No. 982 and No. 2049 which have more clear provisions regarding education of deaf students.

Professional sign language interpreter preparation, certification, and accreditation:

Law No. 324 makes a breakthrough mandating the government to recognize and give resources for the recruitment and funding of sign language interpreters. It states that this service will be implemented progressively.

Law No. 982 from 2005 has several articles related to this issue, and provides that sign language interpreters must receive proper training and be qualified and accredited to serve. The government is responsible for overseeing this in

conjunction with the deaf community through alliances as stated below:

Article 4. The State will guarantee and provide the assistance of suitable interpreters and guide interpreters so that this is a means through which deaf and deafblind people can access all the services that the Constitution confers on them as Colombian citizens. To this end, the State will organise, through official entities and through agreements with associations of interpreters and associations of the deaf, the presence of interpreters and guide interpreters, for access to the services.

Access to information and services in sign language during emergency:

Law No. 324 and other laws that were passed after that do not include any specific article regarding access to information in times of crisis or emergency. However, Law No. 982 of 2005 indicates that it is the government's obligation to provide official and television information in an accessible manner for deaf people, as well as orders the obligation to maintain accessible telephone services as it is stated in the following articles:

Article 15. Every establishment or dependency of the State and of the territorial entities with access to the public, must have signage, notices, visual information, and visual alarm systems suitable for recognition by deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing people.

Article 16. In any public service announcement in which any environmental sound, sound effects, dialogue or verbal message is used, which is transmitted by the national government channel, the information access systems for the deaf must be used, such as the closed caption or hidden text, the subtitling, and the interpretation service in Sign Language, in accordance with the regulations issued by the National Government for this purpose.

Article 17. The National Government, through the Ministry of Communications and the National Television Commission, must guarantee television as a public service to the deaf and deafblind, for which they will establish collaborative agreements with open channels at the national, regional level, or local, tending to implement the provisions established in the previous article.

Deaf community participation in decision making process regarding sign languages:

Since the adoption of Law No. 2049 in 2020 which approved the creation of the National Council on Sign Language Planning, this council must be composed of half plus one deaf persons from the following institutions, it is important to note, that they must be active users of Colombian sign language:

Two (2) representatives of organisations of deaf persons, who communicate and be a user of Colombian sign language.

Two (2) representatives of deaf students from institutions of higher education who are active and who communicate through the LSC.

One (1) representative of deaf graduates from higher education institutions, who communicates and is a user of sign language.

This Council has the mandate to integrate and recognise the linguistic rights of the Colombian deaf community and guarantee equal opportunities for all deaf persons in Colombia. This Council will be responsible for designing and ordering the implementation of sign language policies.

Asia - South Korea



South Korea began advocating for the legal recognition of Korean Sign Language from 2008 onwards. In December 2015, the National Assembly in Seoul passed the Korean Sign Language Act which was then enacted in February 2016 (Act No. 13978).

Objectives of the law:

The KSL Act has the sole and important objective of granting official status of Korean Sign Language as a national language. Therefore, deaf people are granted linguistic rights. This Act seeks precisely to improve the quality of life of deaf people by fully respecting their language.

Article 1. (purpose)

The purpose of this Act is to improve the right to language and quality of life of deaf and the users of the Korean Sign Language, by declaring that Korean sign language is the inherent language of the deaf, which has the same status with the Korean national language, and by laying the foundation for development and preservation of Korean sign language.

Language policy and liberty:

The Korean Sign Language Act is clear regarding its status as an official language. It grants absolute rights for deaf people to use and communicate in Korean Sign Language. Throughout the Act, strong provisions are observed regarding respect for sign language, language policy, and the right of deaf people to communicate in Korean Sign Language.

Equality and non-discrimination:

There are no articles on this issue.

Policy on language use and promotion of identity:

There are several articles in the Korean Sign Language Act related to language policies and the promotion of identity of deaf people. These are found in the definitions. It is the government's responsibility to respect the identity, culture and language of deaf people, in the formulation of plans and programs for deaf people, among others. This Act even clearly

establishes that Korean sign language is considered as part of a linguistic heritage and it must be studied, promoted, and disseminated correctly through a framework plan every five years, which will be deliberated by experts in Korean Sign Language.

Educational provisions in sign language for deaf children:

The Korean Sign Language Act has an article dedicated to Korean Sign Language education. This establishes the mandate to state and local governments to provide additional regulations for the implementation of a bilingual education for deaf students achieving mastery of both languages: Korean Sign Language and the Korean language:

Article 11. (Korean Sign Language Education, etc.)

- (1) The State and local governments shall create educational environment in which the deaf, etc. can improve proficiency in Korean sign language and the Korean language.**
- (2) The State and local governments shall, with respect to educating the deaf, etc., devise the policies necessary for the deaf to learn Korean sign language from the early stage of disability.**
- (3) The State and local governments shall ensure that Korean sign language is used at schools for the deaf as a teaching and learning language on an equal footing with the Korean language.**
- (4) The State and local governments shall give support so that, with respect to education at schools for the deaf, education using Korean sign language and study through Korean sign language can be seamlessly realized.**

Professional sign language interpreter preparation, certification, and accreditation:

Article 16 of the Korean Sign Language Act establishes various provisions regarding the interpretation of Korean Sign Language. These provisions have to do with the obligation to provide sign interpreters, training, and accreditation:

Article 16. (Sign Language Interpretation)

- (1) The State and local governments shall provide sign language interpretation for the deaf, etc. in need of sign language interpretation.**
- (2) The State and local governments shall provide sign language interpretation, if deemed necessary with respect to public events; judicial, administrative, and other procedures; use of public facilities; public broadcasting and other cases deemed necessary for public interest.**
- (3) The State and local governments shall provide sign language interpretation services so that the deaf, etc. can avoid suffering disadvantages in all job-related activities such as job seeking, vocational training, work, etc.**
- (4) The State and local governments shall endeavour to foster manpower specialising in sign language interpretation.**
- (5) The State and local governments may establish and operate centres for sign language interpretation among community rehabilitation facilities for persons with disabilities under Article 58 (1) 2 of the Act on Welfare of Persons with Disabilities.**

Access to information and services in sign language during emergency:

In the Korean Sign Language Act, there is no specific article regarding access to information services in times of crisis or emergency. However, there is another law of 1997 on disability called "Act on Welfare of persons with disabilities No. 5332" that provides that national and local governments may request accessibility in television:

Article 35. (Sign Language and Captioning)

Paragraph 1. The national and local governments may request a head of broadcasting station to televise sign language and captioned news, or to rebroadcast such media on national important affairs for persons with hearing disabilities.

This provision could be strengthened in the future adding provisions for accessibility in general or in crisis or emergency situations

Deaf community participation in decision making process regarding sign languages:

The Korean Sign Language Act establishes that the entity in charge of implementing the law is the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. They are responsible for developing a five-year plan and its implementation. The law does not inform or provide how deaf civil society can participate, it only indicates that they will have the support of experts in Korean sign language. Yet, it does not indicate whether they will be hired, or whether the deaf community will participate in decision-making processes regarding Korean Sign Language.

Europe - Bulgaria



The Bulgarian Sign Language Act was unanimously passed in Parliament in January 2021.

The Bulgarian Deaf Community with the Sofia University and other allies advocated for it since 2019 which was preceded by the research on Bulgarian Sign Language during 2016-2018.

This Act consists of 5 chapters with a total of 29 articles and transitional provisions. All articles of this Act entered into force immediately in 2021, except for Article 11 that is related to education which will enter into force in 2026 as its implementation will be complemented with additional regulations.

Objectives of the law:

The objective of this Act is mandated in the third section of the law with seven provisions beginning with the recognition of the Bulgarian Sign Language as an equal and independent language for the deaf and deafblind persons in Bulgaria as it is stated in article 1:

Article 1. (1) *This law regulates the public relations, connected with the recognition of the Bulgarian sign language as a natural independent language and with the respect of the right of the deaf and deafblind persons to expression and of information through the Bulgarian sign language.*

Language policy and liberty:

Deaf and deafblind persons, according to this Act, can fully express themselves in Bulgarian Sign Language.

This law, additionally recognises the culture and identity of deaf and deafblind persons in two articles, meaning that they can access to sign language an early age:

Article 3. (2) *The specifics of the Bulgarian sign language and the culture and the identity of the community of the deaf persons in the Republic of Bulgaria must be respected and preserved.*

Article 4. *Every person has the right to express himself through the Bulgarian sign language, to use it and to study it.*

Article 7. (1) *recognition of the Bulgarian sign language as a natural independent language;*

(3) *Recognition of the cultural and linguistic identity of the community of deaf persons and formation of attitudes for respect for them through the Bulgarian sign language*

Equality and non-discrimination:

This law doesn't have specific articles that mention equality and non-discrimination directly. However, there is a mention to remove communication barriers related to sign language use, and that they have the right to access all spheres of public life, with this it is understood that non-discrimination by language is implied from the context.

Article 1 (2) *The law shall create conditions for the removal of any restrictions in the communication of the deaf and blind-deaf persons and in the use and access to information through the Bulgarian sign language.*

Article 6. (5) *equal access to all spheres of public life through the Bulgarian sign language.*

Policy on language use and promotion of identity:

In the Bulgarian Sign Language Act, there are several articles referring to sign language as the official language of deaf and deafblind people. It recognises their right to affirm their identity and culture.

Article 6. *The main principles of the law are:*

- 1. *Equal access to information and communication;***
- 2. *Equal access to quality education through the Bulgarian sign language;***
- 3. *Preservation and affirmation of the culture and the identity of the community of the deaf persons;***
- 4. *Development and popularisation of the Bulgarian sign language;***
- 5. *Equal access to all spheres of public life through the Bulgarian sign language.***

This act, in its article 11, also promotes the learning of Bulgarian Sign Language by students that are not deaf or deafblind, as part of the curriculum in optional school hours. This will promote positive interactions in school settings and more hearing persons will also be learning Bulgarian Sign Language.

11. (4) *For the students without hearing loss training for acquiring additional training in Bulgarian sign language may be carried out in the optional school hours, and for the children without hearing loss - training for learning the Bulgarian sign language in additional forms of pedagogical interaction.*

Educational provisions in sign language for deaf children:

There are several articles of the Bulgarian Sign Language Act related to education. It is one of the most important aspects of the law and the one that has dedicated the most articles. It explains the importance for deaf students to have access to an education using their sign language through their lifespan. Also, the law mandates children to learn Bulgarian Sign Language and have a specific course in their studies as can be seen as follows:

Article 7. (4) *Formation of sustainable attitudes and motivation for lifelong learning and for the use of the Bulgarian sign language in order to ensure equal opportunities for the deaf and blind-deaf persons for their full inclusion and participation in public life;*

(5) *Application of the Bulgarian sign language in the system of pre-school and school education and of higher education;*

Article 8. *In the kindergartens, the schools, and the centers for support for personal development provide conditions for studying, mastering and using the Bulgarian sign language.*

Article 11. (1) *For the purposes of the education and the communication in the special schools of students with sensory disabilities -hard of hearing, the Bulgarian sign language shall be used.*

(2) In the special schools for students with sensory disabilities for the deaf students, studying in the schools of the system of the pre-school and school education, training in Bulgarian sign language shall be conducted as a special subject.

(3) For the deaf children and for the blind-deaf children according to the degree of the disturbance of the sight and / or hearing in the kindergartens shall be conducted training for studying of the Bulgarian sign language in a special educational direction.

Additionally, the Act has articles related to the importance of schoolteachers to become fluent in Bulgarian Sign Language and to be taught by professional teachers of Bulgarian Sign Language.

Lastly, in article 21, specifically mentions that in higher education, will access services to Bulgarian Sign Language interpreters, additionally to the number of hours that each person is entitled to:

Article 21. (2) The deaf and blind-deaf students and doctoral students in the process of their education for acquiring higher education, except for the provided limit, have the right to additional use of translation services in Bulgarian sign language up to 60 hours per semester.

Professional sign language interpreter preparation, certification, and accreditation:

The Bulgarian Sign Language Act has a specific chapter dedicated to the professionalisation and profile of sign language interpreters. Bulgarian Sign Language interpreters must be professional and undergo an accreditation process in order to be authorised to work.

The interpreters that have achieved accreditation will be listed in a public listing so that they can be contacted to provide interpreting services.

Article 16. (1) A translator from and into Bulgarian sign language may be an able-bodied natural person of Bulgarian citizenship or with the right of permanent residence in the Republic of Bulgaria, who possesses a professional qualification or qualification in part of the profession The list of professions for vocational education and training under Art. 6 of the Vocational Education and Training Act.

(2) Translation services from and into Bulgarian sign language by the order of this chapter shall be performed by persons included in the List of Bulgarian Sign Language Translators.

Article 17. (1) The list of translators in Bulgarian sign language shall be kept and maintained by the Agency for People with Disabilities.

(2) The list under para. 1 shall contain: 1. identification number of the translator; 2. the date of entry of the translator; 3. name and surname of the translator; settlement in which the current address of the translator is located; 5. telephone number and / or e-mail address of the translator; 6. hourly range during which the service can be provided by the translator; 7. Preferred areas of sign language interpretation.

(3) The list shall be published on the website of the Agency for People with Disabilities in compliance with the normative requirements for personal data protection.

Article 18. (1) Any person, who wishes to provide translation services from and in Bulgarian sign language, shall submit personally or through a person authorised by him to the Agency for the people with disabilities an application for entering in the list under art. 17. The application is in a form approved by the Executive Director of the Agency for People with Disabilities.

(2) The application shall be accompanied by a certificate for acquired degree of professional qualification, respectively a certificate for acquired qualification in part of the profession "Translator from and into Bulgarian sign language".

Access to information and services in sign language during emergency:

Deaf and deafblind people in Bulgaria, as has been pointed out in previous articles, have the right to impart information and express themselves in Bulgarian Sign Language. In this regard, the Act states that they will always have access to all government agencies and government bodies through sign language interpreters. Furthermore, the Act gives an additional number of hours per year in which they have the right to have sign language interpreters for when they need it in different places including ministry of interior, health, social services among others.

Article 21. (1) *The deaf and deafblind persons shall have the right to gratuitous translation service in Bulgarian sign language up to 120 hours annual limit.*

(2) *The deaf and blind-deaf students and doctoral students in the process of their education for acquiring higher education, except for the provided limit, have the right to additional use of translation services in Bulgarian sign language up to 60 hours per semester.*

The number of hours for free translation service in Bulgarian sign language shall be determined for each calendar year in accordance with the limit and in proportion to the term of validity of the expert decision of the TEMC or the NEMC, or of the remaining months after the granting of the translation service. 1, in Bulgarian sign language in case of: 2. hospitalisation in medical establishments for hospital care and in rendering emergency medical care;

Article 24. (1) *The deaf and blind-deaf persons, for whom a translation service is provided by the order of art. 22 and 23, shall exercise their right to receive a gratuitous translation service in Bulgarian sign language through translators selected by them from the list.*

(2) *In the cases the respective institution shall provide translation service to the deaf and blind-deaf person through a translator from the list.*

Article 25. *The state institutions and the bodies of the local self-government shall be obliged to provide translation into Bulgarian sign language outside the provided limit*

There are no clear and direct dispositions regarding public broadcasting information, or access to information during emergency situations. However, the Act clearly establishes, as mentioned, articles stating that Bulgarian Sign Language is a right of deaf and deafblind people, so that with this they can demand respect for their rights.

Deaf community participation in decision making process regarding sign languages:

There are two specific articles of importance within the Bulgarian Sign Language Act which make provisions regarding the partitioning of the deaf community. The first is found in the articles related to education in which special schools can and should interact with the legally organised deaf and deafblind community. This highlights the importance they give to deaf and deafblind students having closeness and interaction with linguistic models.

The second is a specific provision that orders the establishment of a Bulgarian Sign Language Council and in which it specifies to have five deaf and/or deafblind members out of a total of 14 members.

This would make it possible to guarantee that the deaf community has an active participation in the linguistic policies on sign language in Bulgaria.

Article 10. (3) *In carrying out the activities, the institutions may interact with organisations of and for the hearing impaired and of the deafblind persons, registered by the order of the Law for the non-profit legal entities as legal entities for public benefit activity.*

Article 27. (1) *A Council for Bulgarian Sign Language shall be established at the Minister of Education and Science.*

(2) *The Council is an advisory body that assists the Minister of Education and Science in the implementation of the activities related to the development of the Bulgarian sign language.*

(3) The Council shall consist of 14 members and shall include: 1. two representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science and one representative of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy; 2. two habilitated lecturers from the academic community - linguist and special pedagogue; 3. one representative of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; 4. five representatives of the community of deaf people and of deafblind people; 5. one representative of a special school for students with sensory disabilities - hearing impairment; 6. two translators in Bulgarian sign language.

Oceania - New Zealand



Advocacy work began in the early 2003 with consultations on a Bill from the Office for Disability Issues and representatives from the deaf community in several spaces. After that the government agreed for a bill and further consultations took place. Once the bill was introduced in parliament, it followed the regular consultations, parliament readings until it was passed and received royal assent respectively.

In 2006, the New Zealand Sign Language Act was passed, making New Zealand Sign Language to become and recognised as an official language of New Zealand.

Objectives of the law:

The NZSL Act has as its main objectives the legal recognition of the sign language used by deaf people in New Zealand. Significantly, the act also grants legal capacity to deaf people to use NZSL. The Act aims to establish the competencies of sign language interpreters and how NZSL will be promoted and used as stated in the following article.

Article 3.: Purpose

The purpose of this Act is to promote and maintain the use of New Zealand Sign Language by—

- (a) Declaring New Zealand Sign Language to be an official language of New Zealand; and***
- (b) Providing for the use of New Zealand Sign Language in legal proceedings; and***
- (c) Empowering the making of regulations setting competency standards for the interpretation in legal proceedings of New Zealand Sign Language; and***
- (d) Stating principles to guide government departments in the promotion and use of New Zealand Sign Language.***

Language policy and liberty:

Language policy in the New Zealand Sign Language Act is explicitly stated in several articles that establish the scope of the right to use NZSL.

The legislation begins by pointing out and giving official status to the NZSL. Then, it describes the language and the people who use it, and finally the meaning and the scope of the official recognition

Interpretation: New Zealand Sign Language or NZSL means the visual and gestural language that is the first or preferred language in New Zealand of the distinct linguistic and cultural group of people who are deaf.

Article 6. New Zealand Sign Language to be an official language of New Zealand.

New Zealand Sign Language is declared to be an official language of New Zealand.

Article 8. Effect of recognition

(2) Nothing in section 6 or section 7—

(a) affects any right that any person has, otherwise than by virtue of those sections, to seek, receive, or impart any communication in NZSL

Equality and non-discrimination:

The New Zealand Sign Language Act does not have a specific article that dictates specific provisions on equality and non-discrimination. However, it does indicate and reiterate that the NZSL is the official language of deaf people for all types of communication or interaction.

Policy on language use and promotion of identity:

The Act does not have articles that develop in depth on the use of the language and the promotion of the identity and culture of deaf people. However, it directs the government that they should always consult with the deaf community on anything related to the NZSL.

Educational provisions in sign language for deaf children:

The Act does not have any specific articles on the education of deaf people.

However, a year after the Act that officially recognized the NZSL came out, in 2007, the Ministry of Education issued the new national curriculum where the guidelines for the education of deaf people were established. There, it points out that the NZSL is the medium of instruction for deaf people and that deaf people should grow up and be educated in bilingual spaces.

Professional sign language interpreter preparation, certification, and accreditation:

The Act recognizing the NZSL states in its definitions (interpretation) what a sign language interpreter means. On the other hand, it orders and commissions the government to develop specific regulations to establish the standards and competencies of a sign language interpreter. The latter is still being implemented; however, deaf people can access sign language interpreters, and these are covered and paid for by the state.

Article 3. (c) Empowering the making of regulations setting competency standards for the interpretation in legal proceedings of New Zealand Sign Language; and

Definition:

interpretation, in relation to New Zealand Sign Language, means—

- (a) the expression in New Zealand Sign Language of words spoken in English or Maori or both; and*
- (b) the oral expression in English or Maori or both of messages expressed in New Zealand Sign Language*

Access to information and services in sign language during emergency:

With the legal recognition of New Zealand Sign Language, the Act states that all government and public information must be accessible to the deaf community. It also holds the government accountable with making this right effective. This clause does not have specific articles regarding access to information in crisis or emergency situations.

9 Principles

- (b) NZSL should be used in the promotion to the public of government services and in the provision of information to the public:*
- (c) government services and information should be made accessible to the Deaf community through the use of appropriate means (including the use of NZSL)*

Deaf community participation in decision making process regarding sign languages:

One of the most important aspects and strengths of the New Zealand Sign Language Act is that this law requires the deaf community to be consulted on all matters relating to sign language and the rights of deaf people. They even have a specific board to deal with New Zealand Sign Language issues.

9 Principles

- (a) the Deaf community should be consulted on matters relating to NZSL (including, for example, the promotion of the use of NZSL)*

In May 2014, the Cabinet from New Zealand Government of Disability issues, established a NZSL Board to specifically assist the government in the implementation of the obligations of the CRPD and the 2006 NZSL Act. The board is comprised of 10 members that are NZSL users and most of them must be deaf NZSL users.

The first board was appointed in 2015 and since then they have led the issues related to sign language rights in New Zealand with the acting government.

The importance of continuously strengthening sign language recognition laws

After achieving legal recognition of your national sign language(s), it is important to start a continuous advocacy work towards its implementation. It is not sufficient to have a law that only has one article recognising your country's national sign language as an official language. If your country's legislation on sign language rights is limited, advocate for further legislation and public policies following the guidelines presented in this publication

CHAPTER SIX

Understanding Legislation

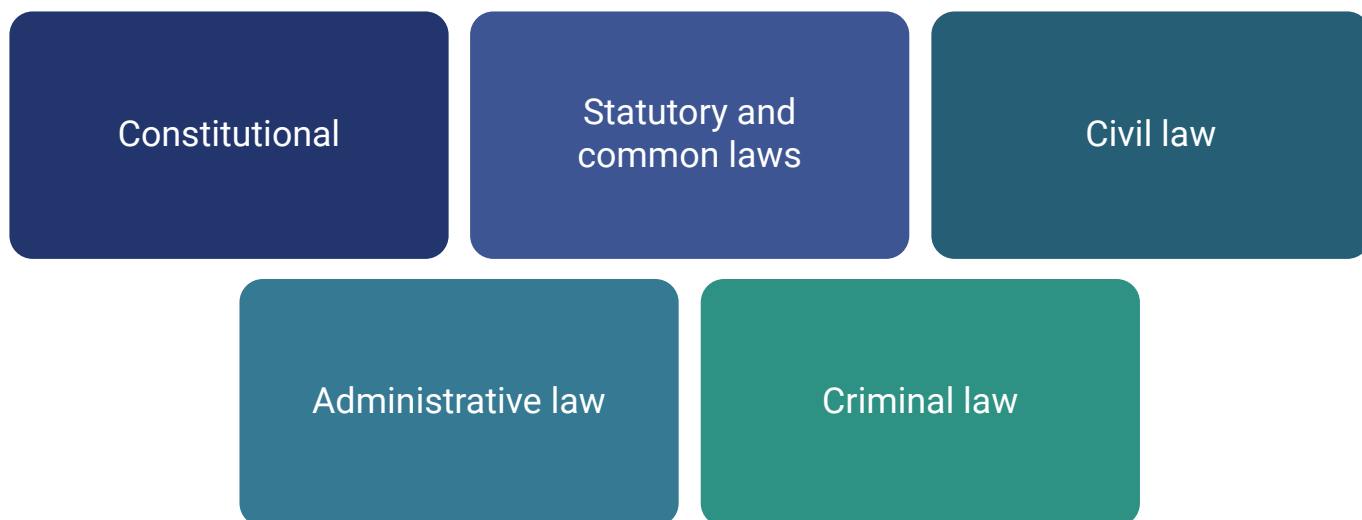


- 6.1** - Why We Need Sign Language Legislation?
- 6.2** - Constitution
- 6.3** - Legislative level
- 6.4** - Executive level
- 6.5** - Regional level
- 6.6** - Homework: research about the legal system + research on the different levels of executive power
- 6.7** - Homework: Research on your national general disability legislation
- 6.8** - How legislation comes into practice
- 6.9** - Homework: infographic on responsibilities and levels of legislation
- 6.10** - Entities accountable for sign language rights
- 6.11** - Funding law into practice
- 6.12** - Funding provisions in sign language legislation
- 6.13** - Monitoring and compliance
- 6.14** - How can the national association of the deaf monitor the implementation of the sign language law?
- 6.15** - Homework on public consultation platforms and who is responsible
- 6.16** - How DPO continue to be involved and are vigilant of compliance

Why legislation is needed:

Laws are necessary because they set up a framework and guidance of the legal responsibilities of governments, citizens and how all people should be treated. Laws encompass several areas and are organised according to each countries' legal system.

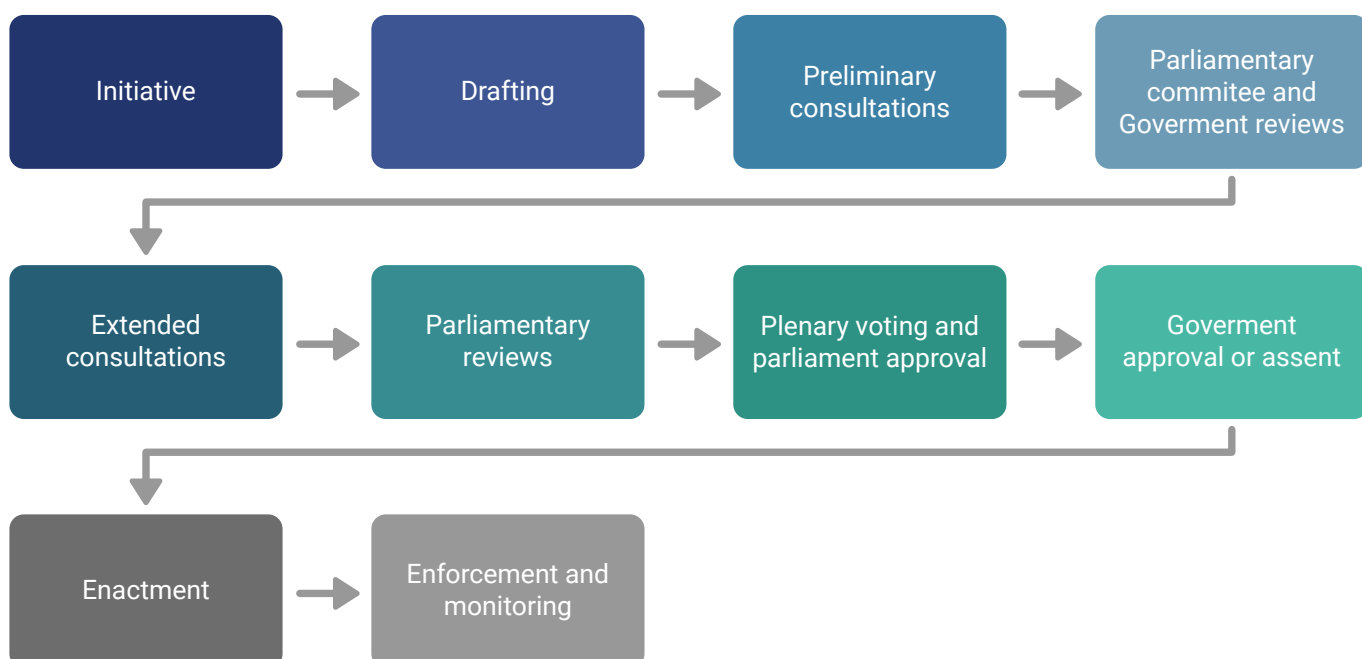
Legislation around the world is mostly organised into different types of law such as:



In this guide, we will focus on legislation that can be applied to achieve recognition of a national sign language. This can primarily be found in constitutional, statutory or common laws that have been passed by Parliament or Congress, as well as administrative laws that have been passed by the federal or regional level of government.

How are laws drafted and what are the most common procedures?

It is important that you research how laws are passed in your country and the composition of your national legal framework. Some countries may have a different framework than what is outlined below.

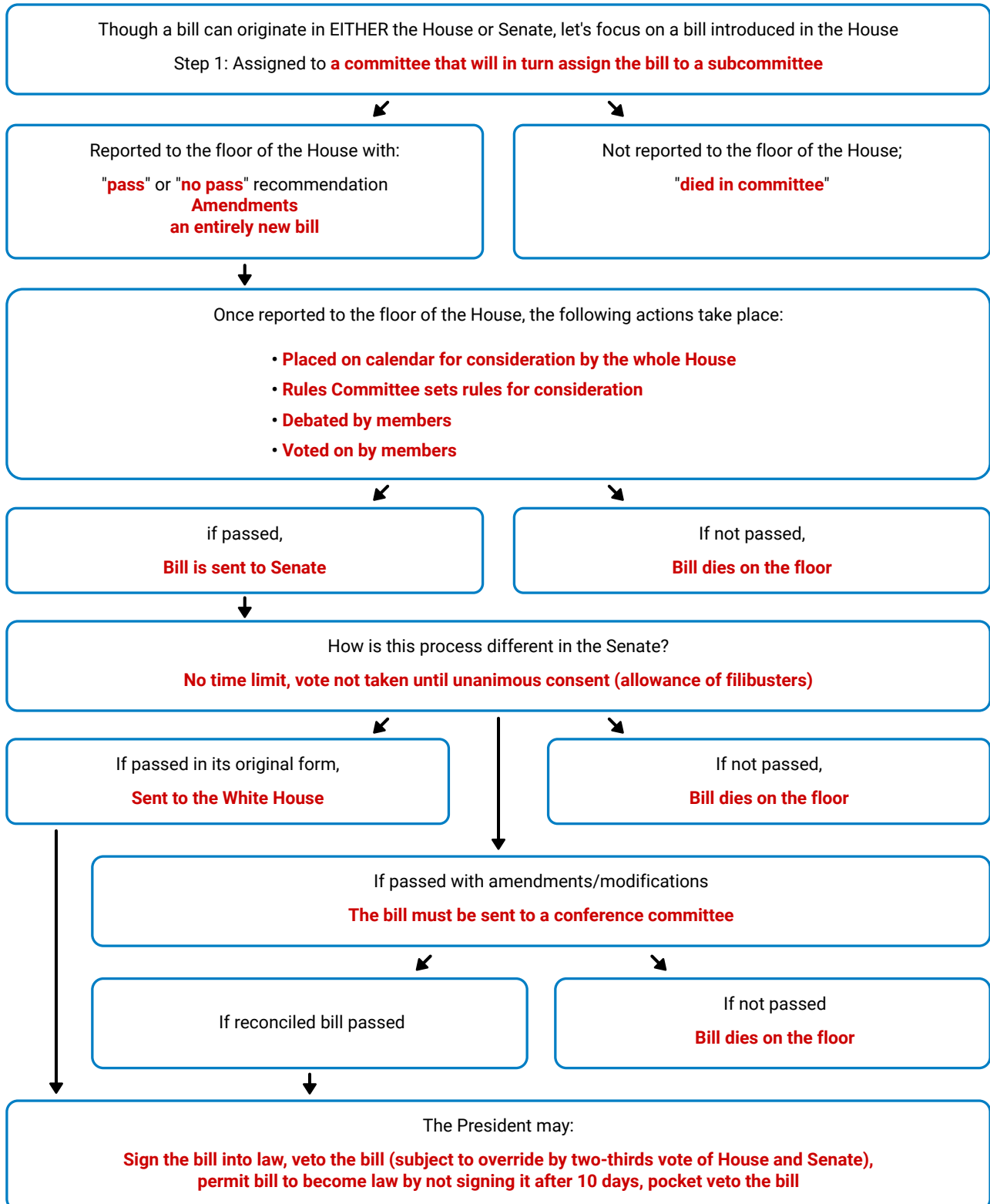


Homework:

Investigate about your country's process on how laws are made. Develop a flowchart with the most important processes.

Flowchart example:

How a Bill Becomes a Law (Flowchart)

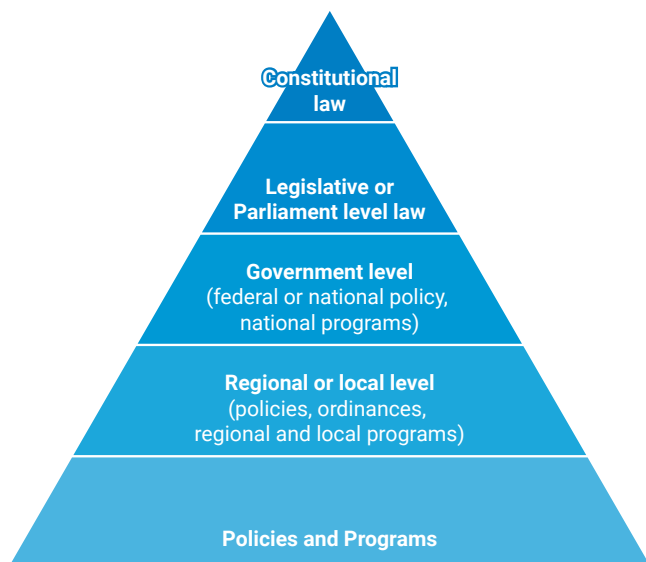


Different types of legislation

The legal system of a country comprises many levels and categories of legislation, and each country has its own unique set of laws. This legal system is essential to ensure that people, private entities, and public authorities all live up to their respective rights and duties. It is necessary for governments to have a structure in order to be able to rule in accordance with the existing legal framework. Without this, it will have many legal gaps or power gaps, both of which will make it extremely difficult to steer the actions and activities of the government in favour of the population. Without this, it will have numerous legal gaps or power gaps.

Legal frameworks are made up of a collection of laws to be found in various instruments. These include the national constitution, legislation, regulations, and official decrees. The following pyramid illustrates the different types of existing legislation that are most common across the world. This scheme illustrates the relationship existing between different legislation as well as their priorities in the hierarchy of norms. Each legislation must align with the legislation that is hierarchically superior. Each level of the different types of existing legislation will be explained in this chapter.

This chapter will provide an explanation for each level of the several types of laws that exist in hierarchical order.



Constitutional level

All countries have a legal framework which begins with or has atop a founding document such as a constitution (IFES, 2016)¹⁹. The constitution establishes the scope

of powers and authorities in a country as well as the country's system for governance (federal or national, regional and municipal), regional. This legal instrument also establishes the official language(s) of a country. It also enshrines the dignity and fundamental rights of their citizens.

In addition, the constitution also organises the functioning of the power, its institutions such as the legislative process to adopt legislation, the judicial system to solve legal issues and the executive branch to execute legislation or maintain the good functioning of the public administration.

A Constitution usually is drafted by an assembly of elected persons or experts. This is called the Constituent Assembly (or constituting power). The drafting of a constitution is initiated by legislative mandate following a national referendum or by a government, or by the legislature itself. The drafting process of a constitution should involve meaningful participation of various stakeholders such as human rights organisations, academics, civil society organisations among others. A constitution can be amended; however, such amendments must follow strict and complex legislative proceedings. This could include a referendum or drafting and approval with a super majority in the legislative institution.

With the constitution being at the top of the hierarchy of norms, its revisional procedures are quite complex. It is a long-lasting legal framework protecting the rule of law, the rights of the people and the sovereignty of the country from short term political governments.

At the time we are writing these lines, 13 countries have recognised their national sign language at a constitutional level. They can be grouped into three categories;

- **Considering the national sign language as part of the official languages of that country**
- **Establishes the right to be educated in the national sign language.**
- **Mandates access to forms of communication to be accepted in which the national sign language is considered.**

Tips:

Knowing your country's legal system will make you understand more how laws are drafted, the process they undergo for approval, and how they become implemented.

¹⁹ THE HIERARCHY OF LAWS Understanding and Implementing the Legal Frameworks that Govern Elections

https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2016_ifes_hierarchy_of_laws.pdf

Homework:

Research and respond to the following questions:

- Do I have access to all the relevant documents of my country's legal system? Where can I find them?
- How is your country's legal system?
- What is the law type that has the highest ranking? How are laws interrelated to each other?

Legislative level (congress or parliament laws)

The legislative level is the second level of the national legal framework after the constitutional level. Its laws are issued by a parliament/assembly that is composed of parliamentarians who have been democratically elected (by the country's population).

There are two types of laws at this legislative level

1. Statutory laws: they derive their authority from the Constitution and establish rules of national importance such as the social order, the national security, the government responsibilities, among others.

Since they are of high importance, the drafting and amendment procedures are also complex and lengthy: they must be thoroughly debated, undergo a series of revisions in the committees of the parliament and be voted by the absolute majority of the parliament. An example of statutory law is the law ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2. Laws proposed and drafted by the parliament members from the government proposal or by citizens' initiatives if applicable in the country. They must undergo revisions in the committee of the parliament and be voted by a majority in the parliament.

Some countries have recognised their national sign language at the legislative level. Dr. De Meulder (2015) classified this types of laws in which the recognition is done in four different categories:

- General language legislation
- General disability legislation
- Sign Language law or act
- Sign Language law including other means of communication

In the drafting process of the statutory laws or acts, deaf people and national associations of the deaf should be able to participate in the debates and contribute to it.

After that a law/act is passed by the parliament, it must then be approved by the government. This can be done by the President or by royal assent, depending on the legal system of the country. Then it must be published in the government gazette to enter into force and be implemented.

General disability legislation

There is already a general disability legislation in most of the countries and, upon ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, those countries must adapt it accordingly. In case your country has not yet amended the legislation or is undergoing it, it is an opportunity for your organisation to introduce provisions recognising your national sign language and/or recognising the linguistic rights of deaf people in the areas of education, access to information, sign language interpretation, among others. If you want to know if your country already has a general disability legislation, please consult this <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/disability-laws-and-acts-by-country-area.html>.

This process is slow, and there are several countries that are still undergoing internal processes in order to update their legislation. To date, ten countries (per 2023, as listed in Chapter Five), have explicitly recognised their national sign language as official language in a general disability legislation.

Homework:

Find your national general disability legislation (and its governing regulations if any) and review the legislation using the points in the chart below. Analyse and discuss the legislation with your fellow association members. Make a list of positive aspects of your national general disability legislation, the missing or negative aspects of that legislation, and what should be updated following the principles of the CRPD.

When finished, develop an outline of the analysis done to have it handy whenever you meet legislators, or government officials. This outline can be used to share your organisation's priorities when updating the legislation. You can also schedule meetings with other OPDs (organisations of persons with disabilities) and exchange perspectives.

This dialogue will strengthen your organisations talking points in your advocacy efforts and activities. This will reinforce the status of your organisation in the eyes of government officials, OPDS and other stakeholders.

Item to look for	Questions to guide your analysis	Annotations
Definitions	Are there any definitions regarding deaf persons, sign language, sign language interpreters?	
Equality and non-Discrimination	Is there any law that mentions discrimination by language use?	
Sign Language	Is there any mention of sign Language in general disability legislation?	
	If Sign Language is mentioned, what does it say about it?	
	Is sign language considered an equal and official language, or a communication tool for education or accessibility purposes?	
Accessibility	What measures are considered in accessibility and elimination of barriers?	
Education	What does it say about the education of persons with disabilities, or deaf persons?	
	Are there any measures dictated to meet deaf persons educational needs in basic compulsory education, higher education, vocational education?	
	Is there any mention about sign language, deaf linguistic models, promotion of linguistic and cultural identity, sign language interpreters, or other relevant topics?	
Freedom of expression and opinion and access to information	Are sign language and other formats of alternative communication (ie. Pro-Tactile sign language for deafblind persons) and other forms of alternate communication modalities considered?	
Other		

Executive level (policies, national programs)

Each country or region has its own government, and they can differ from one country to another. Besides, each country has different levels of executive power exercised by the government: national, federal, regional and/or local levels. A government's system is determined by the constitution regulating its organisation, responsibilities, competences and institutions.

Public policies are established for the acting government to be able to maintain the good functioning of the country, ensure its economic stability, and provide public services

and programs for its citizens. Governments must provide the minimum public services for all the citizens like access to education, health, security, justice, provision of basic amenities like water, sanitation and many more. Government usually has policies for every sector of the country's needs.

Governments may issue executive regulations that can be called decrees or executive orders depending on the legal system of the country. Those executive regulations implement the existing legislation and must be in compliance with the superior levels of legislation (international treaties, constitution, statutory laws, norms approved by the parliament).

Once the government issues an executive order/decree, it must be published in the official gazette and be communicated to the citizens so that they become aware of the new regulations. And the government is accountable for its actions towards the parliament and present its yearly progress report to it.

Many countries mentioned/referred to their national sign language in executive regulations as follows:

- **Regulations implementing the Sign Language Law/Act**
- **Regulations on the profession of sign language interpretation**
- **Regulations on the education language of deaf children that is indirectly granting linguistic rights to deaf people**
- **Education language of deaf children that is indirectly granting linguistic rights to deaf people**

We recommend you and your organisation to research the government policies of your country to check if they are addressing the (linguistic) rights of deaf people and national sign languages, and if these policies are in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Identify where your organisation can participate as a civil society organisation in the development/changes of the government policies.

Regulations are not the best tool to achieve sign language recognition because it is only for short-term and can easily be changed/revoked by the government without going through the legislature. Indeed, the composition of the government can often change and its priorities can differ from that of the previous government. This is why we recommend you and your organisation to achieve sign language recognition in a law, as a more sustainable and ongoing achievement.

Homework:

Research in your country how the civil society (National Associations of the Deaf) can participate in decision making processes.

National Government

Civil Society Participation	Description	Contact information	Website
Example:			
Public Policy regulations	Public consultation of Deaf Education Model – government dictated pre-publication dispersed for 30 days to receive feedback from general population	Office of Special Education in Ministry of Education (add name of person responsible)	Consultation website and email

Regional Government

Civil Society Participation	Description	Contact information	Website

Local Government

Civil Society Participation	Description	Contact information	Website

Regional or local level (policies, ordinances, regional and local programs)

Governments at regional and local level produce executive regulations in the form of ordinances after they have been approved by the municipal or regional council. Then they must be published in the official gazette and communicated to the citizens.

Language rights of deaf people can also be addressed in those regional and/or local executive regulations. Indeed regional and local governments tend to address the accessibility issues in transportation, communication, and interactions in the regional/local community. For example: a regional government can issue an executive regulation that guarantees accessibility measures in the municipal services, provides assistance in case of disaster and ensures that the broadcasted information is accessible for all.

You and your organisation must research the participation mechanisms existing at regional or local levels and follow up closely on the measures implemented at those levels when they can be relevant to the linguistic rights of deaf people.

How legislation comes into practice

All laws are mandatory from the day after they are published in the legal gazette, unless otherwise stated in the same law that postpones its effects. Publishing a law in the legal gazette is an act of proclamation of the given law. Once a law has been proclaimed, the acting government must implement the measures for its realisation. Among the measures to guarantee

compliance of the law, is to dictate the complementary legislation, the executive regulation, that will allow the approved law into force. Regulations define and offer the measures required to comply with the law's requirements. Such measures for the implementation (regulations) of a law involve the allocation of budget.

Governments also have the responsibility to communicate to the public the measures that they are going to develop to implement the legislation. Consequently, there should be public hearings open to citizens. This is a part of vigilant monitoring efforts that civil society organisations such as your national deaf association must undertake. The process in which a law is put into practice and begins to work can take time. Sometimes a law establishes how quickly the government must act to implement the necessary measures for its initiation. But other times, there is no deadline and the government can take its time to start dictating the measures for its implementation. For this reason, it is essential that citizens and organised civil society remain vigilant and also demand its prompt implementation from the acting government.

National Deaf Associations as allies to the government can support in:

- 1. Identifying the most important elements of the law that need robust and clear regulations.**
- 2. Identify the major decision makers and plan meetings and develop collaboration, this could be done by encouraging the development of a temporary multi-sectoral committee.**
- 3. Become vigilant and inform the media to persuade the government in the timely implementation of regulations.**

Homework:

Activity 1:

Develop an infographic or find an infographic of how your country is organised and what are the levels of responsibilities and jurisdictions that have to comply with the laws of the country.

Sample format:

National (or Federal) level	Name of Government office	

Homework:

Activity 2:

Find out about actions and who is responsible for

Activity	Who (Legislative, executive, judicial)
Initiates a law	
Declares laws unconstitutional	
Signs bills into law	
Decides on annual budget for government	
Vetoes bills	
Interprets/makes meaning of laws	
Implements a law or bill	
Makes treaties	

Entities accountable for sign language rights

Accountability is a term referring to the processes, regulations, and structures holding public officials from a government legally responsible for the actions that their offices implement. After a legislation recognising sign language has been passed into law, a government agency or offices are required to be responsible for the law's implementation.

The responsibility for implementing the law may lie with one or more Ministries, Departments, or Secretaries. Additionally, regional or local government offices will also need to take on their share of the responsibility in order to fulfil their obligations. In many instances, the office that is in charge of disability issues is the department that takes the lead on all matters pertaining to persons with disabilities, including those pertaining to the deaf community. On the other side, there may also be national language councils or a government institution responsible for cultural issues that might potentially take leadership or manage matters pertaining to your national sign languages. In any event, it is vitally important that the relevant government entity or entities must have knowledge of the subject. If they do not, they should hire an outside expert. Furthermore, they should work closely

with the National Associations of the Deaf. In certain nations, the laws recognising the national sign language either specify which government agency or agencies will be in charge of its implementation, or they mandate the establishment of a body that will be responsible for protecting the linguistic rights of deaf people. In other instances, both of these provisions are present.

In some instances, a national sign language commission can be responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the recognition law. This is the case in the cases of the Netherlands, which formed an NGT Advisory Board, Denmark, which established the Danish Sign Language Council, and New Zealand, which established a New Zealand Sign Language Board, to name a few (see De Meulder, Murray & McKee 2019 for more on this).

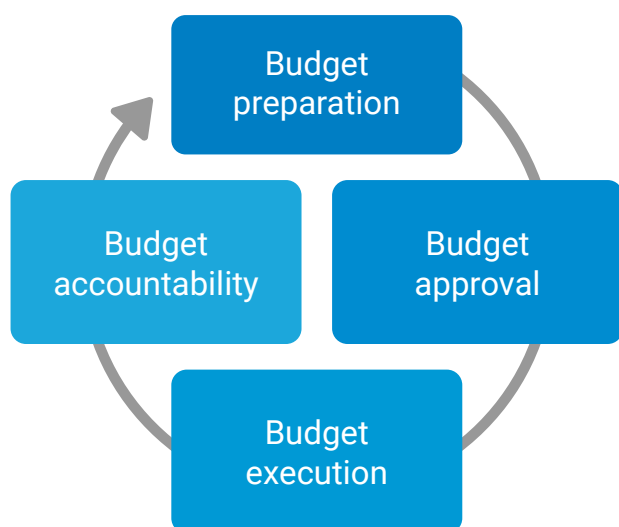
Funding for law into practice

A designated budget is required to effectively implement the law. This must be reflected in the legislation with the appropriate language ensuring funding. In the event that the sign language legislation does not include a specific financial allotment, it can be further determined in an executive regulation. In fact, it is recommended to insert

the amount dedicated in an executive regulation rather than in the sign language law. The reason being that it's easier to modify the amount allocated in an executive regulation compared to a law. Therefore, it will be easier to increase the yearly allocation in the situation where it would not reflect the actual cost needed to implement the sign language legislation.

Because governments are dealing with so many issues at once, it is possible that they do not have the competence or expertise on sign language and the human rights of deaf people. This is where the National Associations of the Deaf and deaf academic and/or language activists can intervene to provide guidance and expertise to their government.

There are four separate stages involved in the process of creating a budget for the national government. These stages are known as the preparation of the budget, the legislation or authorization of the budget, the execution or implementation of the budget, and budget accountability. This cycle for financing occurs once a year and is subject to oversight in the form of audits and reviews in accordance with the legislation that governs public funding in your country.



National Deaf Associations will have to influence the government to allocate a public budget for the development and priorities in the implementation of the law. The sign language bill can also include creative ways to get private funding for its implementation apart from government mandated activities, this could come in the form of tax incentives, public-private partnerships, grant programs or others to encourage the private sector to contribute to the implementation.

Every country has their own legal framework to decide and allocate funds as well as reporting and monitoring its effectiveness. Funding provisions in sign language laws should include all or a combination of the following:

- **A statement in the law that obliges the government to provide an adequate budget for sign language implementation activities. It should be clear which government entity will be responsible for administering the budget.**
- **Depending on your institutional system, it is possible that the legal recognition and implementation of your national sign language may involve not only one government office, body, or agency, but several of them. Especially if they must comply with accessibility requirements and hire interpreters for example, some government offices will need explicit authorization or directives to spend resources in hiring sign language interpreters.**
- **Include a list of funding for specific implementation activities such as resources for the Sign Language Board, implementing programs for training sign language instructors and sign language interpreters, sign language research, sign language dictionary for example.**
- **Provide incentives for academic funding related to the implementation of the law. Usually research is not funded, but governments can subsidise Universities to do continuous research for education of deaf children, sign language work, sign language instruction, linguistics and interpreter training.**
- **Provide incentives for the National Association of the Deaf to assist and be involved in the implementation of the law.**
- **Provide directives and information about private funded initiatives related to the implementation of the law, such as grants, public-private partnerships, grants for NGOs or civil society organisations, and include incentives to promote private funding. The directives should explicitly mention or provide a mechanism for participation, so that national deaf associations should be involved and participate.**

A model sign language law, will ensure that public funding is allocated so that there are resources for at least the following activities:



Some governments additionally provide public funding for particular projects to be carried out with the national associations of deaf people, such as the development of a Sign Language Dictionary or a sign language corpus. It is important to develop good working relationships with government at all levels: national, regional, and local so that law implementation becomes successful.

Monitoring and compliance

It is critical for national deaf groups to quickly organise in order to monitor how the law is implemented. The process of advocating for sign language to be recognised in the law will continue with a new strategy now that this milestone has been reached.

As was discussed in earlier chapters, sign language rights are considered human rights and are also included in the CRPD. This means governments are required to include groups from civil society, namely national associations of deaf people, in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the law.

Why Monitoring is important:

When National Deaf communities actively engage, they are able to increase their power and scope, contribute to the building of a community that is more respectful and varied, and express their citizenship and sense of belonging to the nation. When it comes to matters pertaining to sign language, issues must be addressed by deaf people and their organisations, and public policy must be improved by soliciting multiple contributions and points of view. This is especially important for deaf communities.

Achieving the legal recognition of your national sign language constitutes the first step in the right direction. But this is not the end of the advocacy work. The next step is the implementation process of the law. This is where the law will be able to have a real impact. Deaf communities should be prepared for this task of continuous monitoring and supporting the government in its implementation.

National Deaf Associations can:

Express opinions, proposals from deaf perspectives and experiences as disability and linguistic minority

Review and negotiate existing policies to advance in sign language rights

Deaf community has the the right to be informed of goverment activities and law implmenentation (we all pay taxes)

Deaf community have the right to participate in both goverment decision making and law implementation

Deaf community has the right to express opinions on issues that concern them: Sign Languages concern deaf communities

Issues related to the deaf community concern us, particularly in matters of education, access to information and sign language interpreters

Engage with other stakeholders in shadow report to CRPD about advances in Sign Language Rights

Support enforcement and implementation of laws

Support acting goverment in developing social indicators to better monitor the impact of Sign Language Laws in the long term

Ensure that implementation policies are human rights based

How can the National Deaf Association monitor the implementation of the sign language law?

Your organisation’s first step in the process should be to do research on the many forums for public engagement that are available in your country. Consultations with the public are an essential component of democratic governance, which requires that various tactics be developed by functioning governments, after which they consult the general population over crucial matters of public policy. They may take the shape of public and open forums, formal written consultations, conferences, open calls for specialised policy consultations, meetings with interest groups, or citizen panels, to name just a few examples.

Public consultations for the implementation or monitoring of laws are extremely important for a number of reasons. First, it will make it possible to establish a baseline from

which to gather evidence; second, it will be simpler to monitor and follow the results of implementation; third, it will allow transparency in the actions and decision-making processes of the government; and fourth, it will give citizens or interest groups validation and ownership of the outcomes. The deaf community should be involved in the consultation process in all matters related to sign languages.

Therefore, you will need to do research and inquire about the public consultations currently being held by the government, as well as whether or not there are consultations geared specifically toward people with disabilities, moreover for the deaf community. Find out if there are any directives or processes that require civil society consultation and involvement for the adoption of public policies. Collect this data and annotate them in a sample chart like the one that is shown below. Additionally, don’t forget to include contact information and links to resources from your country.

Sample chart to annotate existing different types of public consultation platforms:

Level or instance	Type of Consultation(s)	Are there reasonable adjustments and accessibility requirements considered?
Legislative level		
National Government level (Presidential office or Minister level)		
Disability national office level		
Regional level government		
Local government level (Municipality)		

Who will oversee the development of regulations or directives following the implementation of the Sign Language law? Who will enforce the laws? Annotate which governing body will be responsible.

Sample chart to annotate existing different types of public consultation platforms:

Instance or offices responsible	How to be involved and participate in public consultations	Contact information

After the adoption of your national sign language law, the following are some things that you should be able to monitor and take action on:

- Be a part of the public discussions that will be held about the implementation of the law.
- Participate in the formulation of new executive regulations requirements (Decrees, Ordinances, or other national, regional and local legislation).
- Keep an eye on how the budget is distributed and make sure it includes funds for the Sign Language Board, funds to pay for interpreters of sign language in areas such as education, accessibility, broadcasting, and other areas, and funding for research, training, and dissemination of sign language information.
- Ensure that the government agency in charge of supervising sign language issues is equipped with the necessary competence and experience to carry out the provisions of the legislation.
- Keep an eye on the coordination between different levels of government, as there will be more than one department within the government responsible for carrying out the implementation of the law. These departments include accessibility, disability, education, health, communications (television broadcasting), and communications.
- If your organisation notices a lack of compliance with your sign language legislation, you should make a public complaint, or a public submission, or an open letter to government officials with a large number of signatures from members of the deaf community, or you should hold open and peaceful demonstrations to attract the attention of the government so that they can make corrections and improvements in conjunction with the members of the deaf community.
- Developing a baseline and clear indicators to monitor progress, record, and annotate advances and performance of programs over time. Several nations who have committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are also monitoring and tracking its indicators, thus they are some of the ones that will be utilised.
- Keep a record of successes and failures with regard to sign language rights, and in the event that there have been breaches of human rights, notify them both locally and globally to the CRPD Committee by means of parallel reports and other forms of communication.
- Maintain a critical stance and continually check whether or not the legislation governing sign language is really producing the desired effects.

- **Ensure that the funds that have been allocated for the execution of the Sign Language Law are used effectively on an ongoing basis, advocate for compliance with the Sign Language Bill.**

Therefore, as can be seen, monitoring and ensuring compliance work is not an easy thing to do, and consistency, permanent advocacy, and closeness with decision makers are required.

Involvement of DPOs in compliance measures

Disabled people organisations (DPO) are and may be a tremendous ally of deaf communities. They are also working for their rights just like us, and we will undoubtedly share many places of struggle, communication with government officials, and other activities with them.

It is common practice in some countries for national organisations of people with disabilities to have affiliations with national human rights organisations. This allows these organisations to have a more active participation, more experience, and closer relationships with the acting government.

Therefore, it is important to plan, communicate, and involve your national DPOs so that they can also get involved in deaf community's activities and can support us in monitoring and compliance with the sign language law. Therefore, it is strategic to plan, communicate, and involve DPOs.

It is essential to cultivate links with non-governmental groups and academic institutions, just as it is important to engage DPO in the process. The more networks and relationships that are developed by National Associations of the Deaf to monitor and work for the implementation of the sign language law, the more resources the deaf community will have.

Academic institutions can have the role of developing studies that allow for reliable monitoring efforts, identifying progress and achievements, and determining areas for future improvement or lack of implementation. This allows continuous reflection and may help chart better compliance strategies for the sign language law.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Starting Your Advocacy Work



7.1 - Sign language rights-based approach to pursue robust legislation

7.2 - Who should be involved?

7.3 - Preparing a strategy for sign language legislative work

7.4 - Homework: research checklist and list of themes

7.5 - Identify, develop and forge alliances

7.6 - Homework on the themes and draft articles of the proposal

Different types of legislation

Deaf people and their representative organisations have advocated for the legal recognition of their national sign languages in a variety of ways, such as awareness-raising, petitions, peaceful protests, rallies, and governmental meetings. In pushing for legislation recognising your national sign language, it is crucial to undertake a rights-based approach.

Undertaking a right-based approach means that all your claim and demands for the legal recognition of your national sign language should be backed by relevant legal provisions and policy-documents, such as the CRPD, with advocacy support from the relevant WFD Position Papers. The purpose is to highlight that it is a fundamental right inherent to all deaf people rather than their simple desire.

As the advocacy work and campaign can take several years, it is crucial to constitute a strong and cohesive deaf community with numerous allies to establish a well-planned strategy to deliver a coherent and impactful message.

Advocating for basic human rights like the freedom to use sign language is an ongoing and long-term task

Who should be involved in developing, monitoring, implementing and evaluation of the plan to achieve legal recognition of your national sign languages?

National associations of deaf people should lead the national initiative towards achieving legal recognition of your national sign languages.

The strategy effort should be led by a core team from the organisation. The team should be responsible for designing, monitoring, and executing a long-term strategy for advocating for the language rights of deaf people. Having a coherent set of strong principles and rules will be made possible by adopting an approach that is centred on human rights and sign language rights.

The core team has to be able to engage with their deaf community in concertation and empowerment for everyone to take ownership of the initiative and its outcomes. Participation and transparency must be included at all phases and everyone advocating in the deaf community must be accountable for both their involvement and the message they deliver. Community engagement and openness should be incorporated in all

aspects of the process.

National associations of deaf people will need to deliberate thoroughly and make an informed selection for this core team. In that regard, the organisation needs to look for people who have experience in long-term projects, have leadership and interpersonal qualities that can establish a network and develop connections, are persistent and can persevere. They must also have creative abilities with extensive knowledge and experience about the reality of the deaf community. Lastly if the core team that is selected is familiar with the political situation and legal framework of the country it is a plus.

After the national association has assembled the core team, the work and strategic planning can be initiated.

This chapter provides a brief overview of several strategies and lobbying techniques to achieve a robust recognition of your national sign language. It is important to identify the most relevant and feasible strategy according to the politico-economic reality of your country. For example, it is not relevant to organise a petition to the parliament to introduce sign language legislation if your legal system doesn't foresee the possibility of an introduction by petition. In this section, we present several different scenarios that illustrate how some countries can develop their strategy.

Where to start the quest to achieve legal recognition of sign language:

1. The National Association of the Deaf develops a partnership with a legal team to draft the sign language bill and provide all the relevant information to the team (data, situation faced by deaf people,...). With the association providing their comments and viewpoints, the document will go through a rigorous analysis and in-depth revision, after which the legal team will make further adjustments to it. Then, a bill will be ready to be introduced to the parliament through a Member of Parliament. Alongside the process of submitting the legislative proposal, the association works in the preparation of an advocacy strategy that includes preparing the messages to be delivered, as well as developing a communication and media campaign to accompany and complement the process.

2. The national association of deaf people constitutes a core advocacy team, as outlined above, and starts organising workshops to feed the draft sign language bill made by the legal team. The workshops will collect data, including the lived experiences of deaf people, that reinforce the need for a sign language bill and serve as evidence to the members of parliament.

Alongside this effort, the national association of deaf people should start forging alliances with DPOs and any other NGOs (human rights NGOs) to advocate for the legal recognition of their national sign language through governmental meetings, public events and media outreach.

3. In some countries, the national association of deaf people began to advocate for the introduction of the bill through the government and not the parliament. This is the case in countries where there is a positive and strong relationship between the deaf community and the government in power. The fact that this is a proposal that was presented by the government indicates that it has already been discussed thoroughly with various government agencies that would be responsible for the implementation of the bill. As a result, the legislative power will be confident in the proposal's ability to become law. However, that will be the government that will very likely take ownership of the initiative, with or without the national association of the deaf.

One limit of this strategy is that it might reduce the scope of the initial proposed bill, depending on the possibilities of implementation by the current government in power. This is an interesting alternative if the parliamentary initiative proves to be unsuccessful.

In certain countries, an executive order or supreme decree can have the same level of authority that a law does. However, it is weaker than a law passed by the parliament as it can be revoked by any future government.

4. The initiative could come from a member of the legislative body (member of parliament or congressperson) approaching the national association of deaf people to produce a bill recognising the national sign language. This strategy is beneficial since the national association of deaf people will have direct contact with the legislative body and will be able to guide them and provide them with data and resources.

The association can also conduct a media campaign to persuade additional politicians and the general public about the significance of the proposal. Similarly, they should contact disability organisations and other social movements to join and support the plan.

Preparing a strategy for sign language legislative work

Build a core team

Your Association should select a team of persons who will lead and make your campaign successful in achieving the enactment of a law that officially recognizes your country's national sign language(s).

Bear in mind that there is no limit to the quantity of how many persons will integrate the core team but consider a group that will have a good dynamic and that can work together. The team should be agile enough to make decisions. Your core team should be diverse to include individuals with experience in advocacy at the legislative level.

Consider the following profiles for a core team that will work with the board of the National Association of the Deaf:

- **Campaign Coordinator** - person in charge of developing, implementing, and evaluating a strategy plan.
- **Legal coordinator** - the person in charge of organising the formulation of the sign language rights legislation and liaising with lawmakers and other government officials.
- **Campaign administrative support** - someone in charge of assisting the team with administrative challenges, searching for resources and money, and securing sponsorship partnerships.
- **Media and marketing coordinator** - person in charge in supporting the team with key messages for the campaign, responsible for all social media communications, events, and political advocacy activations.
- **A liaison coordinator** will assist the NAD in finding prospective partners, stakeholders, and political allies.
- **Volunteer coordinator** - the person in charge of recruiting, supervising, and training volunteers, as well as all those who will support the plan.
- **Education and capacity development coordinator** - a person who will conduct workshops and education programmes both within and beyond the deaf community.

Research

It is important to understand your Association's advocacy history. This would help determine whether your previous efforts were fruitful and assess its causes of success or failure. This will help to best tailor your policy and advocacy efforts towards the legal recognition of your national sign language.

Homework:

Research checklist:

Make a summary of National Association of the Deaf past and current advocacy efforts	
Identify current policies about deaf persons, deaf community and sign language	
Data collection: Statistics, case studies, research, and others	
Make a summary or statement on the importance and need of a Sign Language Law	
Research the timeline for introducing a Sign Language Law	
Define target audience (legislators, government authorities, influential policy, and decision makers (potential allies and adversaries)	
Define your stakeholders and allies	
Research and determine your Association's current resources for advocacy and estimate the needs for funding.	

CHAPTER EIGHT

Developing a Timeline and Strategic Plan



8.1 - How to develop a strategic plan: introduction

8.2 - How to develop a SMART goal for legal recognition (and homework)

8.3 - How to develop strategic, timeline and mitigation plans

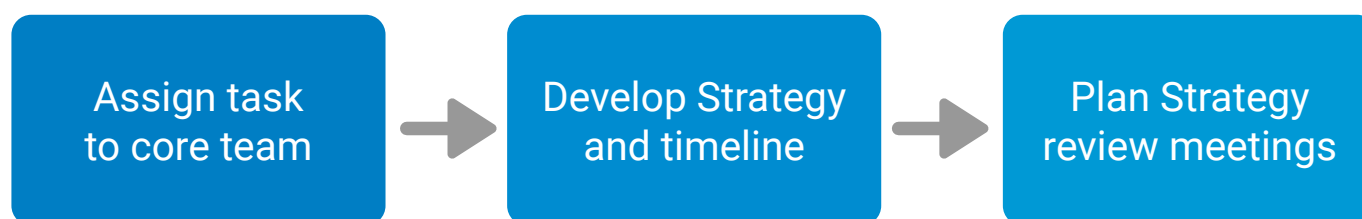
8.4 - How to develop a communication strategy

Develop a goal for sign language rights legislation.

Working within a human rights-based framework is a demanding, complicated, and time-consuming work. Developing a strategic plan with a clear goal and plan of action will help bring out sustainable and meaningful change. Before undertaking any advocacy work, you and your organisation must develop a solid action plan and strategy to fulfil your advocacy goals. According to accounts of how other countries have worked towards sign language recognition, the shortest time frame to achieving recognition has generally been about three years, and the longest has been around 10 years. Deaf organisations are traditionally under-resourced with

a high reliance on voluntary labour. Thus developing a strategic plan is even more important, in order to effectively prioritise people's time and labour towards your goals.

The development of a work strategy and timeline begins with the establishment of a core team located in your national association of deaf people. Include strategy review meetings with your association's executive directors or board members as needed. This may be done on a monthly, quarterly, biennial, or yearly basis. You may use these sessions to assess progress and campaign initiatives, discuss critical activities, evaluate performance, and adjust strategy as appropriate.



How to develop a strategic plan:

Create an easy to explain project brief including a basic overview conveying your goals to the relevant partners.

Create a document that includes all of the following elements in your summary:

- **Goal for legal recognition of your national sign language**
- **Background information**
- **Short-term, medium-term, and long-term milestones**
- **Project goals**
- **Timeline**
- **Communications and disseminations strategy**
- **Evaluation and ongoing monitoring of your plan**

Develop a goal for the legal recognition of your national sign language.

To begin, it is critical to identify the primary issues or concerns that deaf people have while using sign language in your country. In chapter four of this toolkit, you discovered various questions to help you learn about

the issues and obstacles that deaf people encounter in your country. If you have completed this job, you will have inputs that will help you to examine and focus on the most significant challenges and pressing demands in the campaign for deaf people's linguistic rights.

In chapter four (What are sign language rights) you would have addressed and discussed the core issues pertaining to human rights and sign language rights for deaf people in your country. Gather the facts and begin planning and the process. Begin by setting your goal and objectives based on reasonable assumptions about what is achievable in your country, taking into account your legal system and political framework.

Take time to define and write your primary goal and objectives. George T. Doran (1981) devised a technique for writing objectives known as SMART goals. The initials of S.M.A.R.T stand as acronyms that stands for: "Specific," "Measurable," "Attainable," "Relevant/realistic," and "Time-oriented".

MEASURABLE:

How you will monitor advances and achievements

ATTAINABLE:

Is your organisation capable of planning, advocating to be able to reach your goal? If not, what do you need to do?

RELEVANT/REALISTIC:

Can you genuinely achieve the objectives your organisation sets?

TIMELY:

**When do you plan to achieve your objectives?
Reverse the process. Planning in reverse results
makes it easier to see all that has to be done.**

Doran created SMART objectives for business after seeing how various companies struggled to establish clear goals. His methodology offers a platform for teams to build meaningful, complete objectives for their goals.

Before you begin crafting and writing your SMART goal, it is important to estimate what milestones you want

to reach. These may be put down as dates, stages, or milestones. Consider them tiny triumphs or progress toward a goal, rather than a deadline. In these milestones, you can consider the following for example:

- Sign Language Law draft bill developed by ...
- Draft bill reviewed by ...
- Draft bill presented to
- Draft bill introduced to Parliament ...

Use the following table to annotate them and add the time frame:

Milestones	Time frame

After you've written down the milestones, attempt to break them down into particular tasks and assign them to members of the core team. When determining who will be responsible, it will be easier to visualise and estimate how long that task will take, what resources this person or team may need, and how to prioritise them. An example is shown below.

Tasks	Person or persons responsible

In the next step, prepare to write out how you will measure the progress that your core team is making, as well as what evidence will be used to verify the goals. An example is shown below.

How to measure advances	Means of verification

Now that you’ve determined the tasks and who will be accountable for them, as well as how you’ll monitor success, you can utilise all the tables to begin crafting your SMART goal. After that, you’ll be able to construct a strategic plan and timeline based on your goal.

Draft your SMART goal

SMART Goal

Formulate a strategic plan and timeline.

As you’ve undoubtedly seen from earlier exercises in developing your SMART objective, your advocacy work will take time. This is time well spent. Having clear priorities will help you define your work in a sustainable way. It is critical that you and your organisation have an accurate perspective on the short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals aligned to your existing conditions, resources, and alliances.

When you develop a strategic plan, associate it with your SMART goal and integrate into the plan specific objectives, specific activities, responsibility, time frames, and outcomes. Don’t lose sight of the longer-term

societal transformation that you are aiming for. How will society change once your national sign language is recognised and implemented?

Develop an action plan

Before creating a timetable, begin planning your action plan. Using the goal you established, the milestones you established, and the duties you gave to your team, you will now be able to carry out the action plan’s exercise. Begin by writing down your list of actions in the table below, detailing how you will carry out those tasks. Using the previous exercises, fill in the columns with who will be accountable, the date, and your goals.

Action Plan			
Action list (Write sentences that explain)	Who will be responsible	Due Date	Outcome (target)

Prepare a mitigation plan in case

As with any strategy, it is always vital to anticipate and have a backup plan in place, in the event conditions develop that hinder you from carrying out what was intended. Prepare a mitigation plan for scenarios that you believe will be more challenging or have a high degree of unpredictability.

Mitigation planning	
(WHAT IF?)	Potential obstacles:
	Mitigation plan:

Developing a timeline:

A timeline is a visual tool that may assist your core team in understanding, previewing, and tracking the development of your strategic plan. A timeline will assist you in project management and efficiency. During strategic review meetings, it will be important to assess and make decisions necessary to attain the objectives.

A basic timetable that is easy to follow and beneficial for everyone is excellent, such as this one:

Project title														
Name of organisation		Year												
Describe objective and		2022												
Component I:		Person responsible	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1.1														
1.2														
1.3														
1.4														
1.5														
Component I:		Person responsible	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
2.1														
2.2														
2.3														
2.4														
Component II:		Person responsible	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
3.1														
3.2														
3.3														

Download this [excel sheet](#) with a simple timeline to begin your planning.

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, you may encounter detractors and you and your organisation will need to quickly address them and share information so that they can be on your side and support your initiative.

Develop a communication strategy.

Create a communication strategy with different audiences. One audience is for internal communication inside the organisation and the deaf community. Another audience is for communication to the media and broader public. You will also need a communication plan for political and legislative authorities.

Begin by determining who and what you want to convey and spread. Different audiences will need tailored messages so that they can better understand and empathise with the deaf community and sign language rights. Having a wider audience captivated by the deaf community's strategic communication will significantly

impact and put pressure on government and legislator's agenda to address deaf people's sign language rights. A carefully designed communications plan will help follow your goals and measure monitor advances and achievements. Another reason to do this, is because it will help your organisation's develop alliances and relationships with different stakeholders.

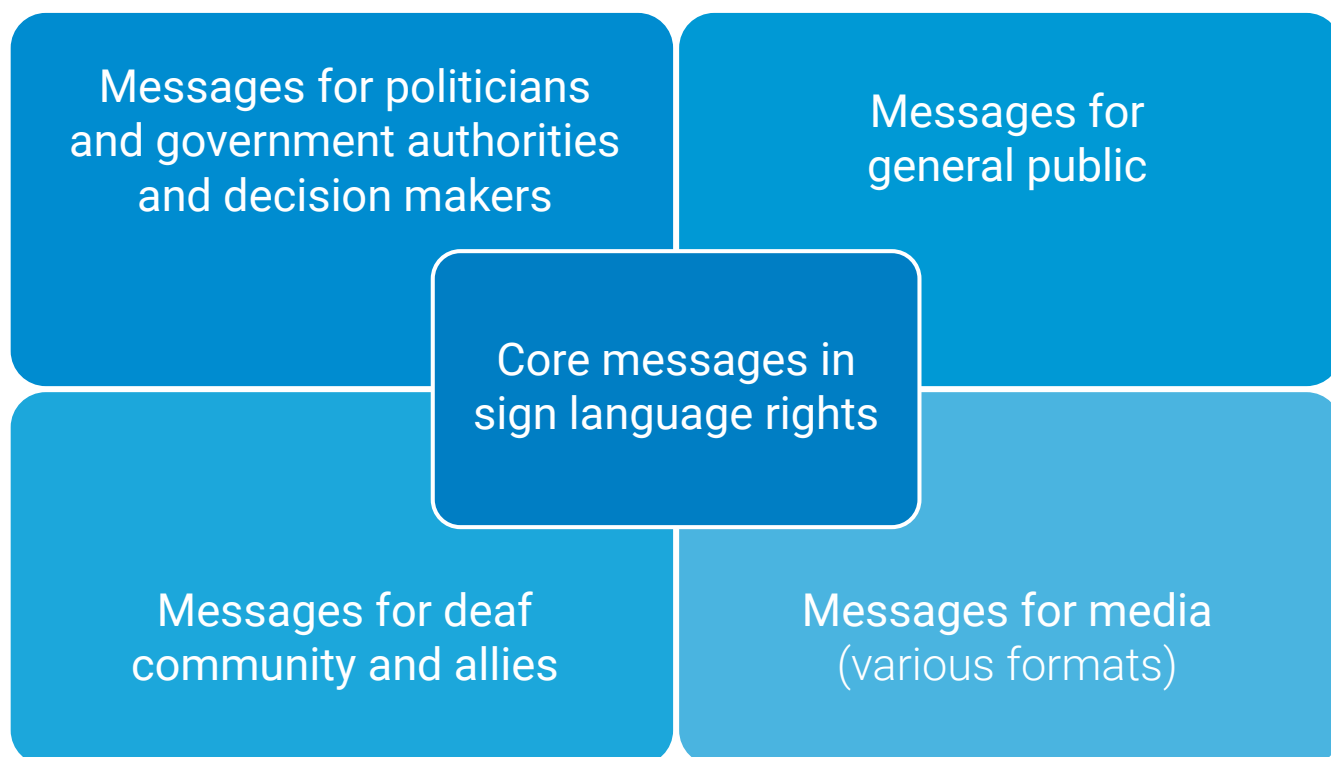
There are several communication tactics, activities and strategies to use to spread your messages and campaign. It is important that your organisation takes this with special consideration because your communications plan will set the direction of the campaign. Communication is not only the process of disseminating information, but about conveying the true nature of the deaf community and the importance of sign language in deaf people's lives.

Planning for this requires brainstorming sessions and defining key core messages and how, and where they will be communicated best. A good communication plan should include:

- A clear purpose (summarise how a communication plan is connected to your goal for achieving legal recognition of your country's sign language rights)
- Define goals and objectives of what you want to expect to communicate and accomplish.
- Define who is or are your target audience (include how, what kind of information, where and when to communicate)

- Tools and methods to communicate (define how you are going to convey the key messages and where)
- Develop a timeline for communications from the objectives you have established to accomplish.

Developing messages for different groups and audiences means that you must think like them and put yourself in their place. What type of information do they require? How can you give them information to persuade them to support your work? Adopt their terminology and ensure you can be recognized as a legitimate expert on this topic.



Communications can take various forms, and you can use several tools or methods to distribute information, and depending on the target it is important to prepare documentation to convey messages in several formats such as:

- Position papers with key core messages
- Brochures
- Flyers
- Presentations
- Press releases
- Press conferences
- Deaf community events (example, international week of the deaf, International Day of Sign languages and others)

- Video messages postings in social media
- Activities (peaceful march, public petitions, public demonstrations)

Lastly, in all communications plans and strategies, it is important to factor in accessibility, for both hearing and deaf persons, throughout the process. Make plans and arrangements to make your communications accessible for everyone, including members of the DeafBlind community, and others persons with disabilities. These groups will be a part of your advocacy coalition and you want to set a good model for accessibility for others to learn from. Use your campaign as an opportunity to educate everyone on the importance of accessibility for all. Your campaign messages should be conveyed in various formats and should always include messages in your national sign languages. Sign languages gain attention and using your national sign languages in your campaign increases its visibility and serves as a physical demonstration of the need for this legislation.

CHAPTER NINE

Forging Alliances



9.1 - How to forge alliances

9.2 - Homework: How to forge alliances

During your advocacy work to achieve the legal recognition of your national sign language(s), you and your organisation may face several people who might be opposed to this aim. Some of them will try to convince you that sign language is only a communications issue, others will claim that legislation is not necessary, that educational policies or disability legislation that covers accessibility issues should be enough.

This opposition may stem from a lack of information, ignorance or ongoing influence from old beliefs of disability and deaf persons. For this reason, your organisation will need to develop a strategy to gradually attract more attention from other entities and organisations as allies to endorse and support your advocacy efforts.

It is important to forge alliances with other grassroots movements such as organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), indigenous groups or other marginalised groups who can empathise with your work. Consolidating alliances with other entities and organisations, opinion leaders, journalists, and others could be of great help to face the different types of detractors that you may encounter during your work.

Disability organisations in many countries support deaf organisations and are very much likely to back initiatives that have to do with disability and accessibility issues. For this, it is important to research and find out about national participation spaces in your country. Your organisation should already be a member of the umbrella OPD. But do look outside disability spaces and seek out support from any existing coalitions with other underrepresented and marginalised groups, as well as human rights organisations at the local, regional, or national levels.

Media coverage can play a key role in getting broad attention and support for your sign language campaign. Contact opinion leaders from various media (TV, press, radio, podcasts or other spaces) with an influence on the general public's opinion. Having supportive messages from voices and persons outside the deaf community shows your initiative has broad based support.

To prepare for media coverage, your organisation can prepare documentation and a dossier with bullet points about what your organisation wants to achieve. Also, you should be able to call or meet with members of the media and ask them to be invited on their programs for interviews. Your aim is for members of the media to get information first-hand from your organisation on your aims.

Communication and media are critical to foster awareness and also to put the issue on public agenda and get support in general. Use your time with opinion leaders to discuss and break down myths about sign languages. This is your opportunity to lay out the facts and override myths about deaf people and sign languages (see Chapter Two for common misconceptions and how to refute them). You and your organisation should combine social networking,

networking and personal communication to generate public pressure, public support and gain visibility. All this will help call the attention of policy makers and decision makers regarding your legislation.

Decision makers are more willing to support an initiative or change a policy or legislation, when they consider that the issue is economically or politically viable and when there is public pressure demanding with strong arguments the need for change. So, therefore it is so important to amass public support from different groups that will be supportive of your goals.

In this chapter we present a series of ideas on how to develop and consolidate support from different groups beyond the deaf community. By forging alliances, you can build a broad coalition to support sign language rights.

The first step is to look towards the initiatives, activities and campaigns of other groups such as indigenous minorities, women, and others that have been historically underrepresented. Try to engage in their activities and develop a respectful and supportive relationship and inform them that within the deaf community we also have persons that belong to those underrepresented groups. For example, there are indigenous deaf people who need support from indigenous organisations as well as deaf organisations. In this way, the deaf organisation can build common ground and a collaborative agenda for both organisations.

Allyship works both ways. Invite other groups to the deaf community's activities and support their advocacy efforts, as well as asking them to support yours. This can be done by asking them to publicly endorse and back your initiative in the form of an open letter or public statement, as well as sharing their legislative and media contacts. Influential journalists can back the deaf community by sharing news about the importance of achieving sign language rights.

Activities to engage with and gain support from allies are endless. You will have to identify what form of support you may need from (and be able to give to) others. Below you will find some exercises that can help narrow and identify specific alliances you can focus on for coalition building.

Develop a record and pay attention to initiatives, activities and campaigns that potential allies are engaged on

Identify common advocacy ground like women's rights, indigenous peoples and other underrepresented groups

Support their initiatives, befriend them and invite to support deaf persons advocacy efforts in sign language recognition activities and sign language rights.

Research and analyse who you can reach and develop solid strategic alliances

Engage with different groups and develop strategic alliances. Lobby at different levels and spaces in society with a clear messages and goals.

Ask to endorse deaf community's campaign, or help disseminate, or help reach decision makers

Capitalise alliances made and continue your advocacy efforts focusing on legislative level and high level government authorities.

Getting support from the government and legislators

Government authorities and legislators are critical contacts during your advocacy journey. The more you reach and talk to legislators and government authorities, the more your objectives will gain legitimacy, credibility and support.

If your initiative also involves government authorities, they also can support advising and giving official opinions in support of your needs.

Investigate and take your time to know when it is best to contact political leaders, find about civil society participation, public forums and other spaces where you can participate on a visible and consistent basis.

Legislative support is essential before the time comes to debate in Parliament or Congress. Legislators who are familiar with the cause and the needs of the deaf community will be more likely to vote in favour of the legislation.

With extended Deaf community (clubs, organisations, NGO, families of deaf children, and more)

Successful advocacy campaigns involve a wide variety of key stakeholders in the process of advocating for sign language rights. One of your most important allies is the extended deaf community. Your national association of the deaf should ensure that all key stakeholders in the national deaf community are supportive of this legislation, as well as grassroots members of the deaf community.

Don't forget to liaise with potential donors and potential technical cooperation partners, in order to supplement your organisation's resources. For example, universities may be able to support your campaign with research on the legitimacy of sign languages as natural languages. Look for persons and organisations that can provide assistance or funds to support your campaign.

Homework:

Organise and identify alliances and organise them in a visual chart so that you can make a plan to contact and develop a relationship with them.

Description of potential ally	Who, contact information and activities they usually engage in.	Prioritise or identify influential individuals or entities and their, if possible, measure their reach or potential

Now that you have identified potential partners and allies for your advocacy work. Now prepare and plan a target to contact legislators, high government officials, decision makers and identify how you plan to reach them and who from your prior list will be most likely to support your organisation:

Target (examples)	How to contact the target	What kind of support you will need from target	Target's influence or reach	Who has frequent and or friendly contact with target	Information target may need to support deaf community's cause
Legislator in senate					
Government official in disability office					
Opinion leader (journalist)					
Indigenous leader					

CHAPTER TEN

Tips for Successful Legislative and General Political Meetings



10.1 - Before the meeting

10.2 - During the meeting

10.3 - After the meeting

Meeting in person with government officers, elected officials, members of the legislature, and others is important for your organisation's advocacy efforts. Advance preparation is crucial to have effective and successful meetings.

As deaf persons, it is crucial to consider careful planning and approach so that communication and accessibility needs are met accordingly. In this chapter, a few considerations are presented so that you and your organisation plan before, during and after the meeting, and what to do in case communication needs are not met.

Before the meeting, find a means of communicating that is accessible for you and your organisation, because it will be the first of many sustained communications that you may have. It is important that in the first contact, you give sufficient information and explain how you would like to be contacted and your communication preferences, to establish a shared understanding going forward. In many cases, it is smart to use your national sign language in physical meetings, with your preferred interpreters, in order for government leaders to experience this sign language in real life.

Sample contact mail:

Dear (legislator or government authority name)

We are writing to you on behalf of (name of the national association of the deaf) a (give a brief description of your organisation), that advocates for the rights of deaf people in (country).

Our organisation would like to have a meeting with your representative to discuss issues concerning our national sign language (name of language). We would also like to bring to your attention the importance of effective communication during our meeting and future communications so that we may have inclusive and meaningful partnerships.

To guarantee effective communication, professional sign language interpreters are needed. (name of national) Sign language is a distinct language with its own grammar and syntax, and interpreting it requires specialised knowledge and training. Professional sign language interpreters play a crucial role in facilitating communication between deaf and hearing people, thereby ensuring equal access.

For this occasion, we will come along with our professional sign language interpreters to ensure that we all have full access to the communication and we can all participate in the meeting. Also, in future meetings, it is a collective responsibility to consider accessibility issues and we trust that we will coordinate about this accordingly.

In the meantime, if your office needs to contact us by phone, please prioritise alternate forms of phone access, such as writing by text message (SMS), utilising other messaging applications, or email. Communication will be direct and without intermediaries, which is ideal for our needs.

We appreciate your time and thank you in advance for your attention and consideration on this matter.

Complement this communication with your proposed theme for the meeting and what you expect to achieve.

Now that you have initiated contact, have informed about the importance of having direct and accessible communication, it is also important to follow up consistently before the meeting and during the meeting. Here are some ideas of what to observe and do:

Before the meetings- scheduling the meeting

When you contact decision makers, let them know about your accessibility requirements. You can use the sample contact mail from above. Once a communication has been established and begin to schedule a meeting, take into consideration that you and your organisation must be flexible on the times and dates for the meeting. Also be prepared if the meeting gets rescheduled in case of unavailabilities of professional sign language interpreters. Have ready a list of available times as well as the names, identification numbers, and contact information of the persons from your organisation that could participate as well. Perhaps you will be asked to present a formal written request before the meeting with details of what you will bring up.

Also, prepare materials that you may need for the meeting such as a summary of the key points that you will bring up during the meeting, a brief PowerPoint presentation or a dossier about sign language rights and the importance of having a legal framework. Coordinate with your team previously on how and who will transmit the ideas during the meeting so that all of the participants have a clear and direct message.

All these are important to prepare before the meeting because the person or persons who you will be meeting, usually spare about 15 to 30 minutes at least for a meeting.

Do	Do not
Inform about your communication needs in advance. (View sample contact letter)	Confide that the office you are contacting knows how or will ensure considering the communication needs of deaf people.
Send a request for a meeting in writing or other means as requested.	Show up in government, or legislative offices without previously coordinating.
Coordinate in-house with your organisation and with the persons that will participate in the meeting beforehand to deliver a clear message about sign language rights.	Show up with your team without first coordinating and preparing a strategy for the meeting.
Be flexible in the coordination of the appointment, have the information of each person who will participate on hand in case they ask for it. If there is a change in the schedule, be flexible and adapt to the changes that they propose in a diplomatic way.	Insist on certain dates and times for the meeting, and do not express your frustration or annoyance for sudden changes in the appointment in the case that it happens.
If possible, try to become acquainted with the office of the government official or legislator you are visiting in advance.	Wait until the last minute to gather information about whom you will meet prior to the meeting.
Prepare a dossier with PowerPoint presentation, a written summary of key points, or other materials that you may need for the meeting. Be prepared to hand in a copy if requested. Also try to anticipate questions that may be raised or additional information that they may requested which can or cannot be related to the subject meeting- for example general statistical information.	Go to the meeting in an impromptu way without materials at hand and without having a defined strategy of what you are asking for.

During the Meeting.

Start the meeting in a friendly manner, thanking for the invitation and the time given to meet you as well as considering the accessibility measures that have been considered and the opportunity given in this meeting. Then try to orient the conversation into common ground or shared interests, explain your interest in the meeting, your objectives, and that you know who you are dealing with and that you consider them as a potential and strategic ally in your advocacy efforts.

Set the momentum with information about sign language rights and why it is important to have a legal framework recognising your national sign language. Do not hesitate to use all the relevant information outlined in the present toolkit.

Be clear, brief, and specific.

As the meeting develops, encourage specific actions from the person you are meeting with. This can be a request to develop a bill together, or co-sponsoring a bill, or voting for or against a measure that does not support sign language rights, supporting or opposing amendments, reforms or legislative initiatives that are in favour or contrary to what the deaf community needs.

It is important that you and your team communicate in a polite manner, and discussions can take place with respect and diplomacy. A government official or legislator or other, could not agree with your statements, don't argue in a way that you may lose support, rather than that, use factual information, evidence, and also real-life stories so that they see the facts and human need for a legal framework for sign languages.

Plan well who from your organisation will make what points. You should have a clear plan of who will speak when and which person will make which points. One person should be the clear lead presenter.

When using sign language interpreters, remember that there is a lag time between when you finish signing and the interpreter finishes voicing. Give the person you are talking with time to respond. Do not have people from your organisation talk one after the other without giving the government official time to respond in between.

As the meeting closes, end with a takeaway. Ask them their thoughts on your proposal, and whether you and your organisation can count on their support or endorsement.

If you and your organisation want to have a visual record of this meeting, ask politely if you can register a few pictures or brief videos of the meeting so that you can share with your organisation. They will likely also want their own photos or video.

Do not give any kind of personal gift or to convince or receive something in return that is personal or unasked for. It is better that there are no interests involved and that neutrality is maintained during the interaction. However, it is ok, if you hand in brochures or materials from the national deaf association.

Do	Do not
Be prepared to hand in summarised information about your goal to achieve the recognition of your national sign language. Have written information about your organisation in the form of a handout or a brochure with clear contact information and how you can be reached.	Leave the meeting without giving contact information
Have a document with key points that should be in sign language legislation and sign language facts from your country.	Come to the meeting with vague information and ideas
Have a clear presentation plan of who will say what during the meeting.	Randomly speak to the government official at different times and interrupt each other.
Give the person you are meeting with time to ask questions and give their views.	Have people from your organisation speak one after the other without giving the person you are meeting with time to respond.

After the Meeting.

Send a letter or email thanking the government or legislator for the meeting and time given to you and your organisation. Reiterate the topics discussed in the meeting, and if possible, follow up on the commitments made. In the same way, if they promised to provide additional information, send it.

If it was agreed to continue the dialogue on another date, or to delve further into an activity or proposal, follow up for the next meeting date and start preparing what will be needed.

Be ready to persevere in a respectful and friendly way towards reaching your goals.

Do	Do not
Make a summary of the meeting notes to share with your organisation for reporting purposes.	Avoid disclosing sensitive or confidential information from the meeting.
Prepare a format for thank you letter or email to send legislators, government officials or others	Refrain from making unauthorised commitments. Unauthorised commitments can lead to misunderstandings and put your organisation’s credibility at risk.
Do follow up if there were any compromises made during the meeting, for instance further information, research, handing in more in-depth information and others.	Avoid engaging in unprofessional or confrontational behaviour. Even if there were disagreements during the meeting.

Resources



READ

1 - WFD Resources

- WFD Position Paper on Language Rights of Deaf Children
- WFD Position Paper on Inclusive Education
- WFD Charter on Sign Language Rights for All
- WFD Human Rights Toolkit

2 - List of the **76 countries** that have achieved Sign Language Legislation and the year (in alphabetical order)

		Country	Year of Sign Language Recognition
1		Albania	2014
2		Angola	2016
3		Argentina	2023
4		Austria	2005
5		Bangladesh	2013
6		Belarus	2022
7		Belgium	2003, 2006 and 2019
8		Bolivia	2009
9		Bosnia and Herzegovina	2009
10		Brazil	2002 and 2005
11		Bulgaria	2021
12		Canada	2019
13		Chile	2010 and 2021
14		Colombia	1996
15		Costa Rica	2020
16		Croatia	2015
17		Cyprus	2006
18		Czech Republic	1998 and 2008
19		Denmark	2014
20		Ecuador	2008
21		El Salvador	2014
22		Estonia	2007
23		Finland	1995
24		Fiji	2013 and 2018
25		Germany	2002
26		Greece	2017
27		Guatemala	2020
28		Honduras	2013
29		Hungary	2009
30		Iceland	2011
31		India	2016
32		Indonesia	2016

33		Ireland	2017
34		Italy	2021
35		Japan	2011
36		Kenya	2010
37		Kosovo	2010 and 2014
38		Latvia	1999
39		Lithuania	1995
40		Luxembourg	2018
41		Malaysia	2008
42		Malta	2016
43		Marshall Islands	2015
44		Mexico	2005
45		Mongolia	2016
46		Namibia	2004
47		Nepal	2015 and 2017
48		The Netherlands	2020
49		New Zealand	2006
50		Nicaragua	2009
51		North Macedonia	2009
52		Norway	2021
53		Panama	1992
54		Papua New Guinea	2015
55		Paraguay	2020
56		Peru	2010
57		Philippines	2018
58		Poland	2011
59		Portugal	1997
60		Republic of Korea	2015
61		Romania	2002
62		Russian Federation	2012
63		Serbia	2015
64		Slovakia	1995
65		Slovenia	2002, 2021
66		South Africa	1996
67		Spain	2007 and 2010
68		Sweden	1981, 2006 and 2009
69		Turkey	2005
70		Uganda	1995
71		Ukraine	2004, 2017 and 2019
72		Uruguay	2001
73		United Kingdom	2022
74		Venezuela	1999
75		Uzbekistan	2020
76		Zimbabwe	2010

Note: This list includes national-level legislation by United Nations Member States. This does not include sub-national recognition legislation. Kosovo and the Palestinian Territories, per the vote of the XX General Assembly of the WFD, are WFD Ordinary Members and also noted on this map.



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