

MLD 2025

Technical dialogue to advance multilingual education

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WFD: 70+ years advocating for human rights



The WFD's Vision

**A World Where Deaf People
Everywhere
Can Sign Anywhere**

What is the significance of International Mother Language Day for deaf communities? What is the importance of national sign languages in multilingual educational settings?



The over 200+ sign languages that exist today are full-fledged languages with their own grammar, syntax, and vocabulary.

They are as diverse as spoken languages, and they are integral to the cultural identity and heritage of deaf communities worldwide.

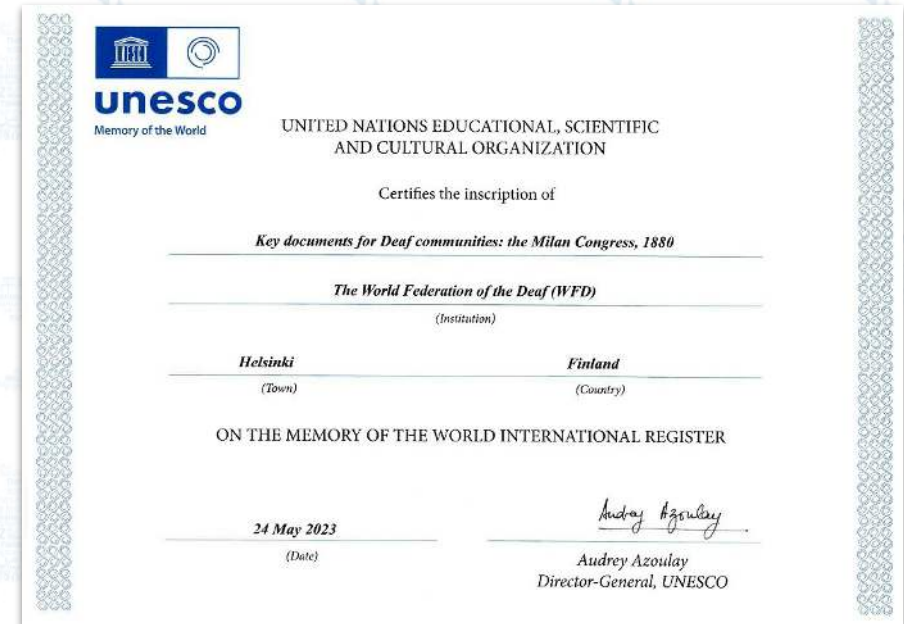
They embody the rich linguistic diversity that exists within our global societies.

UNESCO Memory of the World of the 1880 Milan Congress

In 1880, the 2nd International Congress on the Education of the Deaf took place in Milan, Italy.

This Congress passed a resolution attempting to ban the use of sign languages in deaf education around the world.

The Milan resolutions showcase how sign languages were devalued over time by societies. We are still living with the effects today, after generations of language deprivation and social marginalization for deaf people.





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Position Paper on the Right to Sign Language for Families of Deaf Children

[International Sign version here](#)

May 2024

Key points

- Deaf children have the right to sign language, and realising this right is essential for realizing their right to education, health and wellbeing. Article 5 of the WFD Declaration on the Rights of Deaf Children recognises deaf children's right to grow up in language-rich, multilingual signing environments. As 95% of deaf children are born to hearing families, their language rights are enabled through the provision of sign language support to both children and their families/carers from birth.
- When health care and early intervention and education services fail to provide accurate and comprehensive information to families and carers of deaf children about sign language and fail to provide opportunities to learn it, this constitutes a breach of families/carers' rights and deaf children's right to sign language.
- Article 25 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires States Parties to provide quality early intervention services to deaf children to minimize and prevent further disabilities, such as language deprivation that occurs when deaf children are denied access to sign language while not being able to effortlessly access spoken language during their critical language learning years (from birth to approximately five years old). Article 23 of the CRPD clarifies that early comprehensive information, services and support must be provided to children with disabilities and their families.
- Families and carers of deaf children should be supported in reaping the benefits of multilingualism for their deaf child and be provided with unconditional access to publicly funded, deaf-led sign language services and specialized sign language classes from infancy onwards.

An International Non-Governmental Organisation in official liaison with
the United Nations, UNESCO, ILO, WHO, and the Council of Europe.
Helsinki, FINLAND | www.wfdnet.org

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Position Paper

Right to Sign Language for Families of Deaf Children



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DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF DEAF CHILDREN

Article 1

All deaf children, like all humans, are born free and equal in dignity and rights.



Article 2

All deaf children have a right to a sign language. National sign language(s) are the only fully accessible language for deaf children from birth onwards.



Article 3

The right of deaf children to their national sign language(s) shall not be infringed.



Article 4

All parents, carers and family members of deaf children must be provided with free instruction in their national sign language(s).



Article 5

All deaf children have a right to quality, inclusive, multi-sensory education in their national sign language(s) and the national written language(s).^[1]



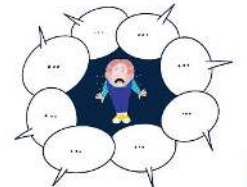
Article 6

All deaf children have a right to learn the linguistic identity and culture of the deaf community.^[2]



Article 7

All deaf children have the right to protection from language deprivation. Not providing access to the national sign language(s) to all deaf children constitutes discrimination.^[3]



Article 8

All deaf children have a right to fluent national sign language models, including teachers in education.^[4]



Article 9

All deaf children have a right to express their views on all matters affecting them.^[5]



Article 10

All the above declarations must be implemented for all deaf children immediately and without delay.



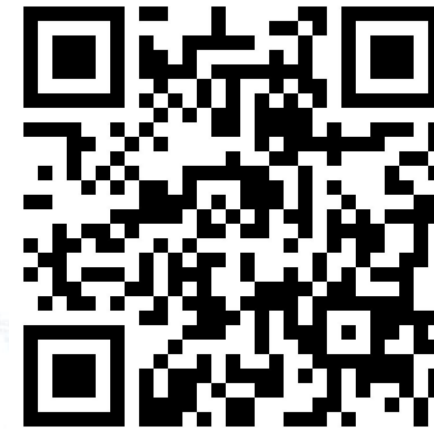
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[1] UN CRPD, Article 24, and the national Disability & Human Rights Inclusion Framework. *Declaration of the International Day of the Girl Child*.
[2] UN CRPD, Article 30, and the national Disability & Human Rights Inclusion Framework. *Declaration of the International Day of the Girl Child*.
[3] UN CRPD, Article 20, and the national Disability & Human Rights Inclusion Framework. *Declaration of the International Day of the Girl Child*.
[4] UN CRPD, Article 24, and the national Disability & Human Rights Inclusion Framework. *Declaration of the International Day of the Girl Child*.
[5] UN CRPD, Article 12, and the national Disability & Human Rights Inclusion Framework. *Declaration of the International Day of the Girl Child*.

Adapted from:

Declaration

on the Rights of Deaf Children



**Make a Difference !
Sign our Declaration Now**



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Recommendation

“ Give families/carers unconditional access to **free deaf-led sign language services and specialized sign language classes** from infancy onwards.



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Recommendation

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Recognize the necessity of **building and nurturing multilingual, sign language-rich spaces** that cater to the **linguistic and cultural needs** of deaf children and their families/carers.



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Recommendation

“ Facilitate, enable and support the **involvement of deaf communities and deaf professionals** in early intervention services and early acquisition of sign languages for deaf children.

Ensure deaf professionals and educators are part of **first-response teams.**



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Together, we can achieve quality,
inclusive, multilingual education for
all deaf learners!

www.wfdeaf.org

