



EUROPEAN UNION  
OF THE DEAF



WORLD FEDERATION  
OF THE DEAF



ENTE  
NAZIONALE SORDI

## Joint Declaration

from the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), European Union of the Deaf (EUD),  
National Association of the Deaf in Italy (ENS)  
at the 24th International Congress on the Education of the Deaf

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Rome, Italy  
11 July 2025

### Preamble

We, representative organisations of deaf people at the national, regional, and global levels, attending the 24th International Congress on the Education of the Deaf, convened in Rome, Italy, 145 years after the Second International Congress held in Milan, Italy, in 1880,

- Recalling the historical significance of the 1880 Congress and its adoption of resolutions that asserted the primacy of oral education to the exclusion of sign languages,
- Deploring the profound and long-lasting harm caused by those resolutions, including the widespread exclusion of sign languages from educational systems and the systematic language deprivation experienced by generations of deaf children,
- Acknowledging with regret that these measures suppressed a natural human linguistic modality and severely restricted the ability of deaf individuals to fully exercise their human rights,
- Noting that many countries have yet to grant legal recognition to their national sign languages,

- Recognising the inherently intersectional nature of deaf communities, whose members are found in every country, language group, ethnicity, and culture,
- Recalling the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), especially Articles 21 and 24, and its emphasis on linguistic identity, inclusive education, and the participation of persons with disabilities in decisions affecting them,
- Recalling also Article 4.3 of the CRPD, affirming the principle of “Nothing about us without us”,
- Welcoming the [2023 Declaration on the Rights of Deaf Children](#) as a guiding instrument for national and international action.

### **We do hereby declare as follows**

We fully and unequivocally renounce the resolutions of the Second International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (1880).

We affirm that sign languages are full and natural human languages, and that their suppression constitutes a denial of linguistic and human rights.

We recognise the historic and ongoing impact of language deprivation on deaf individuals’ cognitive, social, emotional, and educational development.

We affirm that deaf children have the right to acquire and use their national sign languages from birth as a primary means of linguistic expression and education, and must be afforded sign language learning opportunities as part of their education.

We recognise the role of families, deaf communities, educators, and governments in ensuring that deaf children are provided with quality multilingual and multicultural education.

We affirm that national sign languages are integral components of each country’s linguistic ecology and cultural heritage, and should be taught to all people in the country.

**We call upon all Member States of the United Nations, civil society organisations, educational institutions, and other relevant stakeholders to:**

- Legally recognise national sign languages in every country, in alignment with Article 21 of the CRPD.
- Take all measures to ensure deaf children have direct access to sign language from birth, recognising that early exposure is essential for healthy cognitive development and long-term well-being.
- Ensure that all models of inclusive education for deaf learners provide access to quality, multilingual education in the national languages, including direct access to education in and about the national sign language(s).
- Recognising that schools for deaf learners are an integral part of a national inclusive education systems and should be supported by governments.
- Guarantee that deaf children have full access to the national curriculum, with instruction provided in and about national sign languages and including education in deaf history and culture, alongside deaf peers.
- Provide families of deaf children with free, early, and sustained instruction in their national sign languages.
- Ensure the participation of deaf persons and their representative organisations in the development, implementation, and evaluation of all policies affecting the education of deaf learners, in accordance with Article 4.3 of the CRPD.
- Endorse and implement the principles set forth in the [2023 Declaration on the Rights of Deaf Children](#).
- Act with urgency to end the global crisis of language deprivation and promote the full inclusion, dignity, and human rights of all deaf persons.

Released this 11th day of July, 2025, in Rome, Italy and open for signature by all supporters worldwide through official online endorsement.