



Legal Seat – Helsinki, Finland

WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF

An International Non-Governmental Organisation in official liaison with ECOSOC, UNESCO, ILO, WHO and the Council of Europe. WFD was established in Rome in 1951.

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WFD Input to UN's *Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: A Practical Guide for Implementation.*

The 'What'

Provide a brief description of the issue to be addressed

The Deaf Community constitutes both a disability constituency and a linguistic and cultural minority. The diversity goes through their own deaf culture and language, namely sign language. Sign languages are fully-fledged languages with linguistic properties, including grammatical features, such as morphology, phonology and syntax. They are the mother tongue and the natural languages of deaf people. They are the vector of the inclusion of deaf people both in deaf communities and in society.

The rights of deaf people around the world are largely assured through disability policies, legislation and international instruments, as well as legislation and cultural instruments recognising their linguistic and cultural status.

In addition to their use of sign language, deaf people have their own identity which manifests from different perspectives, such as personal experiences of being deaf or one's membership of a language community. However, deaf identity is mainly tied to sign languages and the social connection built on the shared experience with the use of this language. The membership of the deaf community is not often defined by hearing loss but rather by identity with language.

Deaf people differ from other linguistic minorities in one important way: they are usually unable to fully access the spoken languages of their surrounding environment because of their auditory-oral transmission. Therefore, sign languages are not only culturally important, but they are also the sole means of language development and accessible communication for deaf people.

The lack of access to their surrounding environment through sign languages and other accessibility measures affects and disables deaf people, including in the sphere of education.

In many parts of the world, deaf people and deaf children are denied to their rights of accessing quality and inclusive education in sign language. The general trend is to see inclusive education for deaf children as placing them in mainstream school with the provision of sign language interpretation, without having the opportunity to learn sign language and deaf culture.

Such outplacement does not constitute a viable option for deaf children. They will not receive direct education from the teacher as all the information will go through the sign language interpreter, with the risk of missing important information. There is no spontaneous interaction of the deaf child with the teacher and his classmates as everything will pass through

the interpreter. In addition, deaf children will not receive the opportunity to learn about their identity, culture and language.

The 'Why'

Explain why the issue and proposition are justified, referring to evidence and empirical finding when possible.

Several international disability and linguistic legal framework entitle deaf people, including deaf children, to learn and use sign language as well as enjoying their cultural identity.

Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) recognises that people belonging to a minority have the right to use the minority language and to enjoy their own culture.

Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises that all children belonging to a minority shall not be denied their right to enjoy their minority culture and use their own language.

Article 4(3) of the Minorities Declaration establishes that States should take appropriate measures for persons belonging to minorities receive adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or have instruction in this language.

Article 21 e) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that States Parties must recognise and promote the use of sign languages.

Article 24 of the CRPD recognises that all children with disabilities have the right to receive inclusive education, including in sign language. Furthermore, States Parties shall ensure the promotion of sign language in education and the linguistic identity of the deaf community (Art. 24(3)(b)). In addition, State Parties must ensure education to deaf people is delivered in the most appropriate languages, modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximise academic and social development (Art. 24(3)(c)).

Article 30 of the CRPD states that deaf people are entitled to the support of their linguistic and cultural identity.

The 'How'

How will the proposition be realised? Explain the pre-conditions and specific circumstances that are necessary for the proposition to be successful.

Given the above-mentioned legal framework, deaf people are entitled to receiving education in sign language and to the promotion of their linguistic and cultural identity. To do so,

Inclusive education for deaf children is better achieved through bilingual education in the medium of the national sign language and the national written language. The school program must follow the official national curriculum in addition to having deaf culture and sign language classes. Teachers must master sign language with native-level fluency. Ultimately, deaf children must be surrounded by deaf peers and deaf adult models.

Yet, to reach inclusive education for deaf children, governments must

- Recognise their national sign language(s) as an official language, equally with spoken languages;
- Provide opportunities to deaf people to give and receive information and official communications in sign language;
- Establish bilingual schools in national sign language and written language to provide inclusive education to deaf children;
- Provide qualified and professional sign language interpreters to safeguard equal access to

- all services and in society;
- Regularly consult deaf leaders of organisations of the deaf on matters of policy formulation, designs of programs and development of new legislation that will benefit deaf persons at national, regional and international frameworks that affect them.

The Benefits

Starting with non-discrimination and equality as a baseline, explain what specific benefits the proposition has for States and broader society

Having the right and the opportunities to use and enjoy their linguistic and cultural identity is the first step to safeguard non-discrimination and equality for deaf people. Sign languages are not only culturally important, they are also the sole means of language development and accessible communication for deaf people.

With the provision of bilingual education, deaf children will receive better opportunities to develop their linguistic and cultural identity and to maximise the social, emotional, economic and academic outcomes of their education. This would place States Parties in compliance with their international human rights and linguistic obligations.

For more information, please contact WFD Human Rights Officer, Mr Alexandre Bloxs at alexandre.bloxs@wfd.fi



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About the 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 122 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). (www.wfdeaf.org) Email: info@wfd.fi

