



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 STATEMENT ON DEAF PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO DRIVE A CAR OR OTHER VEHICLES

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) urges the removal of all legal or practical barriers preventing deaf people from acquiring learners' permits or drivers' licences for any type of vehicle, so that deaf people may drive vehicles on an equal basis with others. This call is supported by evidence and by international law.

Evidence

The WFD stresses that deafness does not in any way limit a person's ability to drive a car or other vehicles. Consequently, a deaf driver does not constitute a risk for safe traffic. Globally, many deaf people drive.

Globally, there are no known reports that deaf drivers are a threat to other road users in the countries where deaf people are allowed to obtain a driver's license, or that they are involved in more traffic accidents or injuries than the general population. To the contrary, according to studies made in a range of countries, it is well known fact; deaf drivers have been involved in car accidents *less* than the average driver.

Hearing is not a necessary sense for driving a car. For example, it is possible to check a horn is working by sense of touch and to see the ambulance or police vehicles' lights flashing.

International legal standards

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) provides for the right to [Equality and non discrimination](#) for all people with disabilities – including deaf people and requires they have equal protection and benefit under law. Article 5 Paragraph 2 states:

States Parties shall prohibit all discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantee to persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection against discrimination on all grounds.¹

UN CRPD Article 12 also requires that States Parties ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others *in all aspects of life*.

Many countries have ratified or acceded to the UN CRPD and thus have a legal obligation to ensure that their laws and practices align with and do not breach these provisions.

Discriminatory practices

It is rare for countries to have legislation that explicitly states that deaf people cannot obtain a driver's licence. However in many countries how legislation is interpreted by officials has the practical effect that deaf people cannot obtain a driver's licence. Prejudices and common practices by the traffic authorities or other institutions handling learners' permits, drivers' licences and driver training remain as obstacles to deaf people obtaining a licence. Medical certificates stating an applicant is deaf, for example, should not preclude an applicant from obtaining a permit or licence.

Denying deaf people driving licence deprives deaf people of the mobility that gives them access to essential services, social opportunities and life in general. It also restricts the already limited employment prospects open to deaf people. Many deaf people globally work as car mechanics where having the skill to drive (and holding a driver's licence) is an essential part of securing this work. There are also many deaf transportation professionals who have a licence to use long-haul vehicles.

¹ <http://ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx#5>

It is anomalous and cannot be justified that in many developed countries deaf people are able to obtain driving licences on an equal basis with others, while deaf people in other countries are not allowed drive at all.

Recommendations

1. WFD urges that all governments base laws and policies on evidence rather than discriminatory views about the capacity of deaf people, and take into consideration the evidence outlined above.
2. WFD strongly urges that governments take effective steps to ensure that deaf people can exercise their rights to obtain a learner's permit and a driver's licence on an equal basis with others throughout their countries, consistent with the requirement of the UN CRPD.
3. All legislation, policies and practices relating to issuing of drivers permits and licences should be reviewed to ensure that the principle of non-discrimination is applied and the principle of legal capacity of deaf people is respected.
4. Any legislation, policy or directives which contain discriminatory provisions restricting deaf persons' right to obtain a learner's permit, obtain a licence or drive a car or other vehicles as a private person or as an employed driver should be appropriately amended or repealed.
5. Instead of introducing restrictive measures, relevant authorities and driving schools should make provision for deaf people to receive driving lessons in sign language, which is the language a deaf person uses as his or her first language.

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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 132 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