

ACCESSIBILITY ACROSS BORDERS

Standards of information accessibility for people
with visual and hearing impairments

Accessibility Analysis for the Visegrad Group
and Eastern Partnership Countries

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MOLDOVA

INFONET Alliance

www.infonet.md

Association of the Deaf of the Republic
of Moldova

www.as.md



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Hungarian Deafblind Association

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CSO 'Support for the Deaf'

www.karlaradestek.org



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
Stanislaw Brudnoch	
BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN THE PARTNER COUNTRIES	9
Anna Serputko	
SECTION I.	
DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION IN THE PARTNER COUNTRIES	
AZERBAIJAN	13
Kamran Abasov	
ARMENIA	15
Vahe Arzumanyan	
BELARUS	19
HUNGARY	22
Dorca Kiralyhidi	
GEORGIA	26
Teona Gvalia, Mariam Goduadze	
MOLDOVA	31
Victor Koroli	
POLAND	40
Kamila Skalska	
SLOVAK REPUBLIC	47
Maria Krkošková	
UKRAINE	53
Anna Afuzova, Alexander Gorlachev, Yuri Voytyuk, Anna Serputko	
CZECH REPUBLIC	60
Pavel Ruzyak	

SECTION II.

ACCESSIBILITY IN THE MEDIA

Kamila Skalska, Slawomir Stempski, Aleksander Gorlachov

Sign language	66
Three ways in which sign language appears in the media	72
Technical ways of broadcasting sign language content on TV all over the world	74
The work of a deaf interpreter	74
Working in a team	76
Consultation with the community using accessibility services	76
Preparation for the interpretation	77
Use of visual content during interpretation	80
How to translate proper names when interpreting to a nationwide audience?	81
Speaker's identification	81
Synchronization	82
Off-screen sounds	82
Competences and the process of their acquisition	82
Mentoring	83
The size of the interpreter – why is it so important?	85
The most common positioning of a person using sign language on the screen	86
The space for signing – how big should the interpreter's figure be	88
Right or left?	89
Interpreter at the center of the event	89
Additional visual elements on the screen during interpretation	90
Interpreter's outfit	90
Guests signing on the TV show	92

Recommendations for cinematographers	93
Cinematographer's check-list	93
Display quality	94
Information and apology in the event of service interruption	94
Crisis management in an accessible form	94
The biggest challenges	96

SECTION III.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Kamila Skalska

Who uses Audio Description?	96
Technical details regarding Audio Description on TV and in media	103
AD on streaming platforms (online)	105
Do all programs require Audio Description?	106
AD creation process	107
Audio descriptor	110

INTRODUCTION

Stanislaw Brudnoch

The publication “Accessibility Across Borders” is the result of months of work done by experts from the Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership countries on the topic of access to information for people with visual and hearing impairments. It is the first analytical work describing the current situation in each of the above mentioned countries. It is a collection of good practices and recommendations on accessibility of information, as well as a pool of information and specific recommendations for actions aimed at improving the current global situation. It provides directions and answers to the challenge of improving access to information in the near future.

The study is highly relevant as it responds to the issue of the lack of sufficient accessibility of mass-media publications for people with visual and hearing impairments. In particular, the issue was clearly demonstrated by the events of 2020 and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic.

The analysis has shown that in many countries the access of people with visual and hearing impairments to information during the COVID-19 pandemic deteriorated, as the media often did not provide sign language interpretation or audio description. People with visual and hearing impairments were effectively cut off from reliable information about the epidemic’s development and emergency situations.

The pandemic is, naturally, only one of the factors limiting access to information. After all, people with visual and hearing impairments face numerous challenges connected with information accessibility every day. Often problems with information accessibility arise due to the insufficient knowledge or lack of awareness of the media community as well as institutions that organize and broadcast various events.

The publication, intended for a wide audience and addressed mainly to employees of non-governmental organizations, the media, spokespersons and students of humanities, in particular journalism and special education, promotes the idea of information accessibility for people with visual and hearing impairments. It also contains useful and important information for people with visual and hearing impairments from different countries, in particular, current standards in the field of information accessibility.

The publication was produced as part of the “Accessibility Across Borders” project funded by the International Visegrad Fund.

The project “Accessibility Across Borders” started in 2018 and includes activities aimed at the professionalization and development of organizations and institutions dealing with the general accessibility of culture, art and information to people with visual and hearing impairments. It brings together experts from the Visegrad Group and Eastern Partnership countries creating an interdisciplinary coalition of social activists, people with visual and hearing impairments, universities and public organizations, various institutions and cultural and artistic figures.

The project's greatest achievements include:

- development and implementation of audio description in the Arsenal Museum in Lviv (Ukraine), the Archaeological Museum in Poznan (Poland), and the Ethnographic Museum in Stará Ľubovňa (Slovakia);
- a training program for audio description and sign language experts;
- development of audio descriptions, organization of specialized and socially-oriented media productions, movies, fully adapted to the needs of people with visual and hearing impairments in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia;
- logistical preparation for the implementation of high-quality international and national sign language interpretation in various spheres of life for persons with hearing impairments;
- numerous educational meetings and webinars aimed at deepening knowledge and promoting the idea of information accessibility.

BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN THE PARTNER COUNTRIES

Anna Serputko

The first section of the publication describes general trends in education and accessibility of information to persons with visual and hearing impairments both at the legislative and practical levels in four Visegrad Group countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia,) and six Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine). General information about the situation in the partner countries is arranged alphabetically.

Reliable statistical data derived from population census and the European health survey are available in the case of the following countries: Georgia, Hungary, Poland. In the case of other countries, statistical data may vary depending on a specific agency or a study.

In all the countries described in the publication there are still special educational institutions of various levels for persons with visual and hearing impairments, but at the same time, most countries have been actively developing other forms of education, e.g. inclusive and integrated education. Only in the case of Azerbaijan and Belarus we did not find data confirming the spread of inclusive and (or) integrated education.

Regarding the status of sign language and the provision of sign language interpretation services for people with hearing impairments, the situation in most countries varies, depending on several factors, e.g. population size, including the number of people with hearing impairments, the socio-economic situation in the country, etc. Let's dwell on this issue in a little more detail. Although the level of literacy of the deaf in Azerbaijan is low, the fact that in 2021 the sign language was recognized by the Parliament National Assembly has led to positive changes, including the creation of online dictionaries of sign language. Unfortunately, neither sign language service providers have been identified in the country nor tariffs for the provision of interpretation services have been introduced yet. In addition, there are problems with professional training of sign language interpreters, although it seems to be a matter of time only. In Armenia the number of trained interpreters is also insufficient, and they mainly provide interpretation services in the capital and two or three largest cities. Therefore, people with hearing impairments, residing in remote areas, cannot use sign language interpreting services on an equal basis. The certification of interpreters in Armenia, similarly to Moldova and Ukraine, is carried out by the Armenian Deaf Society. In Belarus the freedom to use sign language is declared, and the provision of free sign language interpreting services is legally regulated.

Sign language interpreters are trained by the Pedagogical Linguistic College in Minsk, although the training of interpreters may still be improved, since sign language interpreting in Belarus is mostly done by children of deaf parents. In many countries, deaf people face challenges when getting university level education. In Hungary, sign language and the deaf community have a lot of support as they are protected by the Sign Language Act. People with hearing impairments are guaranteed at least 120 hours of free interpretation per year. There are sign language interpreting centers all over the country.

The rehabilitation of people with visual and hearing impairments is quite efficient. Sign language in Georgia is officially recognized by the state. There is certification of sign language interpreters. Electronic dictionaries of Georgian Sign Language have been developed, but there are still shortages of sign language interpreters and teachers fluent in sign language. In Moldova, accreditation of sign language interpreters is on a par with accreditation of translators/interpreters of any other foreign languages, setting an example of a good practice on a country level. The main provider of sign language interpreting services, similarly to Ukraine, is the Association of the Deaf of Moldova. In Poland, there is a register of sign language interpreters, maintained by regional public administration (voivods), while the certification of interpreters is carried out by the Polish Association of the Deaf.

A unified certification system for sign language interpreters is being created. In Poland interpreters are trained at different levels, including at universities. In Slovakia, no mandatory certification of sign language interpreters is required. There is a large number of hearing-impaired persons per interpreter. In Ukraine, preservation, learning and full development of sign language is guaranteed. Sign language interpreting services are provided by both state and civil society organizations.

Training of interpreters, as in Armenia and Moldova, is mainly provided by the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf and the newly established All-Ukrainian Association of Sign Language Interpreters. The tariffs for sign language interpreting have not been officially introduced yet. There is no professional training of sign language interpreters at university level yet, but the Department of Deaf Education and Deaf Psychology named after M. D. Yarmachenko of the National Pedagogical Dragomanov University (Kiev) has been actively dealing with the issue. Television accessibility has been gradually improving through sign language interpretation and captions. Despite the differences in the provision of services for people with hearing impairments and in general status of sign language in different countries, there are still some challenges faced by the majority of the countries.

The main ones are as follows:

- **insufficient number** of sign language interpreters;
- **accreditation and certification** of sign language interpreters;
- **professional training** of sign language interpreters;
- **inaccessibility of information** in various spheres of life to people with hearing impairments.

We recommend everyone who is interested in better understanding of the situation in the countries described in the publication to read the first section of the book.



SECTION I.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION IN THE PARTNER COUNTRIES

AZERBAIJAN

Kamran Abasov

STATISTICS

In Azerbaijan, the community of people with hearing and speech impairments is about 30,000 people, while there are about 1,000 people with hearing, speech and visual impairments. There are no exact statistical data.

The number of sign language interpreters in Azerbaijan is 8, including 3 professional interpreters. Territorial coverage of interpretation services: 6 interpreters are registered in Baku, while 2 in the regions. The ratio of sign language interpreters to the number of people with hearing and speech impairments in Azerbaijan is **1:3750**.

about **30 000**

people with hearing and speech impairments

about **1 000**

people with hearing, speech and visual impairments

**1 interpreter
per 3750 people**

with hearing and speech impairments

EDUCATION

Special educational institutions in Azerbaijan:

- kindergartens: 1
- secondary schools: 3
- vocational schools: 1.

According to the Ministry of Education, there are about 400 secondary school students. The percentage of literate people with hearing impairments is very low. Over 80% of the deaf cannot read and write correctly, they communicate only in sign language, which is not the same as literate spoken language. Most teachers in schools are not fluent in sign language, hence, the deaf cannot learn to speak and read correctly. There is a lack of information about teaching children with hearing and visual impairments.

LEGISLATION

The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" of May 31, 2018, No. 1153-VQ with subsequent amendments.

In Azerbaijan there is no accreditation procedure for sign language interpreters, as there are no relevant training courses. In the future it is planned to create a center for sign language and to train sign language interpreters.

STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE

In Azerbaijan, sign language was recognized by the National Assembly of the Milli Majlis (Parliament) in the fall of 2021. An online dictionary of sign language, developed by the CSO "Support for the Deaf" with the support of the CSO "Regional Development" at the initiative of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and the mobile operator NAR, was presented in September 2021.

No providers of sign language interpretation services have been identified, as the status of sign language has been recognized at the state level only recently.

The tariffs for the provision of sign language interpretation services have not been introduced yet as well.

PROVISION OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION SERVICES

Sign language interpretation services are provided at the Agency for Sustainable and Operational Social Security, established under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of Azerbaijan (DOST Agency). DOST centers managed by the Agency deal with pensions, benefits, employment, and other issues within the scope of the Ministry of Labor. There are challenges with professional sign language interpreting. A program for the training and professional development of sign language interpreters should be introduced.

GOOD PRACTICES

After posting the above mentioned dictionary on social networks, the number of university students and social workers willing to learn sign language has increased. Although there was not much time left in 2021, about 100 people started participating in basic sign language courses at various training centers, but the methodology for training sign language interpreters is still lacking.

ARMENIA

Vahe Arzumanyan

There are **nine special education institutions** in the Republic of Armenia:

1. Yerevan Special School #14 for Children with Visual Impairments.
2. Yerevan Special Educational Complex for Children with Hearing Impairments.
3. Yerevan Special School #17 for Children with Musculoskeletal Disorders.
4. Republican Educational Complex No. 1.
5. Republican Educational Complex No. 2.
6. Yerevan Special School No. 11 for Mentally Disabled Children.
7. Kapan Special Education Complex No. 3.
8. Abovyan Special (auxiliary) School No. 1 for Mentally Disabled Children.
9. Gavar Special School No. 1.

STATISTICS

We present below the number of visually and hearing impaired individuals enrolled in special schools, along with links to sources:

According to the Ministry of ... (please, see the [link](#))

There are **158 students** at Yerevan, Yerevan Police Department #14 in M/G and **105 students** at Yerevan Highway 17c ARM/d

There are **1,047 schools** with inclusive education throughout Armenia.

The number of sign language interpreters in Armenia according to unofficial data ranges from **20 to 30**, most of whom are located in the capital and the rest in three major cities. The ratio of sign language interpreters to the number of people with hearing impairments is 1:104.

The cost of sign language interpreting services in Armenia is \$20-40 per hour.

1 interpreter
per 104 people
with hearing impairments

The procedure for the certification of sign language interpreters in Armenia is not legally regulated. The priority is given to interpreters working for the Armenian Deaf Society that are certified by the same Deaf Society. Such certificates allow them to provide interpretation services at notary offices.

Armenian statistical reports provide the following data¹ on the numbers of disabled people with **vision impairments**:

Severe disability (level 1): **1,614 people**
Moderate disability (level 2): **3,408 people**
Mild disability (level 3): **10,330 people**
Children: **515 people**

and the number of disabled people with **hearing impairments**:

Severe disability (level 1): **13 people**
Moderate disability (level 2): **1,304 people**
Mild disability (level 3): **389 people**
Children: **432.**

INCLUSION IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

The Republic of Armenia declares the inclusiveness, accessibility and quality of pre-school education as an important guarantee for the provision, development and education of every child, the creation of a safe environment, preservation and promotion of life and health.

Inclusive education means ensuring maximum participation in the educational process and obtaining outcomes described in national standards of general education by providing necessary conditions and adapting environment for each child, including those in need of special educational conditions, in line with developmental characteristics.

¹ https://www.armstat.am/file/article/sv_01_21a_530.pdf

The Republic of Armenia declares universal inclusive education as a guarantee of the right to education for every child. The policy of inclusive education aims to ensure accessibility, opportunities and quality in the case of each child on an equal basis. Armenian Sign Language is used when educating and raising deaf people in the Republic of Armenia.

Below we describe good practices, resulting from recent Armenian reforms.

In line with the decision of the Armenian government, since 2015 some special schools had been reorganized into territorial psychological-pedagogical support centers, and in 2021 these centers started operating throughout Armenia.

The National Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship locally provides educational and psychological support to the organization of a child's education, that is, local centers have been established with the task to provide relevant professional educational assistance in organizing the education of students in educational institutions and including children who require special educational conditions in the educational process.

Thus, the following educational and psychological assistance is provided locally:

1. **Counseling parents and teachers** on how to organize the educational process and involve a child socially;
2. **On-site supervision** at local centers regarding educational and psychological assistance, in line with an agreed schedule;
3. **Providing highly specialized educational and psychological services** to individuals with special educational needs who have the following impairments:
 - *voice and speech impairments,*
 - *hearing impairments,*
 - *vision impairments,*
 - *intellectual impairments,*
 - *motor impairments.*
4. **Retraining of specialists** assisting in the organization of education in educational institutions: teachers, their assistants; organization of training courses for parents.

5. **Visits**, aimed at facilitating homeschooling, are made by specialists at the request of educational institutions.

In the Republic of Armenia accessibility for the blind and deaf communities is poor. It is important to note that physical, informational accessibility as well as access to sports and culture are virtually at a zero level. Despite the various state employment programs for the visually and hearing impaired, no efficient solutions have been introduced.

As a result of online and offline meetings held during the program "Assisting the Visually Impaired in the South Caucasus" and the needs assessment in the Republic of Armenia, we propose to implement in Armenia re-training programs in sign language as well as organize roundtable meetings allowing various experts and people with disabilities to exchange international experiences.

BELARUS

STATISTICS

According to various data, about 30 thousand people with profound sight impairments live in Belarus. There are more than 12 thousand deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the country. Official statistical data are not available.

At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, there were 6 special schools for children with visual impairments, where 570 children were enrolled, and 11 special schools for deaf children, where over 1,100 children studied.

about **30 000**

people with profound sight impairments

more than **12 000**

deaf and hard-of-hearing people

LEGISLATION

In 2016, Belarus ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Integration will soon enter into force, introducing innovations that will bring national legislation closer to the high standard of implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities established by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

According to the above-mentioned Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Integration, persons with disabilities in the Republic of Belarus have a full range of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and freedoms provided by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, legislative acts and international treaties of the Republic of Belarus, including the right to receive high-quality sign language interpretation services.

Article 11 of the Law defines the status and functioning of the sign language.

"The state recognizes the linguistic identity of the sociocultural (cultural & linguistic) community of people with hearing impairments.

Sign language is recognized as a language of communication of people with hearing impairments, including the areas of oral communication in the state languages of the Republic of Belarus, and is a complete linguistic system of cognition, development, education, and access to information.

Belarusian Sign Language is a sign language formed in the Republic of Belarus in accordance with territorial and cultural affiliation.

The state supports the preservation and development of sign language and ensures:

- *the freedom of use and equality of sign language with other languages;*
- *training of sign language interpreters, retraining and advanced training of teachers working with people with hearing impairments;*
- *basic sign language training for specialists working in the fields of social protection, healthcare, education, culture, physical culture, sports and tourism, prevention and elimination of emergency situations, human rights and law enforcement;*
- *provision of free sign language interpretation services according to the terms and conditions stipulated by law.*

Sign language interpreting is performed by qualified sign language interpreters.

When a hearing-impaired person participates in the work of state agencies, as well as in court proceedings, procedural actions, including preliminary investigations and pre-trial detention, sign language interpretation is provided to the full extent of that person's needs for interpretation.

Activities encompassed in the state support of sign language are financed by the republican and (or) local budgets, as well as by other sources not prohibited by law.

The current situation pertaining to the functioning of sign language in Belarus is as follows.

The number of sign language interpreters is **95**. At the same time 90% of the interpreters are children of deaf parents, 45% of whom have already achieved or will achieve retirement age soon.

Sign language interpreters provide services to people with hearing impairments only in large cities.

The ratio of sign language interpreters to the number of people with hearing and speech impairments is **1 interpreter per 120 people**.

**1 interpreter
per 120 people**
*with hearing and
speech impairments*

Three years ago, the Pedagogical Linguistic College in Minsk began training sign language interpreters. In addition to the qualification of a "sign language interpreter," college graduates receive education of a secondary school teacher (elementary school foreign language teacher).

Sign language interpretation services are provided free of charge by state agencies (local social service centers) and the CSO "Belarusian Society of the Deaf".

The main issue pertaining to the functioning of sign language is the insufficient number of interpreters. Not all college graduates qualified as sign language interpreters continue working as interpreters due to low wages. Local centers of social services employ a sign language interpreter only if at least 60 persons with hearing and speech impairments live in the territory situated in the center's coverage. It should be noted that an extremely small number of persons with profound hearing and speech impairments get university level education. Similarly, the reason is the shortage of sign language interpreters, as an interpreter is hired only when there are at least 6 students with hearing impairments in an educational institution.

According to the experts of the Belarusian Society of the Deaf, a number of comprehensive measures is required. There is a need for a university level state program for training sign language interpreters. According to experts, a sign language interpreter should have a university level degree and qualify not only as an interpreter, but also as a psychologist. What is also required is an interpreter retraining program (there are changes in the language, many new words appear, etc.). The program promoting sign language should finance not only interpreter training, but also ensure fair compensation. As a rule, low income of people with hearing and speech impairments impedes the development of the market for sign language interpreting services. There is also another issue: parents of children with profound hearing impairments start teaching their children sign language either too late or never.

Opening centers for receiving and passing messages from persons with profound hearing and speech impairments can be considered a good practice. Such centers have been opened at the initiative of the Belarusian Society of the Deaf, and they work 24/7 in all regional capitals. Modern messenger applications are used in the process of message reception and transmission. The remuneration of center employees is covered by local city budgets. The Belarusian Society of the Deaf has been gradually increasing coverage of those centers, including rural areas as well.

HUNGARY

Dorka Kiralyhidi

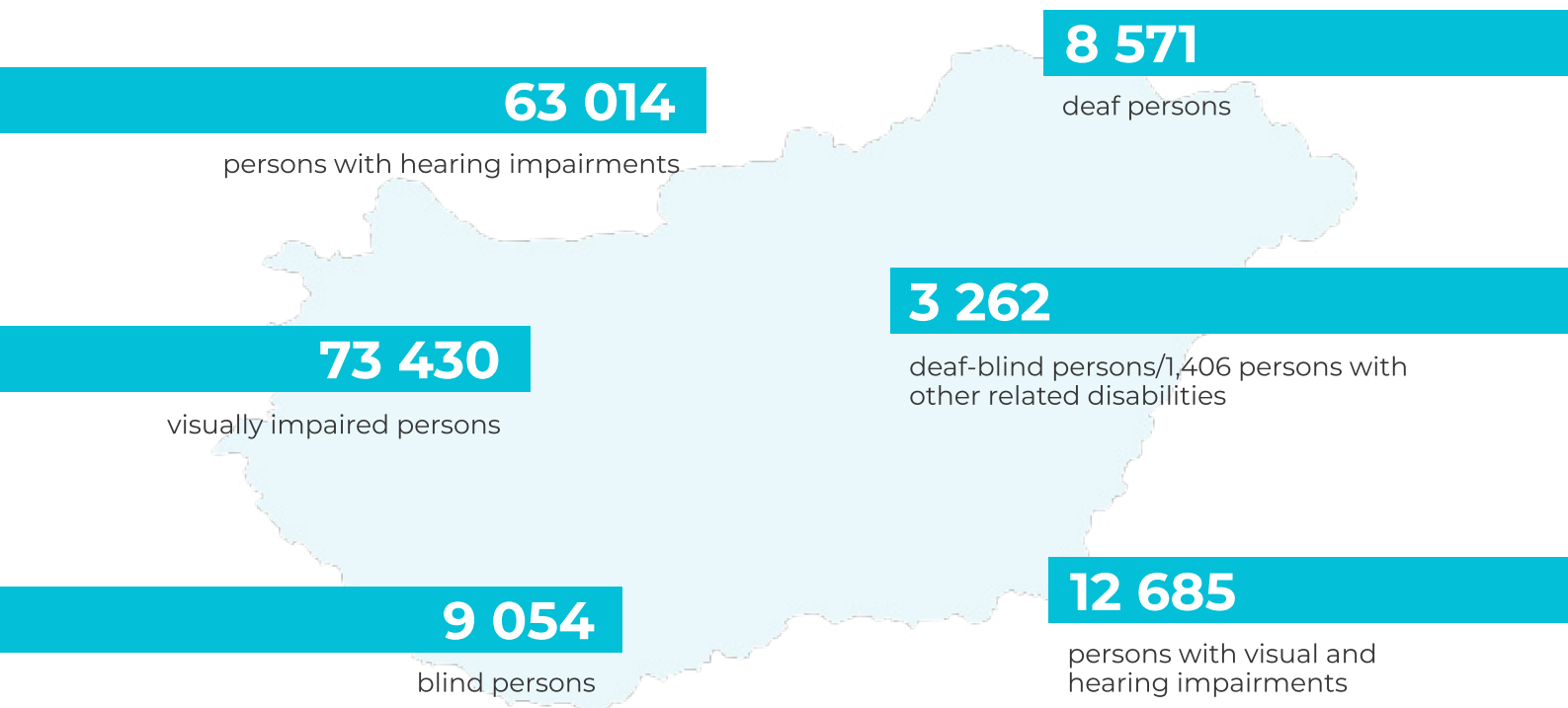
STATISTICS

In 2021 the permanent population of Hungary was 9 890 640 people.

From our point of view, having reliable statistics means that we have something to refer to in our lobbying activities.

The last census in our country took place in 2011. It should be emphasized that before the 2011 census we had separate discussions with the government aimed at including a new option of disability in the questionnaire, i.e. the introduction of the deaf-blind category as an option (visually and hearing impaired). We were very eager for the results, because accepting the deaf-blind identity is much more difficult than choosing just a vision impairment or hearing loss.

So, based on the data from the 2011 census, we can say that in our country there are:



Of course, the census data do not necessarily reflect the most accurate figures, but the financial resources of our association are insufficient to conduct a similar study independently. In addition, these figures are consistent with international statistics.

It is important to emphasize that, in our opinion, deaf-blind people are those who have coexisting vision and hearing impairments. Thus, deaf-blindness does not mean that someone is completely deaf and blind: a person may retain one's sight or hearing; however, his/her rehabilitation and communication is only possible when dual sensory loss is taken into account. We believe that deaf-blindness is a special disability. Hearing loss and visual impairment must be assessed on a functional basis, because two impairments can have an additional negative impact on each other.

People living with visual and hearing impairments are considered deaf-blind if their dual sensory loss does not allow the use of educational and auxiliary methods normally used in the case of visually impaired and hard-of-hearing/deaf people.

We are working hard to raise awareness of the concept of deaf-blindness and to make this special disorder accepted. The achieved results are confirmed by statistical data, as more and more people are accepting and assuming the deaf-blind identity.

It is very important to introduce a common definition of deaf-blindness and identify age-related needs.

From our point of view, there are big differences between the needs of congenital deaf-blind people and the needs of people with acquired deaf-blindness.

In terms of age, it is important to identify and distinguish between needs specific to childhood, active age and old age.

The most important thing for children is to have the right to an accessible and effective education system. For people at working age, the most important are employment, housing, and support for independent living. For the elderly, it is important to accept the changes in life circumstances and to maintain the quality of life. The most effective measures in this case are available aids and well-trained professionals.

Of course, we also try to reach as many people as possible with our services and help them to learn to live with their limitations.

Currently, there are **134 sign language interpreters** in our National Register.

They work at 22 sign language interpreting centers across the country. Each sign language interpreting center must have one trained interpreter who can also work with deaf-blind people and knows relevant communication methods.

The national spread of the interpreting services was ensured by the Sign Language Act of 2009. Since then, the state has committed itself to supporting sign language interpretation services. All persons with hearing impairments can request **120 hours of free interpretation per year**. Deaf-blind persons may request **150 hours per year**. **Additional 60 hours** are available for those who study.

In addition, a very important achievement of 2021 is the Basic Rehabilitation for the Visually Impaired Act, which also regards care for deaf-blind persons. This law guarantees that all visually impaired persons can have **300 hours of basic rehabilitation** per year. All deaf-blind or other visually impaired persons with additional disabilities can request **400 hours** per year. Rehabilitation sessions are offered at 12 basic rehabilitation centers across the country. The centers employ specially trained educators who help the visually impaired, deaf-blind and other visually impaired people with multiple disabilities learn the skills needed to lead their daily lives.

In Hungary, both segregated and integrated forms of education are available for visually and hearing-impaired children.

In Hungary, special early development centers, where parents can go when their child needs counseling or classes, are available from the age of 0.

National Expert Committees assess children with disabilities, identifying their developmental needs. Our next goal here in Hungary is to set up an expert committee for children with multiple disabilities, because at the moment each impairment is handled by a separate assessment committee. Of course, these committees also examine children with multiple disabilities, but they have the right to grant benefits only within their area of expertise. For this reason, parents of children with multiple disabilities have to go through all the committees to ensure that their children are entitled to all benefits and relevant aids.

EDUCATION

There are many special education kindergartens in the country, but most parents still try to enroll their children in integrated education institutions.

There are four special schools nationwide for the visually impaired and eight for the hearing impaired. Each school also has a special kindergarten.

Teachers may visit children enrolled in integrated learning programs and provide regular assistance. Vocational training is available to many students with disabilities, but there are fewer opportunities for students with multiple disabilities.

LEGISLATION

In Hungary, ratification of the UN Convention was one of the key milestones.

In Hungary, each disability group has its own Nongovernmental National Organization (NGO). FESZT (National Council of Associations of Persons with Disabilities in Hungary) works as an umbrella organization advocating the interests of persons with disabilities in Hungary. FESZT is a member of the European Disability Forum (EDF) and informs the government about all new initiatives of EDF. It is very important to build links between the work at the national and international level, as well as between NGOs and the government.

The development of a common vision by all national organizations of people with disabilities is the main key to successful consultations with the government.

The National Disability Council works with the support of the government and in accordance with the rules stipulated by law. All the national organizations of people with disabilities participate in its work. All amendments introduced into any law affecting the rights of people with disabilities should be first discussed with the Council. The Council may either approve the draft or require additional changes.

We are trying to create equal opportunities in Hungary for deaf-blind people. We have very good results, but there is still a lot of work ahead of us.

The Hungarian Deaf-Blind Association is currently working to ensure that every deaf-blind person has lifelong learning opportunities and the right to high quality supported housing.

We would like to improve the support system for families with deaf-blind children and allow family members to return to the labor market: educational institutions should also work with deaf-blind children during school breaks, as they do with other children across the country.

We believe that the identification of legitimate human needs and their reflection in legislation are very important. This requires a development of an effective process, starting from the moment of the identification of needs and lasting till their fulfillment.

GEORGIA

Theona Gvalia, Mariam Goduadze

STATISTICS

According to the 2014 General Population Census, Georgia's population was 3 713 804 people. According to the same census, 6.4% of the population (**239,204 people**) were diagnosed with hearing impairments. Among children under 15, 0.07% (2,463 children) were diagnosed with hearing impairment; among people aged 15-60 and over 60, the same rate was 1.21% (4,510) and 0.66% (190,531) respectively.

239 204

people with hearing impairments

576 348

people with visual impairments

According to the same source, **576,348 people** were diagnosed with visual impairments. Among children under 15, 8,903 of them were diagnosed with visual impairments; the numbers regarding people aged 15-60 and over 60 were 208,276 and 359,169 respectively.

NUMBER OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

According to the Union of the Deaf of Georgia, there are **50 sign language** interpreters in the country.

NUMBER OF INTERPRETERS BY REGION:

Tbilisi - 15 interpreters;

Kakheti - 2 interpreters;

Shida Kartli - 1 interpreter;

Kvemo Kartli - 1 interpreter;

Imereti - 2 interpreters;

Samegrelo - 2 interpreters;

Adjara - 3 interpreters.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS FOR DEAF/HARD-OF-HEARING AND BLIND/VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN:

Tbilisi State School No. 203² (for deaf children and children with hearing impairments): total number of students - 163; number of teachers - 45.

² <https://edu.aris.ge/schools/qalaq-tbilisis-203-sadjaro-skola>

Kutaisi State School No. 45³ (for deaf children and children with hearing impairments): total number of students - 39; number of teachers - 19.

Tbilisi State School No. 202⁴ (for blind and visually impaired children): total number of students - 45; number of teachers - 25.

STATUS OF GEORGIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Georgian Sign Language has been officially recognized by the state. The Guidelines for Certification and Professional Development of Georgian Sign Language Interpreters, adopted in 2021 in Georgia, were initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and supported by the United Nations Development Program and the European Union.

Sign language interpretation services are provided by the Union of the Deaf of Georgia.

There are several electronic Georgian Sign Language dictionaries, for example:

1. Subject Dictionary of Georgian Sign Language, online dictionary: <http://jestikoni.ge/>
2. Georgian Sign Language Dictionary <https://gesl.iliauni.edu.ge/>. The dictionary contains 4,000 signs arranged in the alphabetical order of the Georgian spoken language. The electronic version of the dictionary with a video is accessible online to everyone.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia has published a methodological guide concerning the education of students with hearing impairments. It describes the vision of the Ministry as follows:

Educating students with hearing impairments is a critical issue in special and inclusive education. Students with hearing impairments can participate in the educational process:

- a) in special schools, where only students with specific educational needs study and, if necessary, educational material is adapted to their educational needs (special education);
- b) in mainstream schools, based on an individual educational program and with the use of aids (inclusive education);
- c) in a special class of a mainstream school, where students study based on a modified version of the national curriculum (integrated education).

³ https://edu.aris.ge/schools/search?name=45®ion=8&district=&status=1&class=¤cy=GEL&period=0&price_from=&price_to=

⁴ https://edu.aris.ge/schools/search?name=45®ion=8&district=&status=1&class=¤cy=GEL&period=0&price_from=&price_to=

Special schools are designed for students with special educational needs and specialize in specific educational needs, for example a special school for students with hearing impairments, etc.

The Ministry of Education should ensure:

1. That teachers are motivated and develop professionally;
2. That classmates are informed;
3. Small groups;
4. Organization of classes with different aspects in mind;
5. That sign language is taught as an important means of communication.

There are different types of education for deaf and hard-of-hearing children in Georgia. Deaf students interact with their peers during extracurricular activities. Children in various educational institutions can meet, interact and communicate with children who attend special schools through the use of sign language.

Integrated education means integrating children with disabilities into a mainstream school, where they attend a special education class. Such classes are often called resource classes, where specially trained teachers work with children. Students usually spend some time in the classroom with their peers, participating in lessons and school activities.

Inclusive education means that children with disabilities are involved in all activities of a mainstream school. They attend all lessons and school activities, while an interdisciplinary team (a teacher, a psychologist, an occupational therapist, a speech therapist, etc.) with the active participation of parents develops an individual education plan (IEP), which ensures the adaptation of the existing curriculum to the individual abilities of a child. It also describes the methods by means of which children learn and are assessed. There are various opinions about which method is the best for teaching students with disabilities, and many of them are evidence-based.

Integration and inclusion are relevant for hard-of-hearing and deaf children. Schools that implement inclusive education are well aware that students with total hearing loss and hearing impairments may need additional services (depending on the severity of a disability), such as hiring a sign language interpreter or a special education teacher fluent in sign language. An interpreter becomes a "bridge" between a deaf child and the school environment. Ongoing conversations and events become fully accessible to the child, although the connection is kind of indirect, since interpreters are not teachers. When the child

has additional questions on a given topic, the interpreter gets an answer from the teacher and relays it back. Some schools employ special education teachers fluent in sign language, although some schools have neither an interpreter nor teachers fluent in sign language. As a result, children miss a lot of information (especially during group discussions) and may even feel isolated.

RECOGNIZED BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

1. First of all, children with hearing impairments may continue living in their own homes. They attend a neighboring school and spend their free time surrounded by their family members.
2. Deaf children have opportunities to interact with the hearing world. Through daily interaction with their peers, they become more aware of their way of life and learn communication skills they will use in the future.
3. There are academic and vocational programs intended for deaf children.

However, there are also some challenges:

1. In an inclusive environment, deaf children receive information mostly through an interpreter.
2. Direct contacts with teachers and peers are limited. School employees (a medical doctor, a speech therapist, a librarian) often cannot communicate directly with deaf students, so the student cannot use services available in the school environment.
3. The lack of a highly qualified interpreter or a special teacher fluent in sign language at school is a serious issue, impeding the effective involvement of a hearing-impaired child in the educational process.

THE FOLLOWING PUBLIC SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS:

- **Hearing aids** as a part of a social rehabilitation program. The purpose of the aid is to increase the functional independence of the target group and promote its integration into society. About 1,160 digital hearing aids are purchased and distributed annually (including 100 pieces of pediatric digital hearing aids for children under 18).

- **Providing technical devices** (smartphones) with a video conferencing function for deaf and hard-of-hearing people. The purpose is to improve the quality of functional independence of the target group and to promote its integration into society. About 50 such devices (smartphones) are purchased and distributed each year.
- **About 25 cochlear implants and related hearing and speech rehabilitation are funded each year from general health insurance.** There is also a subprogram of the social rehabilitation program aimed at supporting communication of the deaf. The activities of the subprogram include the services of 10 sign language interpreters in at least eight regions of Georgia (except Tbilisi) (at least one interpreter in each of the regions).

THE FOLLOWING PUBLIC SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE WITH HEARING AND VISION IMPAIRMENTS:

- **The White Cane component** of the social rehabilitation program. The target group of the component is visually impaired people in need of a white cane for the blind.

THE FOLLOWING SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO DEAF-BLIND PEOPLE:

- **Four clubs for the deaf-blind** in four cities, in four regions of Georgia (Tbilisi, Batumi, Telavi, Zugdidi). Each club employs two guides-interpreters that help the deaf-blind to travel and communicate.

The infrastructure and services of the justice system are adapted for use by people with disabilities, including people with hearing and vision impairments. However, there are some problems, for example, the facilities are not fully adapted to the needs of users of hearing aid technology.

MOLDOVA

Victor Koroli

STATISTICS

Community size and situation of people with disabilities in Moldova in 2019.

As of January 1, 2020, according to the National Social Insurance Agency, the number of people with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova was 177 thousand, including 10,7 thousand children aged 0-17. People with disabilities accounted for 6.7% of the total number of regular residents, and children with disabilities accounted for 1.9% of the total number of children with regular residence in the Republic of Moldova.⁵

There is no accurate data on the number of people with hearing and speech impairments as well as with vision impairments, since the state statistics do not provide information on the type of disability, but only on its severity.

Association of the Deaf of the Republic of Moldova estimates⁶ that there are **about 5000 people** with hearing and speech disabilities in Moldova. 2492 of them are members of the Association of the Deaf (members should be at least 18 years old). I

Moldova Association of the Blind estimates⁷ that there are **about 15,000 visually impaired people** in Moldova, 7000 of whom are members of the Association (members should be at least 18 years old). Also, according to the Association's estimates, there are about 10,000 children with visual impairments in Moldova, about 500 of whom need to be educated in special institutions.

According to the estimates of the CSO "Medical-Social Rehabilitation Center for Visually Impaired LOW VISION",⁸ there are **about 50,000 people with visual impairments** in the country. However, according to the estimates of the World Health Organization (based on the total population size), in Moldova there may be up to **100,000 people with visual impairments**.

NUMBER OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

According to an extract from the State Register of Official Interpreters and Translators (last updated on May 07, 2021), **17 sign language interpreters**

⁵ National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova <https://statistica.gov.md/libview.php?l=ru&id=6827&idc=168>

⁶ <https://as.md/ru>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Asocia%C8%9Bia-Nev%C4%83z%C4%83torilor-din-Moldova-1098392857015797>

⁸ www.lowvision.md

are registered in Moldova (numbers 289-296; numbers 504-512).*

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF INTERPRETERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND THE RATIO OF THE NUMBER OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS TO THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH HEARING AND SPEECH IMPAIRMENTS

The city of Balti (north of Moldova) - 2 interpreters,

The city of Cahul (south of Moldova) - 1 interpreter,

Chisinau municipality (center of Moldova) - 12 interpreters (one is retired),

1 interpreter left for permanent residence in the United States,

1 interpreter left for permanent residence in Russia.

Officially, there are **17 interpreters** and 5,000 citizens with hearing and speech impairments in Moldova. The mathematical ratio is **1:295**.

**17 interpreter
per 5000 citizens**

*with hearing and
speech impairments*

EDUCATION

Special educational institutions for children with hearing and speech impairments and for children with visual impairments

Special educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova are as follows:

Preschool Education Institution No. 167 for children with hearing and related impairments (Chisinau), total number of children - 65, including 30 with hearing and speech impairments, 21 with visual impairments and 14 children without disabilities).

Special State Preschool Education Institution No. 135 for rehabilitation of visually impaired children (Chisinau), the number of children with visual impairments - 60.

Vocational School No. 11 (Chisinau), the number of students - 137 (including 92 students with disabilities: 20 with hearing and speech impairments, 8 with visual impairments).

Special School No. 12 for children with hearing impairments and tardive deafness (Chisinau), the number of students - 73.

The Theoretical Lyceum with a technological profile for visually impaired children (Chisinau), the number of students - 75.

There is no information on the number of children and students with hearing and speech impairments, as well as visual impairments in mainstream education. Only the Ministry of Education and Science has such information.

The following special education institutions **were closed** in Moldova between 2018 and 2020:

1. *Kindergarten for deaf children (Balti),*
2. *Special boarding school for blind and visually impaired children (Balti),*
3. *Special boarding school for deaf-blind children (Khirbovets village, Kalarashsky district),*
4. *Special boarding school for deaf and hard-of-hearing children (Cahul).*

There was no official decision to close those institutions, as they were closed "at the request of parents". At the same time, a group of parents of children with hearing and speech impairments sued the Ministry of Education and Science. The case is being reviewed.

LEGISLATION

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the UN General Assembly resolution 61/106 of December 13, 2006, stipulates that "language" includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken languages.

The Republic of Moldova signed the Convention in 2007 and ratified it in 2010.

Constitution of the Republic of Moldova

Article 13. The state language, functioning of other languages

(2) The state recognizes and protects the right to preserve, develop and use the Russian language and other languages used on the territory of the country.

Article 35. The right to education

(2) The state shall ensure, in accordance with the law, the right of persons to choose the language of upbringing and education.

Law No. 60 of March 30, 2012 on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities⁹

Article 7: Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Political and Public Life

(g) The right to freely form opinions about political parties and election candidates, i.a. through organizing electoral debates, television and radio broadcasts in sign language, printing electoral materials adapted for visually impaired persons, and using other tools to inform persons with disabilities in an accessible way.

Article 25. Access to Information

(1) The state recognizes and promotes the use of sign language and other alternative forms of communication as means of communication between people.

(7) Public bodies, in agreement with the Association of the Deaf of Moldova, shall, if necessary, hire a sign language interpreter to facilitate communication between the body and a person with hearing impairments.

(8) The standards for the adaptation of information and communication systems to the needs of persons with disabilities, as well as the use of alternative forms of communication (Braille system and sound version, sign language, etc.) in the information and communication system shall be approved by the Government.

Article 27. Ensuring the necessary conditions for the upbringing, education and training of persons with disabilities

(5) The State, through the Ministry of Education and other competent central and local public authorities, shall take the necessary measures to recruit teachers, including teachers with disabilities, fluent in sign language and/or Braille and in other alternative forms of communication, and to train professionals and staff working at all levels of education with persons with disabilities.

(6) The responsible public authorities and educational institutions shall ensure:

(a) Reasonable adaptation of the learning environment to the individual needs of persons with disabilities;

⁹ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=94168&lang=ru

(b) Promotion of alternative forms of communication, Braille training, learning of alternative forms of writing, navigating, mobility skills, as well as facilitation of mutual support and communication between people with similar problems;

(c) Teaching of sign language and promotion of the linguistic identification of persons with hearing impairments.

Article 32. Professional training, professional development and education of persons with disabilities

(3) The state, through the Ministry of Education and other competent central and local public authorities, guarantees the provision of didactic and instructional materials, including materials for the blind (Braille system), letters in sound versions for the visually impaired, literary works in sound formats, including auxiliary sound systems for teaching groups, sign language interpretation for the hard-of-hearing during their vocational training (including vocational orientation, development and rehabilitation), upbringing, education, advanced training, as stipulated by law.

Government Decree No. 333 of May 14, 2014 on the approval of the Regulation on the provision of services for communication in sign language / sign language with the help of an interpreter.¹⁰

ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE FOR SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

The Ministry of Justice accredits sign language interpreters on equal terms and under the same procedures as foreign language interpreters.¹¹ The commission includes the experts from the Association of the Deaf of Moldova.

STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE

Status of Sign Language / Legislative Framework for Providing Sign Language Interpretation Services

Law No. 60 of March 30, 2012 on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities¹²

Article 25. Access to information

(1) The state recognizes and promotes the use of sign language and other alternative forms of communication as means of communication between people.

¹⁰ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=85199&lang=ru

¹¹ <http://www.justice.gov.md/category.php?l=ro&idc=630>

¹² https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=94168&lang=ru

PROVIDERS OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION SERVICES

The Association of the Deaf of Moldova. The only provider of such services, according to the Government Decision No. 979 of August 17, 2016 on the approval of the Regulation on the procedure for setting tariffs for the services provided by simultaneous interpreters and licensed interpreters.

There are no state or commercial entities among the suppliers.

The Association of the Deaf of Moldova and its partners have just begun to lobby for the provision of such services by law enforcement agencies (police, emergency service, etc.).

TARIFFS FOR THE PROVISION OF INTERPRETATION SERVICES IN SIGN LANGUAGE

Social Issues (1 hour*)**:

Gross: 63,95 MDL (€ ≈ 3,14)

Net: 51,57 MDL (€ ≈ 2,53)

***Every year, the rate is amended based on the average monthly remuneration by industry, in accordance with the Government Decree No. 333 of May 14, 2014 on the approval of the Regulation on the provision of services for communication in sign language / sign language with the help of an interpreter.*

Legal issues (1 hour*)***:

Gross: 180 MDL (€ ≈ 8,85)

Net: 144,14 MDL (€ ≈ 7,08)

**Excluding waiting time, travel costs, and travel time to and from the location where the interpretation is provided.*

****According to the Government Decree № 979 of August 17, 2016 on the approval of the Regulation on the procedure for setting tariffs for the services provided by simultaneous interpreters and licensed interpreters.*

PROVISION OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION SERVICES

Provision of interpretation services in an office

Sign language interpretation services are provided to people with hearing and speech impairments who request assistance from the Association of the Deaf, as well as to police officers (investigators, district police officers, etc.).

Provision of interpretation services during visits

This type of service prevailed before the pandemic. People with hearing and speech impairments requested assistance either via phone or during a personal visit to a translation office. The waiting time was between 7 to 10 days. Interpreters accompanied them during their medical appointments, visits to social services, cadaster, notary's offices, embassies, etc. During one working day, one interpreter could accompany up to 4-5 people.

Provision of remote interpretation services

This type of service has developed greatly during the pandemic. Thanks to video messaging and video applications (*Viber, WhatsApp, Skype*) services have become more accessible. The average number of people that one interpreter can assist during one day has increased to 12-15 people per interpreter.

Provision of interpretation services via a call-center

The Association of the Deaf of Moldova, with the support of the Soros Foundation, for 26 months, starting from November 1, 2021 will be developing *interpretation services via a call-center - Deaf Info Center*.

CHALLENGES FACED WHEN PROVIDING SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION SERVICES

- a) *very few sign language interpreters,*
- b) *the authorities have shifted the burden of sign language interpretation onto the shoulders of the Association of the Deaf,*
- c) *the lack of "state" sign language interpreters in educational institutions is a barrier to career and integration prospects,*
- d) *sign language interpreters have no legal training,*
- e) *none of the universities train sign language interpreters,*
- f) *there is no common understanding / program in the country on how to integrate people with hearing and speech impairments,*
- g) *when inclusive education for school students with hearing and speech impairments was introduced ("unfunded reform"), children from special schools that were sent to mainstream schools found themselves in the worst situation,*
- h) *teachers from mainstream schools face great challenges when working with children with hearing and speech impairments, as they are not fluent in sign language,*

- i) the inclusion of children with hearing and speech impairments was analyzed by the authorities from the point of view of economic efficiency, which led to the closure of special education schools without creating the foundation for a successful alternative reform,*
- j) no nighttime/crisis sign language interpretation services,*
- k) there is no clear procedure allowing state agencies (police, courts, prosecutors, etc.) to access sign language interpretation services,*
- l) access to information is limited: only two TV stations interpret the news into sign language,*
- m) the format of TV programs interpreted into sign language is unacceptable: interpreter's image takes only 1/9th of the screen,*
- n) there are practically no educational, cultural, social TV programs for children / people with hearing and speech impairments,*
- o) the legal framework is insufficient for the development of sign language.*

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION SERVICES

- a) Adoption of the Law on Sign Language in the Republic of Moldova. The adoption of the Law on Sign Language and other means of communication is very important. The document would raise the status of sign language and impose the obligation to provide an interpreter in the offices of public administration. As a result, deaf people would be able to resolve all official issues independently and the stimuli to study sign language would appear,*
- b) the Audiovisual Council should amend legislation on access to audiovisual media services for people with hearing and visual impairments;*
- c) separate decisions should be taken with regard to each type of disability, since the needs of people with different types of disabilities are very different,*
- d) the interpreter's image on the screen should be increased from 1/9th to 3/9th or 1/2nd,*
- e) creation of the Sign Language Center, funded from the state budget, that would coordinate the access to sign language and its development in Moldova,*
- f) creation of a mobile application for accessing emergency services, funded from the state budget,*
- g) raising the status of sign language and a sign language interpreter,*

h) increasing the tariffs for sign language interpretation services so that they would also include waiting time, travel costs and travel time to and from the location where the interpretation is provided,

i) professional training, retraining and licensing of interpreters.

POLAND

Kamila Skalska

STATISTICS

According to the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS), there were 7.7 million (7,689,800 to be exact) people with biological disabilities¹³ in Poland in 2014.

Depending on the accepted criteria for biological disability (namely the severity of disabilities), there are between 4.9 million (12.7%) to 7.7 million (20%) people with disabilities in Poland.

According to EHIS, the number of children with disabilities at the end of 2014 was over 211,000 (55,000 with legal and biological disabilities, about 127,000 with legal and 29,000 with only biological disabilities). The number of persons with biological disabilities (according to the definition used in the study) aged 15 years and older was 7,414,000.¹⁴

*There are 12 types of disability in the Polish disability assessment system. In the second quarter of 2021, 4.3 million persons were registered in the system, of which **242,000** had voice, speech and hearing impairments, and **150,600** visual impairments. Persons with simultaneous visual and hearing impairments are not identified as a separate category and can be assigned either to the visual, hearing or other category.*

242 000

persons had **voice, speech and hearing** impairments

150 600

persons had **visual** impairments

According to a **2016 report** by Poland's Deaf and Blind Aid Society (TPG), there are **5,000-7,000 people** in Poland with both profound visual and hearing impairments. In 1991-2018, about 2,500 people were assisted by TPG. The report shows that 60% of the deaf-blind are male, 70% are over the age of 60, and 20% of them work.¹⁵

¹³ Persons with biological disabilities, i.e. persons who have declared a limited ability to perform activities normally performed by people (in accordance with the unified EU definition used in the study - both severe and less severe disabilities that cause the inability to perform the above-mentioned activities for at least the last 6 months were taken into account).

¹⁴ <http://niepelnosprawni.gov.pl/p,78,dane-demograficzne>

¹⁵ <http://www.niepelnosprawni.pl/ledge/x/331469;jsessionid=21DD7A243A927D3CFF8B4DDD812FB52C>

According to estimates, the number of potential users of captioning for the hard-of-hearing and sign language interpretation in Poland could be about **4-5 million people**.¹⁶

Among these individuals we can distinguish the following categories:

- **Deaf people** for whom Polish sign language is the first, dominant language, because their ability to read in Polish, usually perceived as a second language, is often severely limited. They are usually either deaf from birth or lost their hearing in early childhood. It is estimated that there are at least 50 thousand users of Polish sign language in Poland;
- **People with hearing impairments.** As a rule, this is a group of people whose hearing deteriorated after they had learnt the Polish language, so they usually prefer captions.

NUMBER OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

B According to the Law (2011), the voivods (heads of regional administration) maintain **electronic lists (registers)** of sign language interpreters. When applying for inclusion in such a list, the interpreter declares his/her fluency in sign language system (SLS), i.e. in representational gestures, Polish sign language and the ability to communicate with the deaf-blind. The territory in which s/he works can also attach the certificates confirming that s/he has studied the language, although they are not obligatory. There is no mechanism to verify declared interpreting skills. Interpreters can sign up for more than one voivodeship list (register) if they plan to cover a large territory.

According to this register, there are **395 sign language interpreters**, including 197 that declare advanced fluency in Polish sign language, 92 that declare intermediate fluency, while the rest declare basic knowledge. The smallest number of interpreters in a voivodeship list is 10, the largest is 74. Such lists are most often used by institutions where access to interpretation is stipulated by the Law on Sign Language and Other Communication Methods (2011), e.g. police, courts, state agencies.

The Polish Association of the Deaf (PZG), a nationwide civil society organization, has its own certification of sign language interpreters. In order to get the certificate one has to pass a paid examination for a sign language interpreter and separately for a sign language expert. In 2021, there were 313 interpreters on the PSG lists. For many years, these exams had been on the sign language system (SLS).

¹⁶ The World Health Organization estimates that 10-15% of the population have hearing impairments.

The Association of Polish Sign Language Interpreters (STPJM) unites 54 professional interpreters from all over Poland, and in 2021 there were 38 candidates for membership in the organization. The process of admitting new members to the Association involves an exam and a two-year waiting period. Not all applicants pass this stage, as not only language fluency is taken into account, but also interpretation skills and abilities.

The Polish Sign Language Council is currently working on a unified certification system for sign language interpreters.

On both lists one can also find deaf interpreters. In STPJM, they work mostly on written interpretations, in pairs of interpreters, and translate mostly into foreign sign languages and International Sign Language.

The ratio of interpreters to people with hearing impairments is:

- 1:126**, based on the number of self-declared interpreters,
- 1:159**, based on the number of those who have passed the PZG exam and hold a valid certificate,
- 1:925**, based on the number of interpreters with membership in STPJM.

THE TRAINING SYSTEM FOR SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

Many companies that provide educational services offer sign language trainings. The highest standard of quality is provided by companies set up by deaf persons. Teachers in such centers are deaf persons trained in the methodology of teaching sign language (postgraduate education or full-time education with a major in sign language linguistics at the University of Warsaw). There are at least 5 such companies in the largest cities of Poland. Some of the courses are also taught by sign language interpreters, especially at the elementary level of sign language. In case of higher levels, it is recommended that the courses are taught by native speakers of sign language. The courses are based on the European system of proficiency levels: A1 (60h), A2 (60h), B1 (60h), B2 (60h). According to the Law on Sign Language and Other Means of Communication (2011), up to 90% of participants' tuition fee can be refunded.

Higher education institutions can introduce sign language training as a part of its compulsory foreign language curriculum. Such an option is available at the University of Warsaw to students from all departments. The number of teaching hours is the same as in case of other languages, i.e. 60 hours per semester. During the (full-time) Master's program in Sign Language Linguistics at the University of Warsaw (Faculty of Polonistics / Department of General Linguistics, Sign

Language and Baltic Studies / Department of Sign Language Linguistics) additional classes are provided, and sign language fluency of graduates with this major is at least at B2 level.

Training courses for interpreters fluent in sign language are offered by the aforementioned language training companies and civil society organizations, including the Association of Polish Sign Language Interpreters.

EDUCATION

Children with disabilities can attend special educational institutions, integration educational institutions (since 1993), or be educated within the system of inclusive education in mainstream schools (since 2010/2011).¹⁷ In Poland there is no special institution exclusively for deaf-blind children. There is a department for deaf-blind children and youth at the Special School for Visually Impaired Children (in Bydgoszcz). There used to be such a department at a school near Warsaw for a long time (in Laski). At present children with simultaneous hearing and visual impairments, as well as with an additional moderate or profound intellectual disability, are enrolled there.

Some deaf-blind students attend, within the system of special education, special educational institutions intended for children with visual impairments, i.e. the blind or visually impaired (11 educational centers in Poland), for children with hearing impairments, i.e. the deaf or hard-of-hearing (36 institutions), and for children with intellectual disabilities of various degrees (mild, moderate or profound intellectual disability), as well as other institutions.¹⁸

Deaf-blind children can attend integration and mainstream educational institutions (inclusive) near their place of residence with the assistance of a teacher-assistant.

LEGISLATION

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified by Poland in 2012.

The Law of August 19, 2011 on Sign Language and Other Means of Communication (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland of 2017, item 1824) introduces

¹⁷ Książek M., Paradowska E. (2017) Dostęp dzieci głuchoniewidomych do różnych form edukacji - szanse i zagrożenia [w:] Świat osób głuchoniewidomych. Wyzwania współczesności, E. Domagała-Zyśk, G. Wiącek, M. Książek (ed.), Wydawnictwo Episteme, Lublin, s. 55-71. [Access of deaf-blind children to various forms of education: opportunities and threats [in:] The world of deaf-blind people. Challenges of modern times, E. Domagała-Zyśk, G. Wiącek, M. Książek (ed.), Episteme Publishing House, Lublin, pp. 55-71].

¹⁸ Deaf-blind children with intellectual disabilities are largely excluded from the special education system, but receive schooling through participation in revalidation classes on the basis of a medical opinion on the need to participate in such classes (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland of 2013, item 529).

definitions of the sign language system (SLS), i.e. representational gestures,¹⁹ Polish Sign Language (PSL)²⁰ and communication system for the deaf-blind, describes the rules for using interpretation, funding the costs of training in sign language and for communication with the deaf-blind. It also provides for creating voivodeship registers (lists) of interpreters and the Council of Polish Sign Language established by a relevant minister. According to the Law, persons with disabilities can use sign language interpreting services free of charge when dealing with public agencies. The agency should be notified about the required interpretation at least 3 working days prior to the planned visit, in which case the public agency shall ensure the access to interpreting into Polish sign language, to sign language system (representational gestures) or communication methods for deaf-blind persons.

The Law on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities²¹ regulates the principles of reimbursement for the services of a sign language interpreter or an interpreter-assistant for deaf-blind persons.

The National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council Resolution of November 15, 2018 on Access Services for Visually and Hearing Impaired Persons in TV Programs (Journal of Law of the Republic of Poland of December 4, 2018, item 2261) regulates the amount of captions and sign language interpretation for the hard-of-hearing as well as audio descriptions for the blind, which should achieve the level of at least 50% of public broadcasting programs by 2024. This amount has been and will be gradually increasing from 2019 to 2024 based on the nature and type of television programming. For example, by 2024 news and current affairs programs must have at least 50 percent disability-friendly content (44 percent with captions and 6 percent with sign language interpretation). The National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council does not control the quality of access services, only their quantity. However, the Council has issued guidelines for broadcasters on captioning for the deaf and audio descriptions, and in 2021 also on how to implement sign language interpretation in audiovisual productions.

The Law on Accessibility for Persons with Special Needs (2019)²² describes, among other things, principles of information and communication accessibility, stipulating the obligation of public agencies to provide information to the deaf on the performed tasks by means of a recording in Polish sign language.

¹⁹ A sign-language system (representational gestures) is not a language in the narrow sense, so the word "system" rather than "language" is used to define it. Due to the dual channel of communication, i.e. lip movement and parallel sign language signs, the hard-of-hearing interlocutor can more easily read the message from the lips.

²⁰ Polish sign language is based on manual (gestures) and non-manual (facial and body expressions such as facial mimics, turning of body and head) elements. Often, the combination of these signs is clearly defined by specific grammar rules. Although this is language, to hearing persons it may look like an improvisation or pantomime.

²¹ Law of August 27, 1997 on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (Journal of Law of the Republic of Poland of 2021, item 573).

²² https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/media/82728/dziennikustaw_19lipcapdf_2019.

STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE

Status of Sign Language / Legal Framework for Providing Sign Language Interpretation Services

Sign language is not considered a national minority language in Polish law. It is not included in the Constitution as an equal national language, despite the efforts of the deaf community.

Number of providers of sign language interpreting services (list of providers)

Sign language interpreters are most often self-employed, independently signing contracts on interpretation services with agencies or directly with deaf people.

There are also civil society organizations that cooperate with sign language interpreters and provide free interpretation services, having received on a competitive basis the funding from the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PFRON). Each year, PFRON announces a call for proposals in which CSOs may participate and thus finances activities, in which the participation of sign language interpreters is foreseen. Until 1989, the leading organization was the Polish Association of the Deaf. After 1990 regional and city organizations began to emerge all over Poland, as well as organizations dealing with various topics, e.g. history, sports, theater and culture. At present, there are about 100 such organizations throughout the country, many of them initiated and run with the participation of deaf activists.

There are also companies that provide comprehensive interpretation services, for example, **Migam.org**, which offers interpretation services 24/7 at hours convenient for the client.

СТАВКА ЗА ПРЕДОСТАВЛЕНИЕ УСЛУГ ПЕРЕВОДА

Similarly to spoken language interpreters, sign language interpreters often negotiate rates on a case-by-case basis, depending on the number of hours, travel time to the place where the service is provided, the complexity of the interpretation, and the need for extra preparation time. For this reason, the rates listed below (as given by several Polish interpreters) are only indicative.

- *In case of higher educational institutions, interpreters often get assignments after participating in a tender, and the rate varies between 50-70 zlotys per hour.*

- The rates for conference interpreting, which requires excellent interpreting skills, are negotiated by interpreters on an individual basis, the rates depend on the complexity of the subject and amount 100-150 zlotys per hour.
- The amount of financial aid for deaf people for an hour of sign language interpreting cannot exceed 2% of the average wage, i.e. in 2021 it was about 70 zlotys/hour.
- Only court interpretation is legally regulated, similarly to the work of other language interpreters in this type of public institutions. In 2021, the rate was about 40-50 PLN/hour.

PROVISION OF INTERPRETATION SERVICES IN POLISH SIGN LANGUAGE

Challenges in providing sign language interpretation services

- *The lack of a unified certification program for interpreters continues to be a challenge. Some interpreters may sign up for the lists of sign language interpreters even if they have completed, for example, only two A2-level (i.e. elementary) sign language courses for their own needs, but lack the knowledge and skills required for professional interpreting.*
- *Government agencies often fulfill their statutory obligation to provide interpretation by sending several of their employees to an elementary sign language course. When a deaf person comes to the agency to discuss a complicated matter, the official is unable to replace the sign language interpreter. As a result, the statutory obligation is formally met, but in fact the agency is inaccessible to those in need of interpretation services.*
- *Various institutions and organizations, when they start implementing the Accessibility Law, order sign language interpretation for events that have not been advertised in sign language, thus the target audience have not been invited. As a result, the invited interpreter has no one to interpret to.*
- *The National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council has compiled guidelines for broadcasters on implementing sign language interpretation. However, when defining the standards on interpreter's image size, the Council did not take into account the request of deaf people to use the size of at least 1/8th of the screen and allowed the size of 1/12th of the screen during information and news programs, thereby accommodating the requests of TV broadcasters. The decision was not based on the evidence, but on the widespread misconception that interpreter's image would be disturbing for viewers.*

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Maria Krkoskova

Slovak Sign Language is the language of the Slovak deaf, characterized by its unique historical development and significant impact on Slovak culture. **Slovak Sign Language (SSL)** appeared in the 1930s in Bratislava (the capital) at school for people with hearing impairments, where the majority of deaf pupils were enrolled. The school had a great influence on the development of Slovak sign language and deaf culture. Later, various associations and clubs for the deaf began to emerge, where deaf people could meet and communicate in sign language, which was their native language.

Contemporary deaf culture is disseminated both within and outside the community. There are films in Slovak Sign Language (SSL), paintings depicting gestures and signs, theater groups that put on plays in Slovak Sign Language (SSL), songs, poetry, jokes and much more, all of which have been produced by deaf people.

Slovak Sign Language (SSL) is used not only for communication, but also for spreading traditions, customs, values from generation to generation, and it is a well-known means of communication for the deaf. In 2019, Slovak Sign Language was included in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

STATISTICS

The exact number of deaf people in Slovakia is unknown, as is the number of hard-of-hearing sign language users. There are no statistics that directly indicate those numbers. According to estimates, there may be 1 deaf sign language user per 1,000 inhabitants, hence, we can talk about 5,500 or more people in Slovakia. Hearing impairments impact various areas of life - first of all, healthcare. Parents usually go to a physician if they notice that something is wrong with their child. After the medical examination, the physician determines if the child's hearing is functional or impaired and may recommend hearing aids or a cochlear implant. Then the parents can make a decision. This is the first time the child is included into the statistical data on hearing impaired patients. (an organization that connects hearing parents with deaf children in Slovakia is Nepočujúce dieťa, www.nepocujuce dieta.sk)

In addition, there are statistics on pre-schools and schools attended by the child, statistics on employment, social issues or offices where families can apply for benefits - mostly for adults and the elderly. However, hearing-impaired people are also taken care of by NGOs or commercial organizations, which provide specialized social counseling and sign language interpretation, as well as hearing aid specialists. However, there is no statistical data base to combine all the data.

In addition, the deaf category also includes people with hearing impairments and a cochlear implant. Communicating in sign language or using other ways of getting everyday information may be more difficult for them because their native language is different.

The exact number of official sign language interpreters is also not clear. Various sources mention **around 25 people** across Slovakia. If there are about 5,500 deaf sign language users, then the ratio of an interpreter per person is 1:220.

Interpreting for the hearing impaired in Slovakia is done in two ways, i.e. **personal assistance** and **sign language interpretation**.

PERSONAL ASSISTANCE

Personal assistance means helping a person with a disability, including hearing impairments, in certain activities. A list of activities is listed in the law. One of them is communicating with people with hearing impairments and informing them about sign language, representational gestures, or, what concerns the deaf-blind, tactile communication. The primary goal of personal assistance is to activate people with disabilities, support them to live independently and integrate into the working, educational and leisure environments. The range of activities and hours of personal assistance varies, but the maximum is 7200 hours per year for one person.

Personal assistance to hearing-impaired people can be provided by someone who knows the basics of communication with such people. It is not required for the personal assistant to have a sign language interpreter certificate.

INTERPRETATION SERVICES

Interpretation services are a type of social service in accordance with the Law on Social Services. They are provided to people with disabilities, requiring sign language interpretation. According to the Law, only a person with an interpreter certificate can be a sign language interpreter. Currently, there is only one accredited program at Trnava University (Slovak Language in Deaf Communication), thanks to which the insufficient number of sign language

interpreters may increase. No other organization in Slovakia is currently accredited to conduct sign language courses. A certificate can be issued after completion of such a course.

From 2020 it's possible to apply for accreditation of sign language, representational gestures or tactile interpretation courses to the Ministry of Social Affairs.

EDUCATION OF PEOPLE WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS IN SLOVAKIA

In Slovakia, there are currently **6 elementary schools** for students with hearing impairments (2 in Bratislava, 1 in Kremnica, Lučenec, Levoča and Prešov). There are also **kindergartens** in these cities. There are **3 secondary schools**: in Bratislava, Kremnica and Prešov. All schools for students with hearing impairments are **boarding schools**. An important element of care for children and students with disabilities are Special Education Counseling Centers, located in 5 elementary schools (Bratislava - Hrdličkova, Kremnica, Lučenec, Levoča and Prešov). They provide support to families, children and students from the moment when hearing impairment is diagnosed till the completion of vocational training. Statistical data on enrolled children are available at the [link](#).

The education of hearing-impaired children is carried out in accordance with *the Law No. 245 of 2008 on Upbringing and Education (referred to below as the Education Law)* and in line with a relevant state educational program. Deaf students are guaranteed the right to education and being educated in sign language for the deaf.

The main aim of education is the competence development appropriate to the age and individual characteristics of the hearing impairment. Education of children with hearing impairments in special kindergartens and elementary school has the advantage of professionally trained staff and accessibility of relevant didactic materials. There are fewer students in a class, and they are taught by deaf education teachers. All special elementary schools are boarding schools, their disadvantage is the separation of children from their families during the week.

Special teaching methods are used in education and upbringing, i.e. monosensory, auditory-verbal and multisensory. The multisensory method can either use signs (full communication, simultaneous communication and bilingual method) or no signs (oral method). Therapy methods are also used, e.g. music therapy, drama therapy, art therapy etc.

Phoniatrics and speech therapy, surdopedic care, needed from an early age, play a key role in the inclusive process of educating children with hearing impairments.

Primary school education is compulsory, and it is necessary to ensure the best possible conditions for the education of children with hearing impairments. It is necessary to ensure cooperation between the school, a special educator and a school psychologist, as well as to develop an individual educational plan (not reducing the mainstream curriculum, but modifying it).

We tend to believe that along the inclusive method of education, which is preferred, special schools should stay in place as they have a long tradition in Slovakia and are highly recognized abroad. We have students that would not benefit from the inclusive education model. It is not particularly suitable for students with profound sensory and intellectual disabilities, for students with combined disabilities, with multiple disabilities and for children with autism spectrum disorder. The level of social inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools is problematic due to their disabilities and despite their good cognitive abilities (cited: Vilimova B., PhD in pedagogical sciences, director of the Special Boarding School for Deaf Students, Bratislava - Hrdličková).

The advantages of educating children with hearing impairments in special schools can be summarized in the following way: **communication in a language that is more natural for them, a safe space where their special needs can be met, the presence of deaf education teachers and other professionals, greater understanding as there are fewer children in a class, a community of children and teachers speaking the same language, etc.**

LEGISLATION

Law No. 448 of 2008 on Social Services: defines social services in general, including social services for people with disabilities.

Law No. 447 of 2008 on Disability Benefits: defines various types of state social welfare support and benefits.

Law No. 149 of 1995 on Sign Language for the Deaf: defines and recognizes sign language for deaf people.

Law No. 382 of 2004 on Professionals, Interpreters and Translators: generally defines the role of interpreters and translators, including sign language interpreters.

Law No. 245 of 2008 on Upbringing and Education (the Education Law),
defines the education for all students.

The Constitution of the Slovak Republic.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE

According to the current European and Slovak legislation, every person with hearing impairments has the right to education, communication and information in their native language. Slovak sign language has been officially recognized since 1995. In 2020, the Declaration on the Codification of Slovak Sign Language was signed, which should raise the status of Slovak Sign Language as an independent language and contribute to the development of a unique culture of the deaf.




Interpreting for users with hearing impairments is free of charge. Interpretation rates vary. Most common rates for simultaneous interpretation start with 10 euro/hour and are usually covered by the state social welfare system. If interpreting is done for commercial purposes, e.g. for television, shows, public events, interpretation rates may vary and depend on an individual agreement.

PROVISION OF INTERPRETATION SERVICES IN SIGN LANGUAGE

Sign language interpreting can be provided in various ways: stationarily, remotely, online, using state-of-the-art technology and captioning.

Any deaf person, using primarily sign language to communicate and receive information, can be provided with sign language interpretation. The person should register with the regional social welfare department. If the department does not provide the service directly, the client can be referred, for example, to an ANEPS regional center for the deaf or to any other organization working in the region (www.kcanepsza.sk). In this case, the costs of interpretation are covered by the regional social welfare department.

CHALLENGES:

-  *Shortage of sign language interpreters and persons providing sign language interpretation services.*
-  *Older people don't know how to use modern technology and communicate online.*
-  *There are no statistics on deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the country and at the regional level.*

WHERE TO LOOK FOR INFORMATION?

www.aneps.sk

The Slovak Association of the Deaf regularly provides information on sign language with captions for the deaf and hard-of-hearing in Slovakia.

www.kcanepsza.sk

The Regional Center for the Deaf in Žilina provides specialized social welfare counseling and interpretation services for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, their families and friends.

www.nepocujucedieta.sk

The Organization for Hearing Parents of Deaf Children.

zsihrdlickova.edupage.org

The Special School for Deaf Students, Bratislava - Hrdličkova

onlinetlmocnik.sk

Remote Sign Language Interpretation for the Deaf.

rtvs.sk/televizia/archiv/15249/209787

The Television Club for the Deaf is a show made by the deaf for the deaf on national television.

Sources: <https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/slovensky-posunkovy-jazyk/>

UKRAINE

Anna Afuzova, Alexander Gorlachev, Yuri Voytyuk, Anna Serputko

STATISTICS

Objective analytical data provided by Ukrainian government agencies are dated 2019-2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic has prevented the collection of reliable information due to the lockdown in Ukraine in 2020-2021.

As of today, various sources in Ukraine give different numbers of people with hearing or vision impairments. Discrepancies in the quantitative data depend on the qualitative structure of a group undergoing a statistical analysis. According to the majority of estimates, there are **over 100 thousand people** with hearing impairments in Ukraine. In turn, the Ukrainian Society of the Blind (UTOS) states that in the country there are **over 70,000 people** with visual impairments. According to the "Annual Report on the activities of the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf (UTOH) in 2020", the organization works with 39,759 people, 35,802 of whom are UTOH members. Finally, according to the data of the Ministry of Health from January 1, 2020, in Ukraine there are 5573 people with visual impairments and 10,265 people with hearing impairments in the group of disabled children under 18.

over **100 000**

people with hearing impairments

более **70 000**

with visual impairments

At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, there were 6 special schools for blind children, where 755 students were enrolled; 20 special schools for children with visual impairments, where 3,243 students studied; 21 special schools for deaf children, where 1,881 students were enrolled; and 15 special schools for children with hearing impairments, where 1,806 students studied.

According to the official data of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, in the 2020-2021 school year, **25,078 students were receiving inclusive education**, and there were 18,681 inclusive classes. There were 4369 special groups in 1630 preschool educational institutions for preschool children with special educational needs, where 61,668 children were enrolled; also, there were 3796 inclusive groups in 2242 pre-school institutions, where 6849 children were enrolled, and 4223 students with special educational needs in 708 vocational colleges.

LEGISLATION

The reform of the Ukrainian educational system, facilitating the inclusion, was accompanied by a number of milestones, which at the state level were reflected in the ratification of a number of international documents. Thus, in December 2009, Ukraine ratified the main international instrument ensuring rights in accordance with international standards of education, social protection and health care, i.e. the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In October 2010, the Concept of Development of Inclusive Education was approved. On May 23, 2017, the Law of Ukraine on Amendments to the Law of Ukraine on Education, defining the access to educational services for persons with special educational needs, was adopted. Later, under the auspices of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the procedure for the organization of inclusive education in mainstream educational institutions was improved (August 9, 2017). On the same day, the National Strategy for Reforming the System of Institutional Care and Upbringing of Children for 2017-2026 and the Action Plan for the implementation of its first phase were adopted. Finally, on June 8, 2018, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine approved the Model Regulation on the team providing psychological and pedagogical support to a child with special educational needs in mainstream secondary schools and pre-schools. The legislative base of inclusive education in recent years was supplemented by:

Resolution No. 530 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine from April 10, 2019 on Approval of the Procedure for the Functioning of Inclusive Groups in Mainstream Preschools;

Resolution No. 635 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine from July 10, 2019 on Approval of the Procedure for the Organization of Inclusive Education in Higher Education Institutions;

Resolution No. 636 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine from July 10, 2019 on Approval of the Procedure for the Organization of Inclusive Education in Vocational Education Institutions;

Resolution No. 779 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine from August 21, 2019 on Approval of the Procedure for the Organization of Inclusive Extracurricular Activities.

In Ukrainian legislation the issue of sign language and sign interpreting is mentioned in various laws, resolutions and guidelines of the government. In particular, Article 23 of the Law of Ukraine on the Basis of Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine stipulates that "sign language as a language of persons with hearing disabilities is a means of communication and education, and is protected by the State. State authorities and local self-government bodies shall: promote sign language and encourage the linguistic identity of persons

with hearing disabilities; guarantee the preservation, study and comprehensive development of sign language, its use as a means of education, training, teaching, communication and creative work; ensure that persons with hearing disabilities can communicate in social welfare, law enforcement, fire safety agencies, emergency and rescue services, etc. Television and radio broadcasting organizations (regardless of ownership and departmental subordination) shall provide captions or sign language interpretation of official messages, films, videos, shows and programs in the manner and on terms determined by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine" (Article 23 in the wording of the Law No. 1773-IV of June 15, 2004, No. 4213-VI of December 22, 2011). Also, a draft law on Ukrainian Sign Language was submitted for consideration to the Supreme Council of Ukraine in 2019.

Sign language interpretation services are provided by both governmental and civil society organizations. For example, in accordance with Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Government Contact Center was established to give people with hearing impairments access to the government hotline 1545, where via Skype they can send their suggestions, comments, applications, petitions, complaints addressed to various executive bodies. The civil society organization UTOH has created the All-Ukrainian program "UTOH Service", which provides sign language interpretation services.

Since the first half of the last century the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf has been training sign language interpreters (specialists in fingerspelling), primarily to meet its own needs. According to paragraph 2.3 (e) of the Charter of the civil society organization "All-Ukrainian organization of people with hearing disabilities **Ukrainian Society of the Deaf**" (hereinafter referred to as the UTOH Charter), legal and social protection of hearing-impaired people is ensured by organizing sign language interpreters training and professional development programs. The Ukrainian Society of the Deaf ensures provision of sign language interpreting services to its members in order to improve the completeness, quality and accessibility of services provided to them in legal, medical, domestic and other areas of life, and on the terms defined in relevant agreements (regulations, instructions, etc.), i.a. remotely, using information and communication technologies and systems (par. 4.2. of the UTOH Charter). The Ukrainian Association of the Deaf ensures the use and development of Ukrainian Sign Language in all spheres of public life, in every possible way promoting research, study and teaching of sign language (par. 4.3. of the UTOH Charter). The Ukrainian Association of the Deaf ensures the organization of training and professional development of Ukrainian Sign Language interpreters, their certification with a view to comprehensive complex evaluation of sign and verbal communication competences, issues relevant documents that certify the level of professional competence of sign language interpreters, as well as ensures the functioning of the register of interpreters of Ukrainian Sign Language (par. 4.4. of the UTOH Charter).

As of April 15, 2021, 220 official sign language interpreters were registered in Ukraine by the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf (according to the UTOH Register of Sign Language Interpreters), including: 44 interpreters in the UTOH branch in Kiev, 19 interpreters in the Kiev regional branch; 17 interpreters in the Kharkiv regional branch; 13 interpreters in the Odessa regional branch; 12 interpreters in the Dnepropetrovsk regional branch; 12 interpreters in the Poltava regional branch; 11 interpreters in the Sumy regional branch; 10 interpreters in the Kirovograd and Zaporozhe regional branches; 9 interpreters in the Vinnitsa regional branch; 8 interpreters in the Zhytomyr and Chernihiv regional branches, 8 interpreters; 6 interpreters in the Rivne, Khmelnytsky, Kherson and Cherkasy regional branches; 5 interpreters in the Transcarpathian and Chernivtsi regional branches; 4 interpreters in the Volynsk and Nikolayev regional branches; 3 interpreters in the Ivano-Frankivsk regional branch; 2 interpreters in the Ternopil regional branch. All of them hold serial certificates of a sign language interpreter, issued by the UTOH Central Attestation Commission for a period not exceeding five years. Issuance of such a certificate is regulated by the Regulation on the Certificate of a Sign Language Interpreter (fingerspelling specialist), approved by the Decision of the Presidium of the UTOH Board No. 17 / 2017, dated January 21, 2017. Among all officially registered sign language interpreters, only 57% (126 people) can provide legal interpretation. Accordingly, the ratio of registered sign language interpreters to the number of recipients of UTOH services is 1:180.7.

In addition, the recently established All-Ukrainian Association of Sign Language Interpreters and Persons with Disabilities started organizing professional development courses for sign language interpreters (180 hours). Rates for the provision of sign language interpreting services in Ukraine have not been defined officially.

Currently, in Ukraine there is no professional training of sign language interpreters at university level. Negotiations continue between the Faculty of Special and Inclusive Education of the National Pedagogical Dragomanov University and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine over the establishment of the University Research Center (**“Center for the Study of Deafness”**) that would train professional sign language interpreters in order to meet various needs of Ukrainian communities (professional certificate).

As for television broadcasting, public agencies have recently undertaken numerous efforts in order to ensure access to information (in particular, news, informational and political programs, TV films, cartoons, etc.) for people with hearing impairments through sign language interpretation and captioning of media products. According to the State policy, sign language interpreters should be employed by all TV channels in Ukraine, ensuring equal rights of people with hearing impairments to receive information. Thus, the Supreme Council of Ukraine adopted the Law of Ukraine on Amending Articles 43 and 49 of the Law

of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting (No. 4315-VI of January 12, 2012), which stipulates that all state and municipal television broadcasters shall introduce sign language interpretation or captioning when broadcasting news. This legal requirement is fully implemented by leading TV channels of Ukraine. However, the situation in the regions may vary.

An example of a good Ukrainian practice in the field of information accessibility to people with visual or hearing impairments is the initiative of the CSO Fight for Rights **Accessible Cinema**, which provides access to video content (films, TV series, cartoons) to blind and deaf people by creating audio descriptions, adapted captions and downloading them onto mobile platforms Earcatch and Subcatch, so that people with disabilities can watch films in all cinemas, at home or at festivals, using their own phone and headphones.

Another positive example of improved accessibility of films is the work of a group of audio description specialists trained during the international project "Development and popularization of film audiodescription techniques in the Eastern Partnership countries" with the participation of the Ukrainian International Institute for the Blind. Audio description specialists, graduates and students of the Department of Deaf Education and Deaf Psychology of the Faculty of Special and Inclusive Education at the National Pedagogical Dragomanov University worked during the International Film Festival "Youth". They made audio descriptions to full length feature films "The Outpost", "I work in the cemetery", the documentary "In Joy and Only in Joy", etc. Our little experience has shown that the quality of audio description significantly depends on the professional training of an audio descriptor. Theoretical knowledge and practical training of a deaf teacher allows to understand better how the surrounding world is perceived by the blind. During film festivals there is no separate sound track intended for audio description, but it is read by a narrator simultaneously with the main storyline.

Another good practice in the field of accessibility of information to visually impaired people is the project "Accessible theater: audio description of performances for a blind and visually impaired audience", which was implemented till the end of October 2021 with the support of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation. Project founders wanted to make art barrier-free, to provide access to performances and stage art to people with visual impairments. It was also planned to organize backstage tactile theater tours. In addition, during the project recommendations for theaters were developed, allowing them to invite blind and visually impaired people to their future performances. Such theaters in the capital as Kyiv Academic Theater on Pechersk, Kyiv National Academic Young Theater, Kyiv Municipal Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet for Children and Youth supported the project. Twelve inclusive performances of six productions

were held there. Some public and municipal Ukrainian museums try to make their exhibitions, collections and websites accessible to people with visual and hearing impairments (e.g. Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine, Holodomor Genocide Museum, Taras Shevchenko National Museum, Art Arsenal, etc.). However, it is important to stress that the above mentioned initiatives and good practices, aimed at adapting the visual content for people with visual impairments, are mainly implemented by people with disabilities or concerned activists either on a volunteer basis or thanks to national or international grants, as there is no relevant legal regulation of the issue at the national level. Nevertheless, blind and visually impaired people should have a guaranteed right to get an accessible service, watch a film or read a book in an accessible format. In order to ensure equal access to information, these issues should be legally regulated at the national level, so that all films and TV series shown nationally and in cinemas contain audio descriptions of visual content, which, if necessary, could be used by people with visual impairments, and captions for people with hearing impairments.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Pavel Ruziak

STATISTICS

Counting the number of people with disabilities, including hearing impairments, is always problematic in the case of each country and each disability, because there is no single criterion for how the degree of impairment and its temporal dynamics should be evaluated. In the Czech Republic, the General Statistical Office (CSU) is in charge of statistics, although some counts have been made by other official or pedagogical structures as well. In general, statistical information is well maintained and publicly available.

There are about 10.7 million people living in the Czech Republic. It is estimated that **0.5 million** of them have some hearing impairments. The largest part of the group is elderly people whose hearing has deteriorated as a result of aging. About 7,600 people lost hearing in early childhood. Most of them use sign language, so the total number of people who use sign language is about 7,300. 15,000 people were born with (or acquired in early childhood) some hearing impairment. 3,900 people have been almost totally deaf since birth/early childhood. In total, there are about 7,600 people with near-total hearing loss.



500 000

people have some hearing impairments

Unfortunately, as is often the case, the Czech Republic does not have enough sign language interpreters. The ratio is one interpreter per one hundred people (1:100) requiring sign language interpretation. In total, there are about **120 interpreters** in the country. Not all of them work full time, some do it only in their spare time after their main job. Thus, there are only **about 80 active interpreters**.²³

Most of the interpreters are located in Prague: out of the 80 active interpreters, 40 are in the capital. There are usually 2-3 interpreters per region, although in some regions there may be only 1 interpreter in the whole region.

²³ https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/tlumocnici-do-znakove-reci-handicapovani-nedostatek-problemy_A200212133907domacilre.

EDUCATION

Preschool education starts with special programs that help children and families. The main goal of the programs is social integration and elimination of the most problematic issues related to disability and its impact on the family. One of the key organizations at this stage for people with hearing and visual impairments is **Tamtam - Stredisko rane peceTamtam**. Parents can also find help at their local information service - **Kde hledat pomoc**. The next stage is kindergartens and special educational centers.

Elementary schools choose different approaches to the compulsory educational process. The educational activities are implemented in line with the framework curriculum for basic education **Ramcoveho vzdelavaciho programu pro zakladni vzdelavani**, developed by the Ministry of Education and provided for in relevant legislative acts. In line with the guidelines, each school develops its own educational program and may include additional subjects, e.g. communicating in sign language. Special education usually lasts 10 years. As a rule, special schools have a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 14 students per class.

High schools: the group includes all vocational schools and general education schools. The most popular vocational schools educate mechanics, tailors, carpenters, cooks, confectioners, electricians, gardeners, seamstresses, upholsterers. Higher vocational degrees can be obtained after matriculation exams at the Radlice Medical High School (dentist), the Industrial High School of Clothing in Brno, the Industrial High School of electrical engineering in Valašské Mězíncý, the Pedagogical High School in Hradec Králové and the High School for the Deaf in Prague on Jena Street, which offers the highest level of secondary education.

In the Czech Republic, there is no special education for the hearing impaired at university level. All universities integrate students with such disabilities as much as possible. This is done primarily through individual study plans and counseling centers, which offer comprehensive services on an individual basis, such as interpretation, transcription, assistance, rent of technical equipment, etc. All services for such students are regulated by *Law No. 155/1998 Sb. on Communication Systems for Deaf and Deaf-Blind People and Law No. 108/2006 Sb. on Social Services*.

Currently, there are two university level programs for people with hearing impairments. They are the bachelor's and master's programs "Czech in Deaf Communication" at the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University in Prague and the bachelor's program "Pedagogical Drama for the Hearing Impaired" at the Janáček Academy of Musical Arts in Brno.

²⁴ <https://sancedetem.cz/vzdelavani-deti-se-sluchovym-postizenim>

Sign language interpretation programs at university level are opened in Prague and Brno: [https://ujkn. ff. cuni. cz/cs/](https://ujkn.ff.cuni.cz/cs/), [https://www.muni. cz/bakalarske-a-magisterske-obory/24149-tlumocnictvi-ceskeho-znakoveho-iazyka](https://www.muni.cz/bakalarske-a-magisterske-obory/24149-tlumocnictvi-ceskeho-znakoveho-iazyka)

In accordance with the Law **Vyhlaska c. 27/2016 Sb.**, there is also a possibility of integrated schooling in mainstream elementary schools with the necessary support, i.e. assistants, compensatory technology, etc. If the school advisory board deems that the provided support is insufficient, the school may recommend transferring a student to a special school. Otherwise parents, based on the recommendations of special support centers, decide which integration system to choose for their child. If they choose a mainstream school, the headmaster of the school has to (§16a 2(b) of the Law on Schooling No. 561/2004 Sb.) ensure proper conditions, such as an individual education plan or assistant teachers.

25

LEGISLATION

The main law on inclusive education is the Law No. 561/2004 Sb. on Pre-school, Primary, Secondary, Higher Vocational and Other Education. In its original version, it has been in effect since January 1, 2005, stipulating the principles of non-discriminatory education and regionalism (spádová škola), according to which every child has the right to study at a relevant educational institution depending on his/her place of residence, and each school has to accept a child with any specific needs. The only exception is when the school's capacity is full; then, an alternative solution needs to be found.

However, for many years schools were underfinanced. Many schools declared that they could not accept students with special needs due to the inability to provide required support, which resulted in overpopulation of other schools and emergence of additional problems and complications. As a result, the Law No. 82/2015 Sb., effective from September 1, 2016, was amended, taking into account the above mentioned issues and focusing on the individualization of diagnostic reviews and funding structures. In total, about 10% of children with special needs (100,000) will follow the trend and transfer from special schools to mainstream schools. Today about 75,000 children are integrated into mainstream schools, while children with more profound disabilities are educated in special schools.

ACCREDITATION OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

The accreditation procedure for sign language interpreters in the Czech Republic can happen either at official courses within government supported programs or at courses opened to general public, the graduates of which receive valid certificates.

²⁵ <https://www.pece-bez-prekazek.cz/o-inkluzi-4-cast-inkluzie-v-ceske-legislative/>

The main unofficial code of ethics is described here: <http://www.cktjz.com/o-komore/eticky-kodex/>. It defines basic principles of non-legally binding but customary nature. The legal person is mentioned at <https://www.sagit.cz/info/sb98155>, where main status criteria are defined.

NUMBER OF PROVIDERS OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION SERVICES, GOVERNMENT AND COMMERCIAL ENTITIES

There are several independent NGOs and semi-governmental structures that offer the service, which is usually included into funded social services available to people with special needs. The provider of interpretation services follows the standards of social services that the provider develops independently. They are subject to continuous monitoring by the person ordering the service.

<http://www.asnep.cz/>

<https://www.cun.cz/en/>

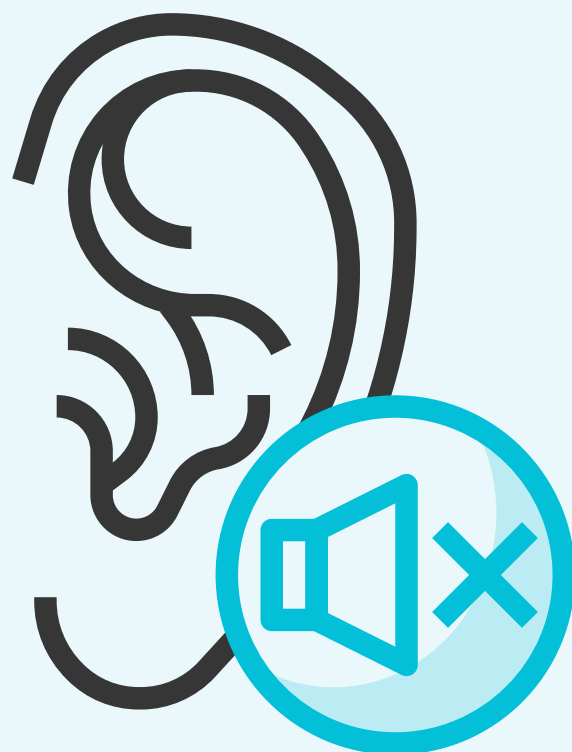
<https://www.sncr.cz/>

<https://cztn.cz/>

All the usual methods are considered, from f2f to digital methods.

GOOD PRACTICES

Tamtam (a pandemic-related initiative): the creation, on a zero budget, of amateur-level YouTube videos informing about current social and legislative developments important for people with hearing loss, using sign language embedded in the [video](#).



SECTION II.

ACCESSIBILITY IN THE MEDIA

*KAMILA SKALSKA, SLAWOMIR STEMPSKI,
ALEKSANDER GORLACHOV*

It is altruism to say that we live in the age of multimedia.

Every day we are electronically bombarded, through a variety of devices, with millions of stimuli. They are mainly (so far) visual and audio ones, which can be combined, as is the case with TV or videos on the Internet, or used separately, as with radio or podcasts.

*These stimuli are received in a sensory way, i.e., using the senses – sight and hearing. Therefore, it is not difficult to guess that the **reduced receptivity of any sense (called a sensory disability) limits access to information.***

*There are a number of ways in which this limited access to information can be compensated for, collectively known as **accessibility**. As part of the accessibility services, persons with hearing impairments can be offered **subtitles for the deaf and sign language interpretation**, while persons with visual impairments – **audio description**.*

This publication is devoted to the topic of accessibility through sign language interpreting and audio description.



ACCESSIBILITY IN THE MEDIA

Sign language

Sign languages

are the primary means of communication used by deaf communities.²⁶



There are about **70 million** sign language users globally, including deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and even hearing people. The speakers of these languages identify themselves as a linguistic and cultural minority belonging to the deaf community.



Moreover, like many other minority languages, sign languages have a low social and linguistic status. Currently, only **41 countries** worldwide recognize sign language as an official language.

Human rights initiatives recognize and support the use of sign language on an equal basis with the spoken language and oblige countries to facilitate its use to promote the linguistic identity of the deaf.

The United Nations declared September 23 as the International Day of Sign Language, acknowledging at the same time that the knowledge of sign language is crucial for the individual development of the deaf and the entire community.

Sign languages are natural languages, like any spoken language, but they differ in the modality they use. Namely, they are visual-spatial languages. They use several articulators synchronously, including hands and arms, facial expressions, and most of the upper body to convey all language structures. Facial elements such as the position of the eyebrows, lips, facial expressions, head tilt, and the position of the arms and torso are used to convey meaning and grammar at all language levels.

Audible information is made available to the deaf and deaf-blind by means of sign language. It can transmit not only spoken language but also sound information, e.g., crackles, alarm siren, or musical elements.

²⁶ In this very publication, the word „deaf” written in a lower case refers to every deaf person, regardless of social or cultural background.

Sign language in the media should also be used to convey information that appears in writing on the screen. Firstly, because a large proportion of the deaf and deaf-blind population may have reading difficulties due to their age, visual impairment, or the level of competency in reading in their national language. But secondly, it can help the viewer to avoid dividing their attention, without the need to control the interpreter's eyesight, the subtitles appearing on the tickers, and the image from the camera.²⁷

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) recognizes the right of the deaf to access information through their cultural and linguistic communication system, i.e., their own national sign language. Most deaf and deaf-blind media users/recipients are bilingual. Even though they have access to written information, they often prefer TV content in their mother tongue, i.e., the national sign language. One reason is that, although captions may convey written text, they do not express the intonation or emotion, which is relevant to the media. Thus, sign language and sign language interpretation on TV make the provided information more profound and precise for users who use sign language as their primary means of communication. Additionally, sign language users also have different literacy levels in their native languages. This fact should be considered as TV captioning is sometimes too fast for older audiences to follow.

In the last ten years, we could witness more and more TV interpretations worldwide. The year 2020 showed how much still needs to be done regarding access to information for the deaf community. The mere placement of sign interpreters in the media does not guarantee the high quality of the message accessible to the signing community. A story from the funeral of Nelson Mandela during which the "interpreter" performed various gestures and movements that were not South American sign language exemplifies this problem. Unfortunately, it was not the first appearance of this "interpreter".²⁸



²⁷ Sign language interpretation in HBBYB 2017-06-14

²⁸ "Interpretation" from 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfZeIVsJxqs>

Graham Turner summed this up in an interesting way, pointing out what the world can learn from the “fake interpreter” story.²⁹

- *Using sign language fluently cannot be done just by waving your hands. Sign languages have a grammatical structure and rules like all other natural human languages. It is impossible to use sign language without preparation and, equally importantly, to understand sign language spontaneously just by looking at it.*
- *If you are unfamiliar with sign language and need to hire an interpreter, you need appropriate procedures to ensure that the person doing the work enables the audience to fully understand what is being interpreted. Sign interpreting is not a game; it should be done by professionals. We saw a spectacular insult to the deaf community at Nelson Mandela's funeral, but no one died. All over the world, every day, as a result of inadequate interpretations, the deaf community receives poor education, unfair court sentences, rejections in recruitment processes, and inappropriate treatment.*
- *Public institutions wishing to meet the legal guidelines on accessibility do not notice or ignore the opposition of the deaf community to individual decisions. But should we always trust deaf people criticizing certain translations? What deaf people can certainly catch is the consistency and clarity of the message, but they cannot say whether the translation is precise. To make such an assessment, you must have access to both messages in phonic and sign language.*

A similar situation occurred in Moldova in 2018 when Ren Moldova station broadcast news with a person “gesturing senselessly.” As a consequence of investigating the case reported by the audience, the television controlling authority imposed a financial penalty on the broadcaster.³⁰

Television broadcasters, interpreters, as well as the deaf community point to the lack of consistent regulations regarding the appearance of sign language on television. Some countries have adopted legal regulations at the national level. Some have just issued recommendations for broadcasters without consequences in the event of their failure to implement them. Some countries still do not have any regulations in this area. We will look at both scientific research and existing documents, collecting best practices and recommendations.

²⁹ <https://limpingchicken.com/2013/12/13/10-lessons-fake-terp/>

³⁰ www.media-azi.md precise link: <https://cutt.ly/moldaviafakeinterpreternews>

Prior to any further, more in-depth consideration, it should be noted that there are sign language communities in Europe without any sign language information available on their public television at all. This is the case with some small countries, such as Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, or Monaco, where there is no public broadcaster with any programs that could be considered (except for Liechtenstein with its public radio broadcaster). Andorra and San Marino have public television, but these are mainly small projects. The countries themselves are overwhelmingly influenced by the media's larger neighboring countries, Spain (and its border region – Catalonia) and Italy, respectively. As for larger countries, the community of Swedish-Finnish sign language users in Finland (now a minority, although historically the first in today's Finland) has no access to information in their sign language. In Russia, the sign language interpretation of television programs was discontinued in 2001. At that time, ORT (currently privatized) was the public television. However, sign language has not yet appeared on either the public WGTRK or the pseudo-public OTR television.

Overall, **7 out of 50**, i.e., 14% of surveyed groups of sign language users in Europe, **do not have any access to sign language on public television.**³¹

14%

The remaining groups can be considered in many respects, but one of the most interesting is whether sign language users can watch programs only in translation or also with deaf presenters. It turns out that this is the case of 15 communities or almost a third of the total.

These communities come from Western Europe (Great Britain, France, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, Spain), Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland), and Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Slovenia).

There are interesting cases from Estonia and Finland, where content interpreted by the deaf is the only detected sign language content at a given public broadcaster.



News service with the participation of a deaf presenter in Estonian ERR

³¹ According to the data gathered by S. Stępski for his PhD dissertation, 2019



News service with the participation of a deaf presenter for the Icelandic station RUV was the simplest news service broadcast only with the presenter, without subtitles, sounds, or any illustrations. These broadcasts were discontinued after 41 years – in October 2021.



An interesting example comes from Switzerland, where deaf people present a magazine in the Swiss dialect of French Sign Language (and spoken French), which is then repeated on German-language television with German captions.

The remaining categories of programs are news sites and magazines dedicated to deaf issues. Both types of such programs, presented by deaf presenters, are available to sign language users from four communities: Czech, Danish, Finnish, and Slovak community, while the Finnish magazine is a talk show devoted to interesting people from the deaf community, rather than a typical reportage.



Interview with interesting representatives of the Finnish deaf community in the Finnish YLE – carried out by Mikalea Tillander and Thomas Sandholm, taking turns.³²

³² Source: <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50654953?autoplay=true>

Five communities have at their disposal only news programs delivered by deaf people, six – only magazines.

It is also worth taking a look at the history of the above programs. The first news programs in Europe with a deaf presenter were broadcast (daily!) by Iceland as early as 1980, the next ones did not appear until 1987 in Sweden and 1989 – in Norway. In the 1990s, the ferment in this regard was continued exclusively (with the exception of Ireland (1992)) by the Nordic countries – Denmark (in 1993) and Finland (1994). In the new millennium, the Czechs joined the deaf newscasters (in 2000), and the next move was by Estonians (in 2008) and Slovaks (2013).

The history of programs devoted to the problems of the deaf community began earlier. The first one was broadcast (contrary to previous findings) in Denmark as early as 1970 on a monthly basis. British and Czechoslovak magazines were launched in 1981, and Swiss-French a year later. In 1986 German deaf people joined the group of presenters on their programs, and the Irish did the same in 1988. The 1990s were less intense – a new program was created in independent Slovakia (1993) and France (1995).

In the first decade of 2000, the deaf started presenting such programs in Slovenia in 2001 (existing since 1980 but back then without deaf presenters) and in Spain. In 2018, a program on the history of the deaf and sign language shortly existed in Portugal, and the production of such a program began in Poland in the same year.

The limited choice of programs available with interpretation into sign languages is another problem. Almost half of the community with access to such programs has only news services at their disposal interpreted into their sign language.

Apart from news websites, programs are ranked in 11 categories – *political journalism, social journalism, sports, medical and health programs related to disabilities, series, documentaries, magazines, cartoons for children, programs about consumer rights, and religious programs.*

The biggest number of the categories mentioned above (as many as six) with interpretation into sign language is broadcast on Polish Television. These include political and social journalism, sports, series, cartoons, and religious programs. Four categories of programs are available to the deaf in Czechia (sports magazines, cartoons, and religious programs), Finland (sports, series, documentaries, and cartoons), and Sweden (in contrast to the Norwegians, they interpret sports instead of politics into sign language).



A social magazine by reporters from Polish Television interpreted into sign language.



An entertainment program Praca da Alegria on Portuguese RTP interpreter into sign language.

The most frequently presented categories, apart from news websites, are political journalism (available for eight deaf communities), cartoons for children (six deaf communities), and magazines (four communities of sign language users).

As has already been written, one of the most important criteria is the source of sign language – a deaf presenter or an interpreter. The genre and category to which the programs belong can affect the fact whether the program is more likely to be interpreted, as it is with news services. At the same time, however, technical issues on the user's side are also important, as well as the methods of transmitting the signal of programs with sign language.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-oSWcs0KNQ



HBBTV standards indicate **three ways in which sign language appears in the media.**

It is an earlier preparation of a sign language interpretation (translation) of selected programs, live interpretation, or broadcasting a program in which a deaf person is a presenter.

1. Non-live broadcasting

In the case of broadcasting programs prepared in advance and not broadcast live, the preferred way of creating a sign message will also be through the thorough

preparation of sign language interpretation in a recording studio. The interpreting process can then be divided into several stages. During the first stage of interpretation, one can use the services of language experts in the respective fields, deaf consultants, and linguists. The interpreter can precisely plan the space and sequence of signs to convey the message in the best way possible. In the world of phonics, this can be compared to preparing for interpretation, where the interpreter has time to consider different linguistic decisions and strategies. The recording of the sign interpretation occurs after a thorough reading of the text; there is a space to introduce corrections, consult the prepared recording and submit it for release. Thanks to such preparations, the maximum quality of the service is ensured.

2. Live broadcasting

In the case of live programs, mainly news programs, it is impossible to prepare a “well-thought-through” interpretation. In this case, we are talking about live interpretation into sign language (as opposed to interpretation prepared before – also referred to as translation - mentioned earlier). The work of an interpreter is subject to greater stress and time pressure.

3. A presenter of the program using sign language

Presenting content by a native sign language user is the most effective way of communicating with the deaf community.³³ The linguistic level of native speakers is higher than that of hearing interpreters, the use of all articulators is more profound and varied (e.g., facial expressions, mimics, space management). In addition, a deaf presenter or interpreter can adapt their linguistic message in terms of culture. They organize their speech according to a spatial grammar of sign language, which has an entirely different logic and order than the sentence order in phonics. They can also decide to add an example that may facilitate the understanding of the statement by a deaf viewer.

The presence of the deaf on the screen has an additional image-enhancing and strengthening significance for the deaf community itself. Sign language then appears in the media space as an equivalent to phonic language and accustom all recipients to a certain standard of the occurrences of this language. Such programs are mostly interpreted into phonics. A program dedicated to the deaf without interpretation was broadcast only in Iceland.

³³ Sign language interpretation in hbbtv 2017-06-14

There are also different **technical ways of broadcasting sign language content on TV all over the world:**

- **on one and the same antenna**, i.e., the program with sign language is available to everyone, including hearing people (main broadcasters in Central and Eastern Europe)
- **on two antennas** – one has a program with, the other without sign language.
 - *Norway stands out in this respect (a separate, if necessary, the 24-hour channel of the broadcaster NRK dedicated exclusively to the content with sign language), as well as Denmark (broadcasters DR and TV2 maintain a common band between 17:00 and 20:00 with the content in sign language available – both live and reruns).*
 - *Swedish SVT has several evening/night bands with journalistic, sports, and documentary reruns.*
 - *Other broadcasters use a similar tactic, but for individual programs, mainly news broadcast live (e.g., the BBC broadcasts some news services in sign language live on BBC News at the same time, whereas the Dutch NPO, the Swiss SRF and RTS, the German ARD and ZDF, Belgian RTBF and VRT broadcast signatures of news services, but with a delay)*
- **Live programs** in sign language can also be broadcast on **Internet-only bands** – this is what Germany does (apart from the main news services, they broadcast most of the content in sign language on online live streams and via hybrid TV HBBTV, also Swedish SVT, apart from regular evening and night reruns, broadcasts current news services interpreted into sign language only in the Internet version).

The work of a deaf interpreter

For several years, the global trend has been to include deaf interpreters, and it is an integral part of the life of the deaf community. [“There is a new trend around the world for the Deaf interpreter service provider to be an integral part of Deaf life”]³⁴

David Cowan, a deaf interpreter with over 35 years of experience working with a hearing team-partner, says that thanks to his translations, a deaf recipient can

³⁴ Topics in Signed Language Interpreting: Theory and Practice, Boudreault, 2005, p. 323

focus not on the language itself, but the content conveyed by the presenter.³⁵ The linguistic level of native speakers is higher than that of hearing interpreters, the use of all articulators is profound and more varied (e.g., facial expressions, mimics, space management). Additionally, a deaf presenter or interpreter can adapt their linguistic message in terms of culture. A mixed team of deaf and hearing interpreters can provide greater linguistic diversity and prevent the development of “sign language of hearing interpreters.”

Lesley McGilp noted it is worth remembering that in many countries, a hearing person must complete a bachelor’s degree to become a sign language interpreter. However, this does not apply to deaf persons who want to be sign language interpreters. Therefore, it is worth considering strengthening the education of deaf interpreters. Switzerland has already found an answer to this issue by offering a new training program for deaf interpreters wishing to work in the media in Geneva.³⁶

Working with deaf interpreters on TV and media requires the use of methods that enable them to work effectively. A deaf interpreter can interpret from the text (live subtitles)³⁷ or in a team with a hearing interpreter giving a message in sign language from hearing. Red Bee Media in the UK uses a specially developed digital tool called InterSub.³⁸ The process is simple, but technically advanced, using the Subito and Intersub platforms. First, the transcriber creates live captions using re-speaking. A special Subito program is used for this purpose. The subtitles appear with a slight delay. However, they are not immediately sent to the interpreter but are reformatted with the image using the InterSub program to eliminate the delay element. In this way, the deaf interpreter receives the image synchronized with the subtitles presented on the studio teleprompter.³⁹

*However, TV broadcasters are still reluctant to cooperate with deaf interpreters, not because of the need for prompters; such equipment is at their disposal in the recording studio on an everyday basis. **The main barrier is the stereotypical approach to deaf interpreters as persons with disabilities and communication difficulties.***

³⁵ Sign language interpreting on TV and media: sharing best practices - A report of the first European seminar, published on www.mayadewit.nl, 30.11.2020

³⁶ Sign language interpreting on TV and media: sharing best practices - A report of the first European seminar, published on www.mayadewit.nl, 30.11.2020

³⁷ (closed captioning or live subtitling)

³⁸ Video depicting the work of a deaf interpreter live: <https://youtu.be/87Y4cnz9Qrk>

³⁹ <https://www.thebroadcastbridge.com/content/entry/12443/new-red-bee-media-technology-enables-deaf-translators-to-create-live-sign-l>

Working in a team

The TV interpreters work independently, in teams of two or more, which allows them to take turns while interpreting. In a survey from the 2019⁴⁰ European media translation seminar, Swedish and other interpreters emphasized that the opportunity to work in a team is a very important element of their profession, as well as the organization of space enabling effective work, e.g., a room in the TV headquarters where they can prepare and discuss the interpretation strategy.

At Red Bee Media (the company that provides access to the BBC in the UK), interpreters never change when interpreting daily news. Depending on the length of the program, interpreters sometimes interpret on their own, even for an hour. In other countries, the interpreters change every 15 minutes, and in some countries, a second interpreter is available during the recording to provide support throughout the entire interpretation. The 2019 seminar discussions showed that there was no consensus among the participants as to the permissible working time of an interpreter alone. Belgian standards recommend team interpretation, especially for complex translations. Croatian standards allow the interpreter to interpret independently for up to an hour, more than an hour in a team of two, more than three hours – in a team of three, and a whole day long – in two shifts of two interpreters.

It is undoubtedly a good practice to take responsibility for the quality of interpretation not only by individual interpreters but also by the interpretation organizer, who can create conditions for the team to improve the quality of interpretation. The Danish interpretation center organizes regular meetings for the entire team of news service interpreters where new terminology and translation challenges are discussed. Meetings with designated deaf viewers are also organized to provide feedback to the interpreters.

Consultation with the community using accessibility services

In Ireland, broadcasters are required to conduct periodic consultations, at least once a year, with groups representing a wide variety of accessibility user groups (blind and visually impaired persons in one panel and hard of hearing and deaf persons in another) to seek their opinions and preferences regarding available programs, actions of the broadcaster not in line with the rules of accessibility, and other related issues.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Sign language interpreting on TV and media: sharing best practices - A report of the first European seminar, published on www.mayadewit.nl, 30.11.2020

⁴¹ Irish Access Rules <https://www.bai.ie/en/bai-publishes-updated-access-rules/>

Broadcasters are required to appoint an **Access Liaison Officer** responsible for contacting recipients about applying accessibility rules in the institution (Ireland, Poland). The contact details of the Access Liaison Officer/Coordinator should be publicly available, for example on the broadcaster’s website. Contact information should be provided in an accessible manner.

Preparation for the interpretation

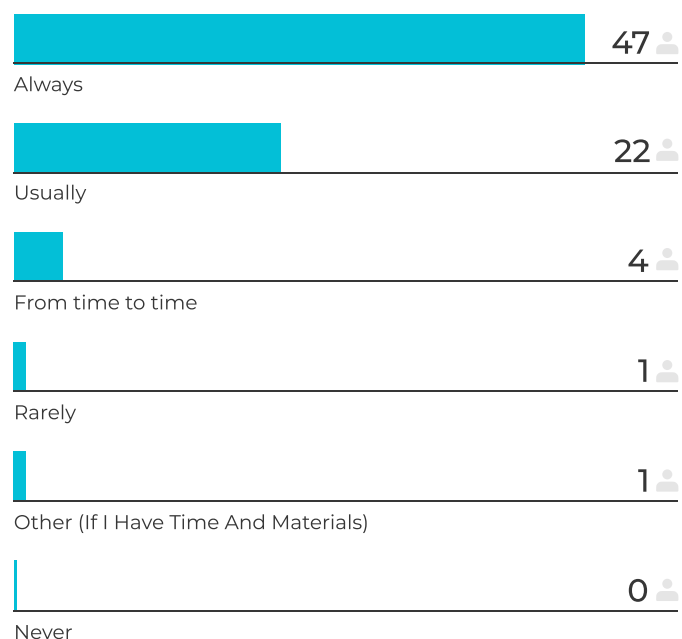
Preparation is an essential principle in most codes of ethics and professional standards for translators and interpreters, cited by teachers and professional organizations of translators and interpreters.

As it is known from linguistic research on interpretation (Mathers, 2000)⁴², the necessity to prepare for interpreting job results from the care to ensure the highest possible quality of interpretation.

During the eighth conference, “Media for All,” in 2019 in Stockholm, Aleksandra Kalata-Zawłocka presented preliminary research results on preparatory strategies used by sign language interpreters working in the television environment.

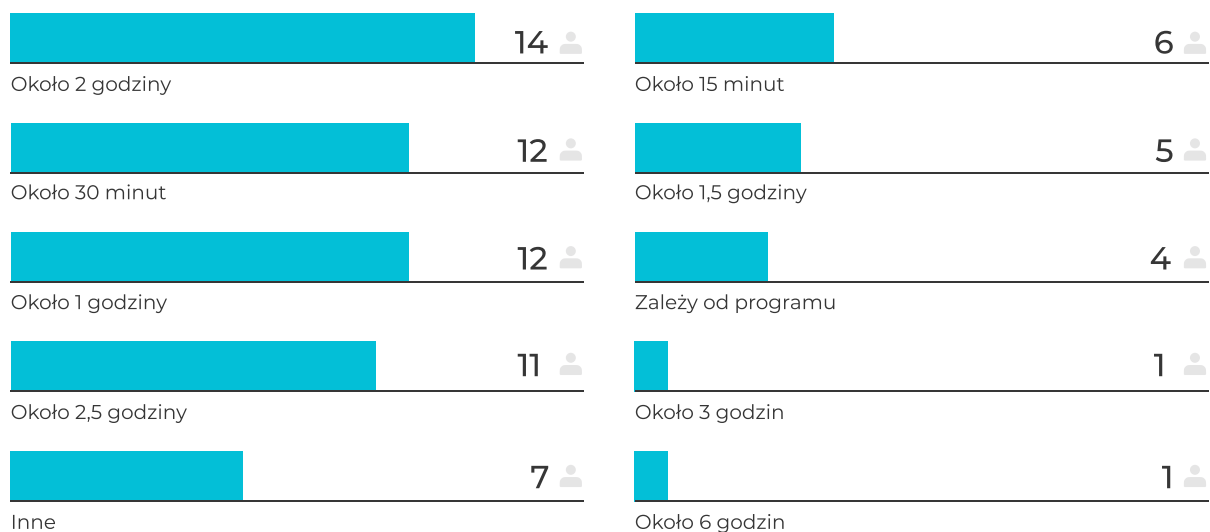
Seventy-five participants from 28 European countries declared how often and how long they prepared to work in front of the camera.

How often do you prepare for interpreting?



⁴² Mathers, C. (1999) "Preparation: More than Just a Good Idea", RID Views, Vol. 16, Issue 8, Aug./Sept. Za Preparation strategies employed by sign language interpreters working in television settings, Aleksandra Kalata-Zawłocka

How much time do you spend preparing for an interpreting job?



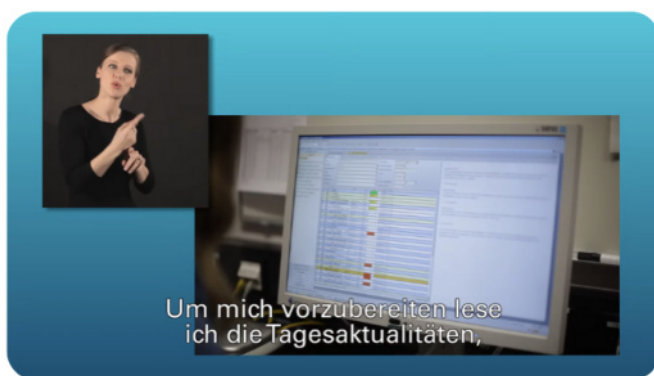
The three most commonly used preparation strategies are (based on the answers of 75 participants):

- 1** Getting familiar with the content and context of the program, e.g., reading scripts, questions, watching movies, listening to content, etc. **47 persons**
- 2** Consulting deaf/hearing colleagues **21 persons**
- 3** Vocabulary development – e.g., learning terminology in both languages **19 persons**

As terminology is a large part of the interpreter's work, the Language Council in Norway set up a working group on sign terminology, consisting of deaf experts from various fields. If there is no existing sign in Norwegian Sign Language for a given term, the group is supposed to suggest a new sign. Whether or not the proposed sign is accepted depends on the deaf community in Norway.

The interpreter should be fluent in sign language and familiar with different signs' variants. The decisions which variant to use at a given point while interpreting directly impact deaf audiences, their perception, and the use of sign language. Interpreters should be aware of this fact and be especially careful when making translation decisions.

However, obtaining material for translation beforehand, especially in the case of news that is broadcast at a very high speed, is not a standard practice in many countries. Interpreters in Poland do not receive any information from the TV station in advance, so they try to keep up to date with all the news on their own. On the other hand, in Belgium, Switzerland, and the UK, scripts are available in the system both to journalists and interpreters before broadcasting the program. In Sweden, the interpreter's working time spent on the preparation is paid.



Gabriela Hauswirth during preparations
(Switzerland)



Katharina Grösser during preparations
(Belgium)

An example of interesting and good practice combining teamwork and the development of interpreting materials is the Finnish broadcast of Independence Day at the Presidential Palace. This event, known informally as Linnanjuhlat (the Castle Ball), is broadcast on national TV and attracts a large audience every year. The interpretation was organized by the public broadcaster Yle. The team consisted of five persons (four working and one on standby). Additionally, the team collaborated with a deaf journalist working in Yle, consulting linguistic issues and terminology. Interpreters received many materials to prepare themselves beforehand, such as music and additional information, including the type of makeup or clothing prepared for the event. Two people interpreted the dialogue live simultaneously, and each of them was displayed on a separate screen. An additional fifth interpreter constantly supported the team during their work. The whole event lasted approximately four hours.⁴³

⁴³ Sign language interpreting on TV and media: sharing best practices - A report of the first European seminar, published on www.mayadewit.nl, 30.11.2020

Use of visual content during interpretation

During TV broadcasts, a lot of information is conveyed visually. In order to improve understanding on the recipients' part, interpreters should consider how to use a visual message in the form of, for example, charts, tables, infographics and incorporate them into their interpretation. Christopher Stone studied how interpreters can make better use of the visual elements available to the viewer through strategies such as pointing the finger accurately, pointing to a specific area, looking in a given direction. When the presenter refers directly to the information indicated in the image on the screen, the interpreter can point their finger at it without the necessity to visually repeat the image's content. The presenter's sentence "exactly such a car" while showing a picture of the car may be signed together with a finger pointing at the part of the screen where the image is visible.

The photos present two strategies – eye and finger-pointing – by an interpreter on the BBC.



In the HBBTV standards, we will find a summary of how to make the best use of this interpreting technique:

- *It is important to create a **positive interaction between the interpretation and the visual information** displayed on the screen.*
- *The interpreter **should receive all the previously prepared graphics** to be displayed on the screen to prepare the interpretation properly (i.e., video clips, graphics, tables).*
- *The interpreter **should be aware of where the indicated visual content will appear** on the screen to refer precisely to it during the interpretation.*

- **The interpreter should give the recipient a moment to familiarize themselves with the visual content.** *A moment of pause will allow the viewer to shift their eyesight to the main screen so that the information in sign language does not have to compete with the image.*

How to translate proper names when interpreting to a nationwide audience?

TV interpretation is typically received by a nationwide audience, so the interpreter does not adapt their interpretation to a given region, e.g., the style of the capital city. The people mentioned in interpretation should be referred to as neutral as possible, making it difficult to select signs to be used in interpretation. For example, the question arises whether to spell proper names or use a sign from a given region. These are the difficulties that interpreters face with additional time pressure and occasional ambiguity in the statements.

Christopher Stone provided an interesting example of this kind at a 2019 seminar, which was the choice made by Red Bee Media, a translation company for BBC News in the UK, to spell the names of US Presidents Trump and Obama. The decision was based on an analysis of the sign names of both presidents. The Trump sign refers to a physical trait that can be perceived as a negative feature (related to the hairstyle), while the Obama sign relates to the party logo, which in turn may appear biased to the recipient. This choice can be debatable. Should the interpreter analyze the etymology of each sign name used by the deaf community when selecting it for interpretation? Can their choice lead to misunderstanding of the message for people who do not understand the spelled message (fingerspelling)? It is certainly easier to make such decisions in a team of deaf and hearing interpreters, but still, caution is required.

Speaker's identification

The interpreter can identify individual presenters and speakers during sign language interpretation, using techniques such as referring to the person by changing the position of the eyes and body or giving the speaker's name and reflecting their behavior. This technique is known in sign language as characterization. Thanks to this, the recipient knows who is saying a given sentence, especially when there are more guests in the TV studio or when the video material contains more than one person.

Synchronization

The Irish recommendations state that interpretation into sign language should start simultaneously as speech. This is not always possible in practice when interpreting live broadcasts because of natural delays during such broadcasts. Providing an interpreter with materials and information about broadcast content before the program is a useful aid to interpreters and can help to ensure good timing. The time of producing signs in sign language should be as close to speech as possible. As with sign language presentations, the sentence “interpreted aloud” should be as close as possible to the time of the original utterance in sign language.

However, it should be remembered that national sign languages and phonic languages have different grammatical structures, so there may be situations in which it is not possible to create an interpretation covering exactly the same time in both languages. Whenever possible, every effort should be made to ensure that all viewers receive information at the same time.

Significantly enough, broadcasting of the program should end only after the interpretation is completed, so the producer of the program must take into account not only the main content of the program and its dynamics but also the work of interpreters.

Off-screen sounds

A sign language interpreter or presenter should indicate the presence of off-screen noises (e.g., telephone ringing, door knock or gunfire, a foreign language left untranslated, a situation impossible to translate verbally) if they are relevant for understanding the program.

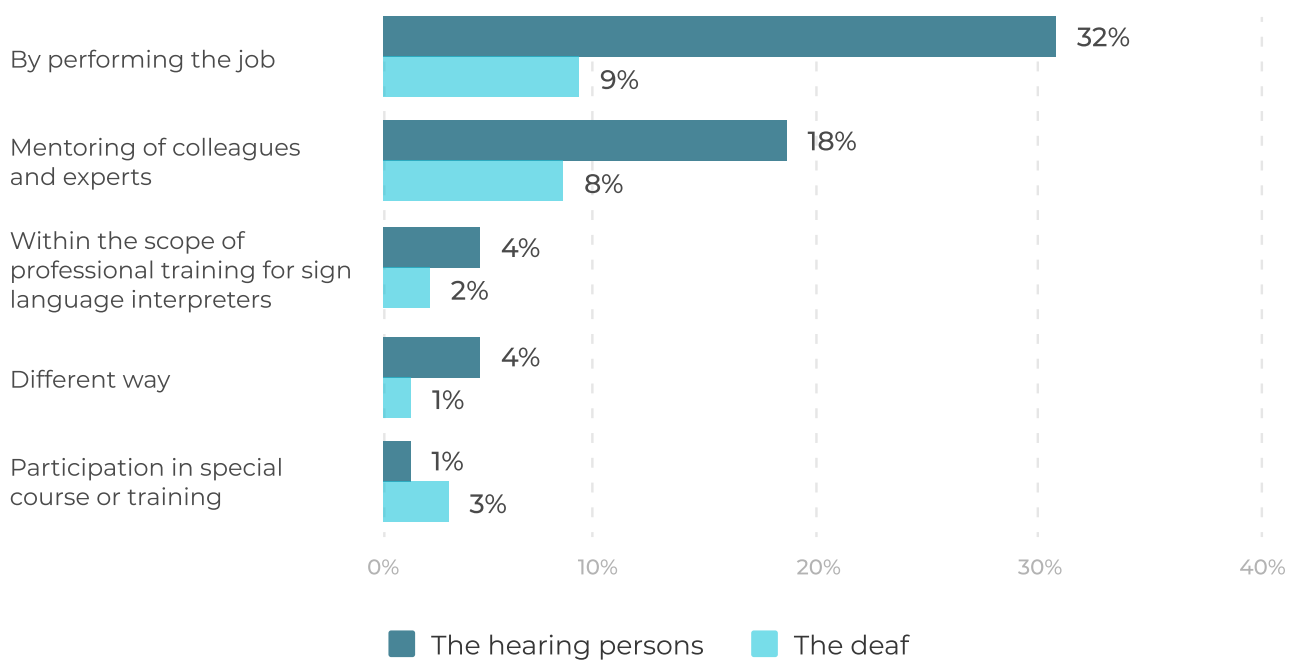
Competences and the process of their acquisition

Does a sign language interpreter undergo any special training before seeing them on a TV screen? Are there any specialist courses for interpreters in the field of Media Translation? The short review by Maya de Wit during the European seminar “Sign interpreting on TV and in media – exchange of best experiences” in 2019 indicated that there is no separate career path for an interpreter focused on working on TV or official standards of how the message in sign language should

look in media. An interesting picture of the situation emerges from the questionnaires completed during this event. The respondents were mainly interpreters, but also researchers, students, and executives from Belgium, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Great Britain, and the USA.⁴⁴

The majority of interpreters (65%) acquired their knowledge and skills of TV interpretation during their work, 41% through mentoring by older colleagues, whereas 15% of interpreters declared participation in a short specialist course related to this field.

How did you learn to interpret on TV and in media? (63 respondents)



Mentoring

The Dutch Center for Sign Language (Gebarententrum), which is responsible for providing and supervising sign language interpreters in the national public news in the Netherlands, places great emphasis on mentoring. The Center runs a mentoring and supervision program for interpreters who carry out specific pieces of information.

The Irish standards indicate that broadcasters should ensure that sign language interpreter have an appropriate level of competence and proficiency in sign language.

⁴⁴ Sign language interpreting on TV and media: sharing best practices - A report of the first European seminar, published on www.mayadewit.nl, 30.11.2020

The level of competence and proficiency required by broadcaster should be validated by user groups, representatives, and other persons or organizations with substantial experience and expertise in the field.

Similarly, HBBTV standards devote a separate section to the employment of professional interpreters. It is worth quoting it in full.

Broadcasters should only employ interpreters who are officially qualified, accredited, or registered by National Sign Language Interpreters Associations (NASLI), interpreters involved in the media work with a wide variety of audiences from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, signing to the camera rather than to the visible audience. Therefore, it is very important that broadcasters employ highly experienced interpreters who have worked in a wide variety of environments, those who have had contact with a wide range of sign language users, so they can adapt to a variety of language registers to suit the programs and audiences they are intended for.

Television interpreters should have native sign language knowledge. They should also be up-to-date with knowledge of neologisms and the terminology of current events. Linguistics qualifications are not sufficient. A high level of interpreting skills and strategies is necessary. They should also have competencies related to working in the media environment, e.g., using a teleprompter and interpreting in front of the camera without user feedback.

When employing sign language interpreters, you should:

- *Contact NASLI or NAD to find out about qualification and training in sign language in your country;*
- *Employ only qualified, accredited, or registered interpreters;*
- *Employ interpreters with the highest native level of the national sign language;*
- *Employ experienced interpreters;*
- *Employ highly qualified interpreters;*

- Offer training for interpreters (on the technologies used in your studio);
- Always ask for expert advice when casting or recruiting new interpreters.

Additionally, you should:

- Avoid employing novice interpreters;
- Avoid hiring untrained or unqualified interpreters.

The size of the interpreter – why is it so important?

When deaf persons and interpreters use sign language, it may appear as though the language involved only broad movements of arms, hands, and body, but sign languages contain many subtle movements and features. Slight changes in the shape of the hand, fingers, mouth, head, body, and expression on the face can change the meaning. **All these features must be clearly visible on television to understand the message correctly.** This is particularly problematic with sign interpretations delivered in an overlay format, where the interpreter occupies only a tiny part of the TV screen, making their hands and facial features relatively small and indistinct.⁴⁵

What is more, watching a TV program and its interpretation simultaneously is more demanding for a deaf viewer. Audiences who can hear use both auditory and visual messages, whereas, for the deaf persons, visual content on TV competes with interpretation into sign language. Consequently, the deaf viewer sometimes has to choose between focusing on what is visually presented on the screen and the interpretation.⁴⁶

One method that reduces the impression of seeing two images at once is the chroma essential technique. It gives the impression that an interpreter, whose image is superimposed on the main content of the program without a background separating it, is part of the entire message. However, this is not the only way the signing figure can be represented on the screen.

⁴⁵ Guidelines for Broadcasting Sign Language Interpreters During Televised Events Compiled by Gordon Vernon, CI, CT, NIC Director of Communication for the Registro de Intérpretes para Sordos de Puerto Rico, Inc. <https://rispri.org/resources/Documents/Guidelines%20for%20Broadcasting%20Sign%20Language%20Interpreters%20During%20Televised%20Events.pdf>

⁴⁶ Maya de Witt seminar

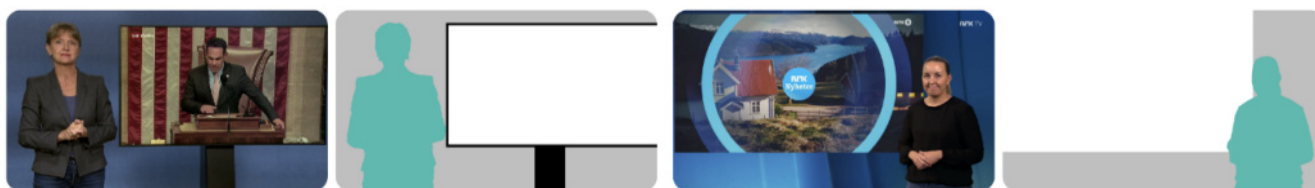
The most common positioning of a person using sign language on the screen:

a. The person on the main screen (interpreter or deaf presenter)

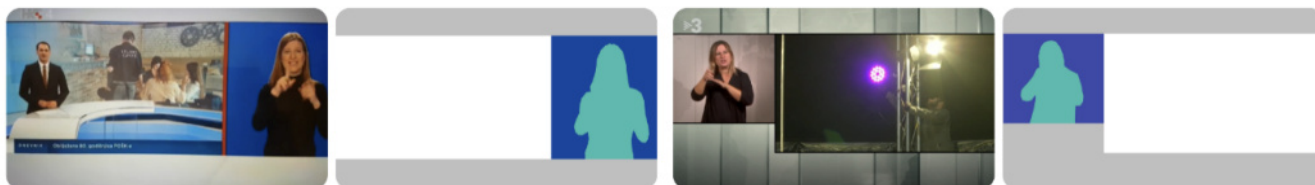


Example from Germany⁴⁷

b. The figure of the interpreter on the screen next to the main TV broadcast



Examples from Switzerland and Norway⁴⁸



Examples from Croatia and Catalonia⁴⁹

c. The figure of an interpreter presented with the use of color keying technology (chroma key)



Examples from Ukraine and Armenia⁵⁰

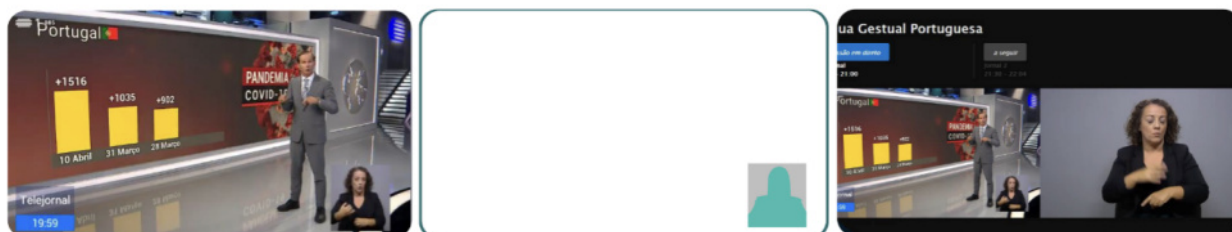
⁴⁷ Germany: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZuFrqyZWfw_Zf0OnXWUXyQ

⁴⁸ Switzerland: <https://www.srf.ch/play/tv/redirect/detail/e230701b-1a31-43c3-a6fc-f62135c86191>
Norway: <https://tv.nrk.no/serie/dagsrevyen/202111/NNFA19110221/avspiller>

⁴⁹ Croatia – own photos, Catalonia <https://www.ccma.cat/tv3/telenoticies/lengua-de-signes/>

⁵⁰ Ukraine: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzjCgRF7-do>
Armenia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvID6N_tATl

d . Figure of an interpreter in a box using a picture-in-picture technology (square or oval)



The above example from Portugal is interesting because an interpreter is displayed using picture-in-picture technology. Although the interpreter's window is relatively small compared to the standards and trends in other countries of the world, after accessing television broadcasting (VOD) on the Internet, it is possible to enlarge the interpreter's image to half of the screen. However, there are many countries where a small image is the only option, which arouses opposition in the deaf community.

Some countries have adopted standards that explicitly regulate where the sign language interpreter should be displayed. For example, this is the designated space on the right side of the picture for all broadcasters in Belgium.⁵¹

HBBTV recommendations include:

- *Depicting a person using sign language in “the size of a man”;*
- *If the interpreter is displayed on the screen in picture-in-picture technology (box), it is recommended to use a square/rectangle shape (it is advisable to avoid a circle or an oval);*
- *Provide the interpreter with a space at least ¼ of the screen width. Avoid depicting a very miniaturized figure.*

The Belgian standards for broadcasters indicate that a professional translation should occupy 1/3 of the screen's width, and the overlay's size cannot be changed during the program. The situation illustrated below shows how the Polish broadcaster reduced and changed the position of the overlay with the interpretation.⁵²

⁵¹ Charte Relative À La Qualité Des Mesures D'accessibilité À Destination Des Personnes En Situation De Déficience Sensorielle <https://www.csa.be/wp-content/uploads/documents-csa/20191015-Charte-accessibilit%C3%A9.pdf>

⁵² Program broadcast on 11th Nov., 2020, illustration of the change created by the deaf activist Małgorzata Talipska, published on forums of the deaf community in order to encourage contact with the broadcaster and express dissatisfaction with the changes in the translator's size.



Sweden has a technical solution to the problem of the interpreter's figure. TeckenPOP²⁸ allows a deaf viewer to choose the position of the interpreter on the screen independently. This technology is available for webcasting and enables the viewer to adjust the size, position, transparency, and background.²⁹



The space for signing – how big should the interpreter's figure be

Belgian standards recommend cropping the interpreter with the “American plan,” that is, showing the interpreter not only from the waist up, but starting from the middle of the thighs, so as to facilitate the readability of all signs, including those on the lower body or the thighs. If the interpreter is visible to a lesser extent, they must be aware of their limited visibility on-screen and modify the signs or use such variants that are visible, for example, from the waist up. However, reducing the interpreter's space impacts the quality of the interpretation, and displaying figures from the chest up precludes the full grammatical use of the signing space. The examples of different sizes of the interpreters in Great Britain, the Czech Republic, and Portugal, respectively.

⁵³ <http://teckenpop.com/>

⁵⁴ <https://beta.dramaski.se/mediaserver/teckenpop.com/video/reklam/teckenpop.reklam.m4v>



Right or left?

When discussing the position on the screen, we can distinguish between the left and right positions, as well as the top, middle and bottom positions. The most commonly used option is the lower-right position. It seems that an important factor determining the interpreter's horizontal positions is the direction of the handwriting – in the case of countries with the writing system read from left to right, interpreters are more often on the right, in countries where the reading is from right to left (e.g., Arab countries and Israel) – on the left. However, the following examples demonstrate that this is not an absolute rule. Initial results using eye-tracker measurements have shown that the left/right position did not affect the clarity and readability of the message. However, it does appear that there may be cultural differences regarding the preferences of the side.

Marta Bosch-Baliard's research on the perception of content by deaf Catalans depending on the size and placement of the interpreter showed a preference of this group for the layout with the interpreter on the left.⁵⁵ It is because historically, the interpreter in Catalonia was presented on the left for many years. In turn, German or Polish recipients prefer the interpretation on the right. Research has shown a correlation between time of exposure to a specific layout and right/left position preference. This means that the more programs viewers watch with the same screen layout, the easier it is to read the visual information. Unfortunately, broadcasters usually make item selection using aesthetic, not accessibility criteria.⁵⁶

Interpreter at the center of the event

The interpreter does not always have to be on the right or left side. They can also be in the center of the event. When the interpreter is not engaged by the TV station but by the press conference organizer, the interpreter will stand next to the person presenting the topic. Thanks to this solution, no matter which television broadcasts, e.g., the speech, an interpreter will be available. It is especially

⁵⁵ Bosch-Baliarda, M., Soler-Vilageliu, O., & Orero, P. (2020). Sign language interpreting on TV: A reception study of visual screen exploration in deaf signing users. *Traducción y Accesibilidad En Los Medios de Comunicación: De La Teoría a La Práctica / Translation and Media Accessibility: From Theory to Practice*, Mon-TI 12, 108–143.

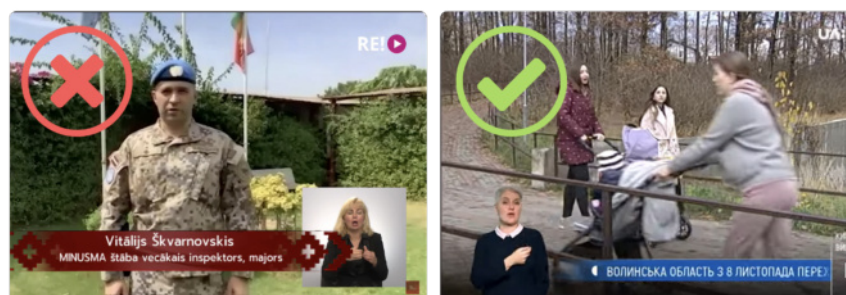
⁵⁶ Sign language interpretation in HBBTV 2017-06-14

recommended when information of state importance⁵⁷ is provided. An example of two different broadcasts from a Georgian press conference organized by an election commission are presented below. A positive consequence of this solution is also the interpreter's natural size, which cannot be reduced to a small square on the side of the screen.



Additional visual elements on the screen during interpretation

The text and visual information must be placed so as not to cover the interpreter's overlay. It happens that during retransmission, the original image is covered by the current news tickers or the station logo, and the interpretation disappears in the background behind the visual information. An example from Latvian TV shows the interpreter covered by a caption introducing a person on the screen, which should not happen. On the other hand, a Ukrainian solution shows the combination of a caption with the informative text and the visible interpreter, not covered by any elements.



Interpreter's outfit

The interpreter's dress code must primarily guarantee the good readability of the signs. For this purpose, clothes worn by the interpreter according to Belgian and HBBTV standards should ideally have the following characteristics:

⁵⁷ Example 2 of the broadcast of the same message:
<https://www.facebook.com/CentralElectionCommissionOfGeorgia> and own photos.


- **Should not be too loose,**
- **Their color must be contrasted both with the complexion of the interpreter, as well as with the colors applied in the program and the background.** A negative color combination may cause more eye strain for a deaf recipient. Deaf-blind persons may experience additional difficulties. Their visual limitations combined with the low contrast of the signing interpreter will make it impossible to receive the content. **The interpreter's figure must be visible,** for example, by wearing uniform clothing that contrasts the skin color (e.g., dark clothes for people with light skin color and for people with dark skin tone – light clothes). **Patterned clothing should be avoided.** The background should be plain, preferably in contrast to the color of the interpreter's skin. The most accessible background for many deaf-blind people will be a dark blue color.
- **Clothing should match the style of TV presenters.**
- **The interpreter's face should be exposed** so that their facial expressions are visible. Similarly, **makeup and accessories (except for the hands, where they should not be present at all) should be discreet** and should not distract the viewer too much.
- *If the interpreter's voice is delivered through headphones, it should be ensured that **all wiring runs under clothes,** being at the same time permanently connected and not restricting movements.*


However, there is no single uniform clothing style for sign language interpreters in the world, and there has not been any over the years. The graphic below shows interpreters from Russia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Croatia, Armenia, Ukraine, Moldova, Poland, Ireland, Austria.




Guests signing on the TV show

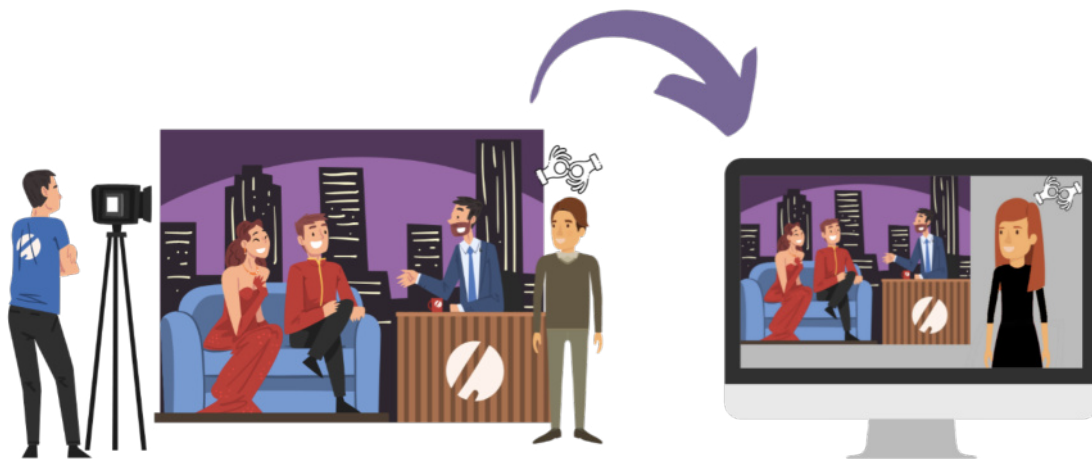
The following guidelines should be considered when inviting deaf visitors to the studio.

- 

Guests should be interpreted by a professional, paid interpreter, not any selected person, especially not a child (a disgraceful example from a Polish private breakfast television, when no interpreter was provided, and a nine-year-old daughter was put in a difficult situation in which she interpreted her mother's statements.)
- 

Any sophisticated TV production techniques should be avoided – when a deaf person is speaking, they must be visible all the time in one view, from the front if possible.
- 

To make the conversation accessible, it is recommended to provide the interpreter's view in a separate window – with spatial imagination and the possibility of a temporary reorganization of the studio. The same interpreter may interpret questions for the deaf, but there may be a need to hire a second interpreter.



www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHlbYyEXZBc





Recommendations for cinematographers

When filming a signing person, all television production standards must be applied.

One of the most important technical elements is lighting.

It is particularly important to have good visibility of the entire person, without shadows or darker parts in the space around the interpreter. This is an essential element because sign language is three-dimensional: it uses not only hands but also arms, shoulders, face, mouth, and facial expressions. To achieve this effect, the best option is to diffuse the light. All these articulators should be in the picture. It is worth noting that the space occupied by interpreters is organized differently on a case-by-case basis. Each signing person has their own style – some have a wide, and some have a narrow signing style.

Cinematographer's check-list:

- Check the lighting.
- Check the space in which the interpreter will sign (3D).
- Use medium long shot (MLS) to film the interpreter.
- Leave some space vertically and horizontally (over the head and to the interpreter's side) to avoid the feeling of "hands cut off" in case of leaving the frame.
- Film the interpreter at eye level, focusing on the interpreter's face.
- Use a frontal or semi-frontal shot.
- Avoid long shots and close-ups.
- Avoid „cut-off" (cutting a person in the frame).
- Avoid changing shots; keep one shot static.
- Avoid high angle and low angle shots.

Display quality

The on-screen sign language interpreter figure should be of sufficient size and resolution to show all movements of the entire upper torso, including the arms, hands and fingers, shoulder, neck, and relevant facial movements and expressions. All important gestures that convey meaning through sign language must be easily and accurately recognized. Interlacing compression must not be used when sharing recordings of programs with sign language (e.g., VOD). Below is an example of **content provided to an Internet audience from Kosovo and Ethiopia using defective compression with interlacing technique. All moving parts are not fully clear, which can be seen especially in the case of the interpreter's hands and the subtitles at the bottom of the screen.**



Information and apology in the event of service interruption

Whenever technically possible, in the event of a breakdown or interpretation breaks, appropriate captions with information about the breakdown should be displayed.

Crisis management in an accessible form

Sign language users are **often deprived of the sources of information provided in phonic languages in emergencies.** It can limit their safety if they are not informed about the nature or extent of the emergencies. Television broadcasts messages with sign interpretation in specific, limited time bands. In case of emergencies, such as an earthquake, hurricane, or pandemic, important information is provided by representatives of crisis teams at different times of the day. Due to a lack of information during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic,

the deaf community in many countries demanded information in national sign language. An example can be the recommendations of Polish researchers during the crisis, indicating, among other things, that during press conferences organized in crises, translation into sign language should be provided by the organizer of the event. The sign language interpreter should then stand next to the speaker. Whether broadcasting or recording, broadcasters should not remove the sign language interpreter.⁵⁸

Television captioning is not necessarily effective in conveying information to all deaf persons due to the different levels of knowledge of the national language. In a crisis, the information should be delivered precisely, and the understanding of the message by the recipients should be complete. Hence the necessity to complement the message with the additional message in sign language.

Emergency press briefings in emergencies should be available to all hearing, hard of hearing, and deaf people. Therefore, the availability of both sign language and subtitles should meet the needs of people who use sign language and those who prefer reading the subtitles. For live meetings that are often not scheduled well in advance, one needs to provide real-time captions with a high-quality captioning provider. The production of live captioning requires different technological solutions from captioning added to the previously produced material.

⁵⁸ Szczygielska, M., & Kalata Zawłocka, A. (2020) Wytyczne na czas kryzysu w sprawie sposobu realizacji i jakości tłumaczeń na język migowy w utworach audiowizualnych. Instytut Lingwistyki Stosowanej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego. Warszawa. <https://avt.ils.uw.edu.pl/files/2020/03/Dost%C4%99pno%C5%9B%C4%87-pim-wytyczne-na-czas-kryzysu.pdf>

The biggest challenges

The community of specialists from seminars and conferences related to sign language in television and media identifies the greatest challenges that still have to be faced by the accessibility providers.

- **The lack of uniform guidelines and standards** is still a problem for many interpreters and producers.
- **There is a lack of training** dedicated to media interpretation in many places.
- Many respondents from different countries (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, Great Britain) observed **an increased demand for deaf interpreters on TV**.
- One of the biggest difficulties all the time is **the way of placing the interpreter on the screen** since the broadcasters often do not care about the clear visibility of the interpreter.

Difficulties also arise with regard to translation process itself.

- **Lack of feedback** from the audience. It used to be the problem mostly of TV interpreters. However, due to the worldwide pandemic, remote interpreting is becoming more and common, and many interpreters working outside of TV have experienced difficulties signing into the camera. This is a one-way communication, and the interpreter does not receive visual feedback from the viewers. In other places, a sign language interpreter and a deaf person can see each other, and the interaction can confirm understanding. This allows them to revise the interpretation choices on an ongoing basis.
- The “environmental” aspect of translation is also sometimes an issue. **An interpreter who provides accurate information quickly may be perceived negatively by deaf persons** with less education and a lower level of knowledge of sign language, even though the translation is linguistically and technically correct. Such people may prefer interpreters that provide less information and are slower.

- TV programs tend to be very fast-paced and have a lot of condensed content, especially during debates with a rapid shift between speakers and often individual speakers shouting over each other. Presenters reading a text can also unconsciously increase the pace of speech.

Being a TV interpreter is also associated with popularity and hence greater pressure from comments and discussions on given interpretation excerpts among the deaf and interpreters' communities. It should be remembered that often the limited awareness of the deaf regarding the social and political context may lead to the situation when they criticize the interpreter for the content of the programs. The increased criticism can affect self-confidence, reputation, and the future career of the interpreter.

The above considerations relate to the effective delivery of information to pre- or perilingual deaf people (i.e., those who have lost their hearing before or during speech acquisition), whose first language is most often sign language. They also concern audiovisual information contained in texts of phonic language, most often subjected to intersemiotic interpretation (i.e., from signs of phonic language to signs of sign language). However, people with visual impairment require a different type of support. They have access to texts (especially digital ones, e.g., via a screen reader). Still, they do not have access (or it is limited, depending on the depth of the visual impairment) to the information contained in the widely understood image (static or in motion) – one of the techniques allowing to complete the information is the audio description.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES





SECTION III.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

KAMILA SKALSKA

Audio Description (AD) is a narration that gives a blind or a visually impaired viewer a verbal description of what is happening on the TV screen at a given moment. It is provided as an aid to understanding and benefiting from the program. The technique uses a second soundtrack that describes the scene and the action on the screen.

Audio Description is created in order to enable the visually impaired to experience the visual/audio-visual work in the fullest, most independent and satisfactory manner. This is achieved when the blind and the visually impaired receive a thought-through, comprehensible, corresponding to their cognitive competences, attractive and linguistically correct description of the visual content that makes up a work of art, an architectural object or a given space.⁵⁹

Audio Description has developed at different times and at different speed around the world. Countries such as the UK, USA, Germany, France, South Korea, Canada and Japan have managed to produce Audio Descriptions of major TV programs with different technical solutions depending on systems at their disposal. The World Blind Union approved in 2011 and updated in 2016 the international toolkit for creating, sharing and lobbying for Audio Description on TV and in films.⁶⁰

Who uses Audio Description?

The group of Audio Description recipients is diverse and the division into the blind and visually impaired does not exhaust the list of significant differences. Equally important, or perhaps even more significant, is the division into the blind from birth and persons who went blind. These two groups differ in terms of: knowledge of the world of images, colors, spatial imagination, the ability to read the language of film or theater, understanding formal procedures inscribed in visual and audiovisual works of art. Due to the different level of competences and diversified needs of recipients, the perfect solution would be to create several versions of Audio Description, dedicated to individual groups. In practice, however, one version of the description is created, which becomes a compromise between the needs of individual viewers.⁶¹

To illustrate the benefits of Audio Description for the blind and the visually impaired persons, the authors of AD toolkit presented several profiles of people based on the observation and development of AD in different countries. We are going to present four of these profiles.

⁵⁹ Audiodeskrypcja – zasady tworzenia [Audio Description – principles], Culture Without Barriers Foundation, 2012, access : <https://kulturabezbarrier.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Audiodeskrypcja-zasady-tworzenia.pdf>

⁶⁰ International toolkit on providing, delivering and campaigning for Audio Description on television and film Commissioned by the World Blind union 04.2011, update 01.2016, https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Digital-Inclusion/Persons-with-Disabilities/Documents/International%20Audio%20Description%20Toolkit_updated%202016.pdf [Toolkit]

⁶¹ Audiodeskrypcja – zasady tworzenia [Audio Description – principles], Culture Without Barriers Foundation, 2012



PROFILE 1

CANEEL, age: 13
school student

Caneel lives in Sacramento, California, USA. She can watch TV two hours daily and one or two films per week:

- *She asks her parents to take her to the cinema at the weekend to see the latest films, so she can talk about them with friends at school.*
- *She watches many films on TV and finds it convenient to use the TV remote. Her favorite TV channel, when she is not watching Disney movies or comedy series, is MTV.*
- *Caneel is completely blind from birth and her way of watching films/TV is different from the way other children do.*
- *She uses Audio Description whenever possible to understand what is happening on the screen. She selects programs with AD using the electronic program guide and sets reminders on her TV. She says that thanks to AD she feels independent.*
- *Caneel uses Audio Description not only for entertainment, but also for education. Her school often uses films for educational purposes and makes sure they have AD videos available for Caneel before using them in class. AD videos are made available through the free library of available media. This library is funded by the government's Department of Education.*

Caneel benefits greatly from the available Audio Description and would love more programs to be audio described.



PROFILE 2

INDIRA, age: 32
housewife

Indira lives in Haryana, North India. She is not much of a TV fan. However, from time to time she enjoys watching documentaries and never misses the evening news. She admits that she does not always understand what is happening on the screen while watching TV. She has two teenage children, who could potentially help her fill the gaps, but she says there is no point in asking them what is happening on the screen as she does not want to disturb them. She uses audio cues to understand the program, but often this is not enough and, as a result, she cannot fully follow the program.

Indira's son taught her how to use a computer, and now she surfs the Internet, where she can read newspapers and magazines. It is easier for her to use the computer than the TV.

Partially sighted from birth Indira uses different methods to understand a TV program/ film than a person without visual impairment:

- *She relies on audio cues to understand the content better.*
- *When she goes to the cinema with her family, Indira does not like asking family members to explain what is happening on the screen and she often cannot follow the film's plot.*
- *Indira does not know Audio Description at all.*

If she had access to Audio Description, Indira would be able to understand the documentaries she wants to watch on TV without any help from the outside.



PROFILE 3

JOHN, age: 42
IT analyst in a call center

John lives in London, Great Britain, and enjoys watching the latest movies. He rarely goes to the cinema, but buys films on DVD/Blue-ray on Amazon or on the LOVEFILM website. John is very pleased with the new technology.

Partially sighted from the age of 23, John uses different techniques to watch TV/films than a sighted person:

- *Audio Description is often the deciding factor for him when purchasing a DVD/Blue-ray film.*
- *John has purchased a new Smart-Talk decoder for his room with text-to-speech functionality for all menus and navigations, which enables independent viewing. Additionally, the decoder allows to easily search for programs with Audio Description.*
- *Jan regularly goes to the cinema to watch films with Audio Description.*

John uses Audio Description extensively on TV, DVDs and in the cinema.



PROFILE 4

JANINE, age: 74
retired

Janine lives in Brussels, Belgium. Before she retired, she had been a clerk at a local library. Her husband died last year, so now she lives alone.

Janine realizes she is slowly losing her eyesight and thinks it's part of the aging process. She tries to watch TV, but it turns out to be difficult: the picture on the screen becomes more and more blurry for her. As a result, it is challenging for her to fully understand what is happening on the screen.

Janine uses different techniques to watch TV than a sighted person:

- *As a person who has watched TV series for years, she now thinks that TV is no longer for her.*
- *She feels quite alienated and isolated because she no longer enjoys the soap operas she has watched on TV for years.*

Providing Audio Description on TV shows can completely change Janine's feelings.

Technical details regarding Audio Description on TV and in media

Some of the methods used to deliver Audio Description on TV in different countries are:

1. Transmission mix/mix from the receiver level [only for digital TV]
2. Description available in a visible/audible form to all or with the possibility to hide it
3. Secondary Audio Programming in analog television
4. Broadcasting AD via radio

1

Transmission mix/mix from the receiver level [only for digital TV]

Combined Broadcast: *An additional audio track consisting of the original audio and the Audio Description track is pre-mixed on the broadcaster side and transmitted along with the regular TV program sound track.*

Simply put, a broadcaster, which in many countries is also referred to as a service provider, mixes the Audio Description track with the program audio in the final stage of editing, and then broadcasts the combined track. When the user presses the AD button on their remote control or the TV menu, they will be able to listen to the Audio Description track interspersed with the original audio track on their TV.

Mix from the receiver level: *as an alternative to broadcasting already mixed sound tracks, in the receiver mix, the combination of the original soundtrack and the descriptive track takes place inside the viewers' receiver, i.e., TV or set-top box.*

This system offers the user some advantages, including the ability to adjust the sound level of Audio Description and redirect AD to the headphones so that only one person can hear the description while other people in the room hear the regular audio track.

2 Description available in a visible/audible form to all or with the possibility to hide it (open/closed)

In effect, both methods described in the first point provide an Audio Description that can be hidden (“closed”). This means that the description is separate from the sound of the main program in such a way that individual viewers can decide if they want to hear it. This contrasts with the “visible/audible” description (“opened”), which cannot be turned off, so the viewer has no choice but to listen to an additional

Audio Description track along with the program’s regular soundtrack. **Audio Description** that is audible to all is perhaps the easiest solution and offers a great opportunity to deliver Audio Description. One great example of a very successful service that has been in operation in Canada since 2008 uses this Audio Description sharing method. The Accessible Channel [TAC] broadcasts Audio Description in “visible/audible” mode on 100% percent of its program. According to information from the TAC, approximately 75-80% of the channel’s programs have never been broadcast with Audio Description before.

3 Secondary Audio Programming in analog television

Secondary Audio Programming is the secondary audio channel on analog TV. It was often used to broadcast an alternative language version on some programs or for Audio Description of video in the United States prior to the switch to digital broadcasting. The description track has been merged with the original soundtrack on an additional channel. Analog TV systems used in most countries do not have the option of switching on a description chosen by the user in this way.

4 Broadcasting AD via radio

The Audio Description track is broadcast on the radio synchronously with the TV program. The first time Audio Description was broadcast in a similar way was in Spain in the 1950s and 1960s. Simultaneously with the screening of the film, the AD track was presented as a kind of radio drama.⁶² An interesting story in Croatia, where blockbuster series productions were broadcast in this way, which met with the great interest of sighted viewers who are travelling by car. Accessibility in various situations may be useful not only for people with more difficult access to visual information.

⁶² Ellis, Katie (2019-02-01). Disability and Digital Television Cultures: Representation, Access, and Reception. Routledge.

AD on streaming platforms (online)

In Great Britain, providing Audio Description online began with BBC iplayer in 2009. There is a method available with most broadcasters, i.e., All4, ITV Hub ITV, Demand 5 on Channel 5 and to a small extent on Sky Go Sky. One of the leading independent streaming services in the world – Netflix, started hosting AD content in 2014. In Australia, AD is available in selected programs on ABC iView).

In Canada, AMI introduced the first available online service in North America in 2014. The original AMI-tv and AMI-audio programs are now available to viewers at any time convenient to them. AMI-player is designed to work with various assistive technologies. It works with voice control and offers video with Audio Description and optional subtitles and transcriptions.⁵

In Poland, the Katarynka Foundation runs a film portal for the blind and the deaf – ADAPTER.PL. It is the first in Poland and one of the few vod portals in the world with films adapted to viewers with visual and hearing impairment. The portal has been operating since 2014, and in 2021 it presents 150 Polish films with Audio Description and subtitles. Using the portal is free of charge, there is no need to log in.⁶

The production of Audio Description on television and for films requires cooperation of:



Providers creating Audio Description and delivering it to the media platforms;



Media platforms for broadcasting the AD track;



Finally, in the case of TV programs, **producers of TV** sets capable of supporting Audio Description in case their products require technical adaptation. When it comes to the cinemas, it is necessary to install access devices to provide Audio Description.

A good practice that we can learn from countries where Audio Description is not a new concept is to work in partnership towards a common goal, e.g., identifying a certain percentage of TV programs required with Audio Description, with all the key stakeholders listed above. Once a legal or voluntary target has been established, responsibility must be shared among all interested parties, ensuring their continuous involvement.

⁶³ Toolkit

⁶⁴ <https://adapter.pl/organizator/>

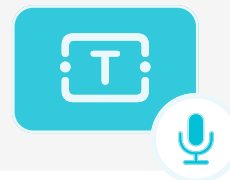
Do all programs require Audio Description?

No. The essence of many programs is contained in their verbal layer. Audio Description is not necessary to understand news and current affairs programs, commonly known as “talking heads”, game shows and other similar forms. In addition, in these types of programs, there is usually very little time between dialogues to add descriptions. In such situations, it is advisable for the presenters to remember that their recipients are also the visually impaired and blind and the graphs should be presented not only using statements “You can see what the situation looks like”, but with the information about the message conveyed in the image. To compare, imagine a film with a minimum amount of dialogue. In the Polish film by Jan Jakub Kolski “Afonia i pszczoły” [English title: “Happy Aphonya”], which lasts about 100 minutes, the dialogues take about 10 minutes. The content of the remaining 90 minutes of the film can be perceived by the blind audience only thanks to Audio Description.⁶⁵ Similar examples can be found in every national filmography.

⁶⁵ Audiodeskrypcja w teorii i praktyce, czyli jak mówić o tym, czego nie można zobaczyć. Praca zbiorowa pod redakcją Mariusza Trzeciakiewicza

AD creation process⁶⁶

Audio Description is a complex process. The person writing the Audio Description script – **the audio descriptor** – may or may not be the person reading it.



In Poland, it is accepted that the author of the text does not usually read their AD. It is done by a professional voice actor. Their voice is selected for a particular film – usually, AD scripts are read both by men and women.

When starting work, the author of the AD script **starts by watching the whole film**. Then they make the most important decisions, e.g., when and how to name individual characters in the film. Usually, the names of the characters are only given after they are presented in the film dialogue, but it depends on the film. In the case of series – if it is not possible to watch all episodes – it is advisable to at least get to know the intentions of the creators, for example, to be able to correctly name the characters. It is very helpful – especially for beginner audio descriptors – to listen to the audio track at the beginning, without the picture. Thanks to this, it is easier to understand the needs of the recipients. In the case of works of art, architectural monuments, exhibitions, museum exhibits, nature routes, etc., the audio descriptor should not only carefully examine the subject of the description, but also obtain substantive information (theory, history, artistic technique, concept of the artist/exhibition creator, interpretations of the work, anecdotes, etc.)⁶⁷

The script used to be written in a text editor, now more and more often dedicated **programs to create subtitles** are used, which allow users to quickly and precisely determine the time between dialogues along with the number of characters that the reader will be able to read at that time. There are also special programs designed to create Audio Description such as Starfish or MAGpie. Apart from the time codes, it is very helpful during the recording to write down a few words of dialogue preceding the given AD fragment. As in the case of the voice-over translation, the AD script should contain useful information for the voice actor, i.e., the phonetic notation of foreign names or the pause symbol: ^ - short pause//medium pause/long pause.

The audio descriptor follows several important principles of Audio Description as summarized by Culture Without Barriers Foundation from Poland. **It is important to describe what one can see. The description should answer the questions: who, what, how, where, when.** Constructions answering question “what for”

⁶⁶ Audiodeskrypcja w teorii i praktyce, czyli jak mówić o tym, czego nie można zobaczyć.

⁶⁷ Audiodeskrypcja – zasady tworzenia [Audio Description – principles], Culture Without Barriers Foundation, 2012

should be avoided, unless an explanation is necessary to prevent ambiguity or misunderstanding. In justified cases, the simple description of the image is abandoned – instead, the visual content of the culture code, symbol, formal procedure expressed in the work is explained. The order of description follows the top-down approach. First, a brief, general description, containing everything that is most important in a given work/image/film scene etc., then a description of the details, ranked according to the importance of the information. **The description should stimulate the imagination.** The audio descriptor selects the most relevant words. The audio descriptor should not be limited to words with the most general meaning. When analyzing the shades of synonyms, they should choose the one that most accurately reflects the essence. For example: a house – or rather: a building, a construction, a skyscraper, a block of flats, a tenement house, a residence, a cottage?; looks – or rather: glances, peers, looks around, observers, stares, examines with his/her eyes?

It is important to look for comparisons, suggestive epithets, even metaphors.

For example: The lamp shade resembles a richly decorated women's hat with a long veil. The veil is unusual, because it is fringed and it surrounds the entire hat (a fragment of the Cabinet's Audio Description from the Mazovian Museum of Płock).

The names of colors and terms related to spatial relations are used; however, rare and very specific terms are avoided, e.g., amaranth, pistachio colors or worm's-eye view. If possible, the expressions like "can be seen", "is visible" are to be avoided in Audio Description. The author of the description uses them only if it simplifies the syntactic construction. In other cases, saying that "something is visible" destroys the illusion and interrupts the narrative, which, by definition, speaks of what is "visible".

On the one hand, the audio descriptor tries to maintain the objectivity of the description, understood as the lack of evaluation, commenting, interpretation and censorship, and does not include private assessments and opinions in the description. The audio descriptor does not explicitly name the emotions of the characters if they result obviously from the facial expressions (e.g., a wide smile) or from the tone and content of the statement. They leave the viewer room for their own interpretation and participation in discovering the content behind the image. However, if the facial expressions are difficult to decipher or there is not enough time for a broader description, there is nothing else to do but express emotions directly. *Peter's face twitched in a grimace of anger* should be changed into *Peter angry*. It is important not to censor drastic, violent, erotic and pornographic scenes. They are described truthfully, only excessive details are avoided. Audio Description does not use literality or vulgar language.

On the other hand, one hundred percent objectivity is not possible.

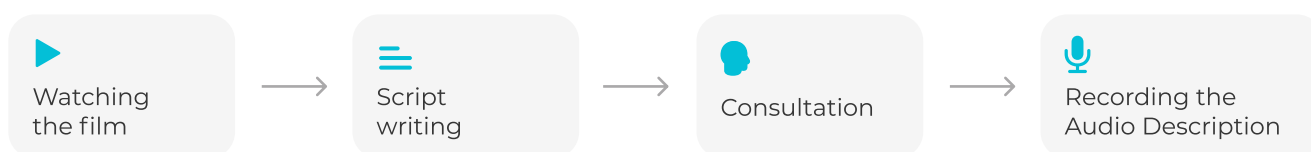
Audio Description is always subjective because it is a choice made by a specific audio descriptor endowed with individual sensitivity, experience and cultural competences.

If the description is addressed to a specific audience, for example children, the audio descriptor should take into consideration their specific needs, expectations and habits. The description should, if possible, be stylistically compatible with the film/performance/work.

An important step in creating an AD script is **consultation**. It is a good practice to consult the script with people who are blind or partially sighted. This is an extremely valuable experience and always results in some changes to the script, e.g., clarifying inaccuracies.

One should also always submit the text for proofreading and editing to another audio descriptor. Another person will surely pay attention to other details, suggest alternative solutions and perhaps notice mistakes. In the course of the discussion, an optimal version can be developed.

The last stage of preparation is **recording the Audio Description**. Make sure that the Audio Description script is recorded/read well. As mentioned before, AD is usually read by voice actors. This is a good practice due to the professionalism of such actors who have correct diction, use correct intonation and logical accentuation. It is important that the voice of a lector and the way of reading do not attract too much attention, e.g., with excessive modulation.



Audio descriptor

The person who creates the Audio Description should be substantively prepared for this.

Audio descriptors are trained in two ways – **at universities** and **by companies that offer Audio Description services**.⁶⁸



Trainings are most often organized under various projects, so it is important that young audio descriptors are mentored by training organizations and experienced colleagues.

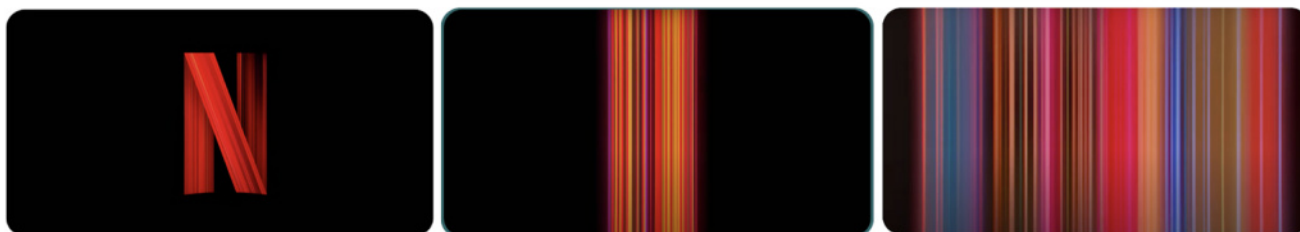
As Orero points out, some features of an audio descriptor are of significant importance:

- **the ability to convey** information in an accurate and objective manner,
- solid **knowledge of the language** they use,
- **pleasant voice and clear manner of speaking** (if the audio descriptor is also the voice actor),
- **good eyesight and hearing** (assisted or not),
- ability to work **in a team**,
- **involvement in work for the blind**, providing good quality Audio Description for the blind or the partially blind.

When employing a company or a person to provide Audio Description, a TV broadcaster, as in the case of a sign language interpreter, should ensure **the highest standards of the service**.

⁶⁸ Orero P. 2007 „Sampling Audio Description in Europe” in: Diaz Cintas J., Orero P., Remael A. (ed.), after: Karolina Karaszewska Metody audiodeskrypcji i wpływ ich Zastosowania na zrozumienie filmu przez odbiorców

Examples of Audio Description



Audio Description: Red letter “N” changes into the color spectrum⁶⁹



A beam of blue light brings out the inscription “KINO ŚWIAT” [Eng. WORLD CINEMA] in the darkness. The white letters flash in turn on the dark background. The white inscription “Toya Studios” drops onto a black background. The letter “S” is cut out in a white square.⁷⁰



A snow swirl blurs the shapes of a wooden hut. There is a high fence around it. Peter’s gray bearded grandfather is standing on the roof. He is holding a shotgun in his hands. He is looking around. Peter is standing in the window of the hut. He is wearing a leather hat and a red jacket. He is looking through the window. It’s snowing outside.⁷¹

⁶⁹ <https://www.netflix.com/browse/audio-description>

⁷⁰ <https://adapter.pl/filmy/jestes-bogiem-pjm/>


⁷¹ “Peter and the Wolf”, directed by Suzie Tempelton, Audio Description script by: Aneta Szymańska, Barbara Szymańska, Marcin Laskowski, 2011



 Fragment of the static Audio Description of the paintings in the cave in Lascaux.

Sloping towards us, softly folded white-cream vault of the “Hall of Bulls” emphasized the figures of animals captured in motion. Surrounded by horses galloping to the right and deer running from the other side, two giant bulls are heading towards each other. At the entrance from the left, an animal with very long, lifted horns, shown from the front. Its silhouette turned to the right, outlined in a blurred black outline. The head is angular, the back is curved and the tail is small. Between the strong, short legs, the belly reaches the ground.⁷²



 From the depths, a milky stream of light pours out into the darkness of the cinema room. Against its background, the spectators are sitting in the armchairs. The projection light illuminates the faces. Behind the girl and the boy, there is a group of people in the next rows. Two girls. Behind them a boy and a girl with blond hair. There is a white earpiece in her ear. Empty armchairs around them. A white cane is folded over the girl's lap. Her hand slowly moves towards the boy's hand resting on his thigh. He touches her. The boy takes her hand. A glistening line of tears on her cheek. The girl cuddles up, the boy hugs her. His eyes are watery, his eyelids wet. He strokes her arm with his fingertips. The cinematic glow comes and goes on their faces. White inscriptions: “Different senses. The same emotions”.⁷³

The last example of Audio Description is the campaign from 2014, carried out by the Audio Description Foundation in Poland. It shows how important it is to be able to simultaneously participate in a cultural event based on a visual message.

⁷² Source of photographs: Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lascaux_painting.jpg and Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/50193753@N02/5961953059>

⁷³ Audio Description Foundation and iSztuka Portal <http://www.isztuka.edu.pl/i-sztuka/node/116>

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