



EMERGENCY RESOLUTION
On Professional Deafblind Interpreters/Intervenors and Equal Access to Communication for Persons with Deafblindness in Europe

Adopted at the Conference "Alone We Can Do So Little, Together We Can Do So Much"
Which took place in the European Parliament, Brussels (Belgium), 5th of June 2018

Having regard to:

- *the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (21 January 2011) and its resolution of 7 July 2016 on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with special regards to the Concluding Observations of the UN CRPD Committee,*
- *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,*
- *the Written Declaration (1/2004) on the needs of persons with deafblindness adopted by the European Parliament calling for the recognition of deafblindness across Europe*
- *the Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications,*
- *the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on 2 December 2015 for the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States in regards to the accessibility requirements for products and services (COM (2015)0615),*
- *the European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on sign languages and professional sign language interpreters (2016/2952 (RSP))*
- *the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters Deafblind Interpreter Education Guidelines,*
- *the Resolution of the 6th EBU - EDbU Deafblind Conference of 20 August 2008 and the First EBU Deafblind Women's Forum Resolutions on the Empowerment of Deafblind women on 20 September 2013.*
- *EMERGENCY RESOLUTION on Equal Opportunities of Persons with Deafblindness in Europe adopted at the European Deafblind Union 4th General Assembly and promoted at the 2nd Conference "Our Way To Equality In Europe" (Tampere, Finland, 2017)*

A. whereas, as full citizens, all persons with disabilities, including those with acquired and congenital deafblindness, those who use sign language, sign language adjustments and other communication systems specific to persons with deafblindness (braille, subtitling or typing, large print, speech/lip reading, manual alphabet, palm writing, etc.) and assistive technology (hearing loop, red-white cane, etc.) have equal rights and are entitled to inalienable dignity, equal treatment, independent living, autonomy and full participation in society;

B. whereas Articles 21 and 26 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of disability and provide for equal participation of persons with disabilities in society;

C. whereas there are approximately 3 million persons with deafblindness who use sign language/sign language adjustments and other communication systems specific to persons with deafblindness in the EU (Green paper “Mapping Opportunities For Deafblind People Across Europe, EDbN, Barcelona, May 2014);

D. whereas national sign languages are fully-fledged natural languages with their own grammar and syntax equal to spoken languages and whereas the use of a natural sign language/sign language adjustments and other communication systems specific to persons with deafblindness, is required under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has been ratified by the EU and all EU Member States;

E. whereas, according to the CRPD, the denial of reasonable accommodation constitutes discrimination and whereas, under the Employment Equality Directive, reasonable accommodation must be provided to guarantee compliance with the principle of equal treatment;

F. whereas there is currently no direct communication access for citizens with deafblindness to Members of the European Parliament and administrators of the institutions of the European Union and, vice versa, to persons with deafblindness from within the EU institutions;

G. whereas accessibility is a precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in society and is not only limited to the physical accessibility of the environment but extends to the accessibility of information and communication, including in the form of the provision of content in sign language/sign language adjustments and other communication systems specific to persons with deafblindness;

H. whereas professional deafblind interpreters are equal to sign language and spoken language interpreters in terms of assignments and mission tasks;

I. whereas there are trained intervenors as well as professional deafblind interpreters that perform further tasks such as guiding and describing to persons with deafblindness with or without acquired language;

J. whereas there is a lack of qualified and professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors in all the Member States and whereas the situation of deafblind interpreters/intervenors is heterogeneous, ranging from informal family support to professional and fully qualified interpreters/intervenors;

The European Parliament, together with European Deafblind Union and European Deafblind Network, the representatives of persons with deafblindness in Europe urge all EU Member States to:

I. Right to recognition

- 1.1. recognise Deafblindness as a unique, dual sensory impairment which limits activities of a person and restricts full participation in society to such a degree that society is required to facilitate specific services in all European countries where such recognition does not exist,
- 1.2. respect our right for full participation and equality in Europe, respecting our diversity, dignity, values, human rights, accessibility of communication, information, mobility and social interaction;
- 1.3. recognise red-and-white cane as the international symbol of pedestrians with deafblindness;
- 1.4. ensure legal recognition of national sign languages, sign language adjustments and other communication systems specific to persons with deafblindness and to take all appropriate measures, including promoting the use of the above mentioned;
- 1.5. ensure inclusive national censuses which investigates hearing/visual impairment in order to have a better understanding of the extent and characteristics of deafblindness in countries where censuses routinely take place.

II. Right to qualified and professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors

- 2.1. respect our right to high-quality deafblind interpreting/intervenor services - qualified and professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors in Member States and within EU institutions, their formal training and formal recognition of the professions;
- 2.2. recognise deafblind interpretation/intervention is a requirement in order for deafblind persons to achieve full participation, equality, independence and self-determination in every area of society, is based on professional qualifications and constitutes a professional service requiring appropriate remuneration;
- 2.3. strongly urge the institutions to formally grant deafblind interpreters the same status as sign and spoken language interpreters in respect of the interpreting services they provide;
- 2.4. strongly urge the institutions to formally grant intervenors recognised status in respect of the services they provide;
- 2.5. respect our right to play a key role in developing, delivering, applying and evaluating the curriculum for education of deafblind interpreters/intervenors and acknowledge the importance of certificates for the professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors given under authority of professionals with/on deafblindness.

III. Right to accessibility and reasonable accommodation

- 3.1. recognise that reasonable accommodation relates to an individual and is complementary to the accessibility duty;
- 3.2. stress that citizens with deafblindness must have access to the same information and communication as their peers in the form of intervention, deafblind interpretation/ subtitling, speech-to-text and/or alternative forms of communication, including oral interpreters;
- 3.3. emphasise that public and government services, including their online content, must be made accessible via deafblind interpreters/intervenors, but also alternative internet-based and remote services, where appropriate;
- 3.4. reiterate its commitment to making the political process (elections, public consultations and other events) as accessible as possible, including through the provision of professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors;
- 3.5. recognise the importance of minimum standards to ensure accessibility, especially in view of new and emerging technologies, the deafblind interpreting/ subtitling services and intervention;

- 3.6. note that, while the provision of health care is a Member State competence, it should cater for the needs of patients with deafblindness by providing professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors and staff awareness training, with particular attention to women and children;
- 3.7. respect the importance of accurate and precise interpretation/intervention services, especially in court and other legal settings; reiterates, therefore, the importance of specialised and highly qualified professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors, particularly in those settings;
- 3.8. increase support and specific provisions, such as intervention and deafblind interpretation and accessible real-time text-based disaster information, for persons with deafblindness in situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters.

IV. Right to education, training, employment and independent living

- 4.1. note that reasonable accommodation measures, which include the provision of professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors, must be taken to ensure equal access to employment, education and training;
- 4.2. ensure inclusive education that best corresponds to requirements, needs and preferences of children with deafblindness, exclusively via professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors, who are trained to work with persons with deafblindness and assistive technology;
- 4.3. stress that early and late intervention programmes are crucial for children with deafblindness, and those with deafblindness who were either intervened at a late stage and/or those without language in the development of life skills, including language skills;
- 4.4. notes, furthermore, that those programmes should include role models with deafblindness;
- 4.5. ensure that those children with congenital deafblindness without a language or communication skills have their needs met and have the right support in order to achieve acquiring both the language to communicate and inclusion in society;
- 4.6. emphasise that students with deafblindness and their parents must be provided with the opportunity to learn the national or regional sign language/sign language adjustments and other communication systems specific to persons with deafblindness of their environment through pre-school services and in schools;
- 4.7. emphasise that sign language/sign language adjustments and other communication systems specific to persons with deafblindness should be included in educational curricula in order to raise awareness and increase its use;
- 4.8. underline that measures must be taken to recognise and promote the linguistic identity of deafblind communities and encourage the learning of sign language, sign language adjustments and other communication systems specific to persons with deafblindness in the same way as foreign languages;
- 4.9. stress that qualified deafblind interpreters/intervenors, and teaching staff competent in sign language/sign language adjustments and other communication systems specific to persons with deafblindness and equipped with the skills to work effectively in bilingual inclusive education environments form an essential part of children and young adults with deafblindness in making their academic achievements, resulting in higher educational outcomes and lower unemployment rates in the long term;
- 4.10. ensure educated and professional persons with deafblindness are given the employment opportunities, support and professional engagement while making reasonable communicational and physical adjustments of their working environment.

4.11. ensure that persons with deafblindness can live on their own or in independent living premises and not institutionalised, with the right support, approach and resources they need.

4.12. ensure that persons with deafblindness in need of specific residential facilities due to its high degree of dependence or choice have the right support and resources they need.

V. Right for full participation, self-representation and equality in Europe

5.1. respect our right to self-representation, to partake in governance and decision-making on all levels via support of properly trained and qualified deafblind interpreters,

5.2. acknowledge that equal access to health, justice, public and political life for citizens with deafblindness can only be ensured through the provision of appropriately qualified and professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors,

5.3. urge that the principle of freedom of movement for persons with deafblindness within the EU be guaranteed, especially in the context of ensuring reasonable number of deafblind interpreters/intervenors, so persons with deafblindness can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public domestic and international affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others.

5.4. recognise that the EU institutions must represent best practice examples for their staff, elected officials and vis-à-vis EU citizens regarding the provision of reasonable accommodation and accessibility, which includes the provision of deafblind interpretation/intervention for accessibility purposes (utilise such existing systems also when providing reasonable accommodation for staff and/or elected officials, effectively minimising the administrative burden on the individual and the institutions)

5.5. take appropriate measures and enable opportunities for persons with deafblindness to participate in cultural, creative, recreation and sport activities and manifestations, according to its interests and affinities by the provision of appropriately number of qualified and professional deafblind interpreters/intervenors;

5.6. urge Eurostat to ensure that statistics on deafblind citizens are supplied to the EU institutions so they can better define, implement and analyse their disability and language policies.