



**EUROPEAN UNION
OF THE DEAF**

A European Non-Governmental Organisation in official liaison with
European Parliament, European Commission and the Council of Europe

**Report on EUD consultative virtual regional meetings
with the National Associations of the Deaf in Europe
in the context of COVID-19 pandemic**

July 2020

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INTRODUCTION

An outbreak of COVID-19, a disease caused by a new type of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) imposed unprecedented challenges globally. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in December 2019 in the Chinese municipality of Wuhan, the virus has spread all across the world. By the end of February 2020, Italy reported a significant increase of COVID-19 cases. By March 2020, all EU member states had reported COVID-19 cases. The number of cases has since continued to increase. On 11 March 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Since the outbreak of the virus, a significant number of countries in the world have taken measures to contain the virus, including lockdown, social distancing, strict hygiene, isolation, quarantine and other measures.

The global pandemic affected everyone; however, we have already seen its disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities and persons who belong to linguistic minorities. For deaf persons who can be considered as part of both of these groups, unequal access to and/or complete exclusion from health-related information and communication in national sign languages, lack of general, public safety-related information and communication presented in a national sign language(s) and subtitling, lack of accessible communication in healthcare settings, disruptions while accessing sign language interpreting services and other barriers related to access to information, communication and knowledge constitute disproportionate effects and can lead to discrimination and exclusion.

In order to monitor the situation of an equal access and inclusion of deaf persons, the European Union of the Deaf (EUD), the only supranational organisation representing deaf people at European level, has collected information from its member organisations National Associations of the Deaf (NADs) in 31 countries, regarding the possible violations of human rights and disproportionate effects of the pandemic for deaf persons in Europe.

EUD carried out four virtual regional consultations in Europe in Nordic, Eastern, Western and Southern regions with its members, during which EUD has received an overview of the effects of the pandemic for the deaf communities together with good and bad practices of how to ensure equality for and inclusion of the deaf. These virtual regional consultations took place on the 20th, 22nd, 27th and the 28th of May 2020.

During these meetings, EUD inquired NADs the following:

- whether official information and communication was fully accessible for deaf persons throughout the outbreak of the pandemic;
- what were the new challenges imposed by the COVID-19 crisis;
- existing positive and negative practices;
- new and/or additional barriers COVID-19 created for deaf persons and how this affected the rights of deaf persons.

This report provides with the information collected from the national level and is the collection of inputs from NADs. The report gives an overview of how COVID-19 affected deaf communities.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND HOW IT AFFECTED DEAF PERSONS IN EUROPE

Austria

- **Government announcements are available in sign language and more interpreters work with the government**

Government announcements in Austria are available in sign language. In Austria, there used to be five interpreters working for the government announcements. Now, due to the coronavirus crisis the government added three more teams of two people, so 6 additional interpreters started working with the government, as based on the guidelines of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD).

In terms of the accessibility of press conferences, the federal government's announcements are accessible, but the accessibility of the regional press conferences depends on regional policies.

Austrian Deaf Association has been lobbying to increase accessibility for the deaf on TV. Austrian Deaf Association provided relevant authorities with brochures with pictures of good examples how to make TV announcements accessible.

- **An app with a helpline is available for the deaf persons, future funding to be discussed with the government**

In terms of help lines and their accessibility for deaf people, there is an app for deaf people, DEC112, like in Slovenia, Italy, and other countries. So deaf people in emergency situations can access help lines.

Funding for these help lines used to be a problem. The responsible ministry has now accepted to work with the deaf association to discuss funding for the help lines for deaf persons.

- **VRS and VRI services are fully accessible for the deaf people**

VRS and VRI services are accessible for all deaf people all the time. The number of hours deaf people can use an interpreter has been extended from 30 to 40 hours and the Austrian Deaf Association has received funding to cover the extra costs.

- **Income for the Austrian Deaf Association has decreased**

The income in the association has gone down, unfortunately. Due to the coronavirus crisis, fundraising (door-to-door) is not allowed. Project funding is secure. Other funding remains to be confirmed.

- **Obligation to wear masks for teachers poses problems for deaf learners**

In Austria there is an obligation to wear masks indoors in schools until June 15th. And for deaf people, this presents a problem. When teachers are wearing masks, deaf people have less access to information.

- **Obligation to wear masks creates barriers for deaf persons when accessing information**

Austrian Deaf Association had to lobby the government and address the fact that deaf people are different from other members of the disability community because of the need to access lip-reading in order to access information. How to solve an issue of how deaf people can communicate with people when wearing a mask is unclear.

- **Survey for regional members**

Austrian Deaf Association has been wondering why there is so little feedback from the regional members on the coronavirus and has initiated a survey asking their regional members what the situation is, as it's still unclear.

- **Austrian Deaf Association is interpreting information every Tuesday and sends newsletters for their members**

Austrian Deaf Association was about to release their new website, but the coronavirus crisis started. The new website wasn't ready yet, so they've moved to social media to provide with information to the deaf community about the coronavirus situation, about the lockdown measures, about the requirements to wear or not to wear masks.

Austrian Deaf Association also provides information in the city of Vienna.

Austrian Deaf Association also has information for children.

Also, Austrian Deaf Association has been in touch with Red Cross for making a voluntary video.

- **Austrian Deaf Association requested for financial support from the government & wants to have organisations of persons with disabilities involved in crisis management team in the government**

The Government in Austria has provided with financial support for the tourism sector, for artists, the cultural sector. They've made budgets available to support these sectors.

As a disability association, Austrian Deaf Association is requesting financial support to keep their civil society organization going. Austrian Deaf Association is in contact with the government and their crisis management team and want people with disabilities to be involved in crisis management teams on the national level. This hasn't happened yet. Deaf people have been ignored, when inquiring about the issue of wearing a mask. Austrian Deaf Association has raised the question and they are still waiting for a response.

- **Many lost their jobs and information about the income support is inaccessible for the deaf**

In terms of employment, many people have lost their jobs. Also, people who are self-employed are faced with income loss of 80, 90% and many deaf people do not understand the official government announcements about financial support available for people who lost their income sources.

- **Extra funding from the government for telephony services**

Austrian Deaf Association received extra funding from the government to provide with telephony services to the deaf community. The government saw an increase in VRI and VRS usage and they actually increased the budget for it.

- **Decreased funding in education**

For education the funding has decreased, and so Austrian Deaf Association is concerned. There are budgets to support the arts or other fields, but what's going to happen for the funding for the deaf community. Government's plans are not clear yet.

- **Unclear how will EU money be used**

It's also unclear how the money from the European Union budgets will be used and for which purposes. The EU is discussing budget cuts coming from the EU, and Austria's budget so far has not been affected, but it's not known what's going to happen in the future.

- **People with disabilities were unemployed more than people with no disabilities due to Covid-19 crisis**

It's unclear if there's going to be some extra aid for the deaf community from the government. Austrian Deaf Association knows that persons with disabilities have been affected much more with regards to loss of employment, more than the hearing community.

Belgium

(i) Flanders

- **NAD used an official crisis centre to ensure accessibility of information**

A crisis centre was set up by the Belgian government following the bombings in 2016. On 12/03/2020, the NAD met with the federal crisis centre to discuss how to make government information about corona accessible to deaf people and to make sure they would use deaf interpreters.

- **Accessibility of information: deaf interpreters were made available in daily press conferences**
- **Information interpreted into Flemish SL and French-Belgian SL with a Flemish & Walloon interpreters**
- **Deaf volunteers set up a Facebook page with information in Flemish sign language about COVID-19**
- **Compared to the amount of information online, information in sign language continues to lack**

The Flemish NAD proposed to the federal crisis centre and the federal government to have deaf interpreters at the daily press conferences which were streamed live. All press conferences could be viewed again at a later time on the website www.info-coronavirus.be. The Federal Government Service Public Health also published information about the daily press conference on its Facebook page. Flemish TV journals would sometimes take video parts from the daily press conference, but not always WITH the deaf interpreter. The Flemish NAD protested against this and later on the deaf interpreter was always included in the news broadcast if a video from the press conference was shown in the news.

The federal government provided information in the 3 official languages and corresponding sign languages about the coronavirus on its website www.info-coronavirus.be. All the presenters in the videos are deaf and the government provided the scripts which had to be followed. The videos about COVID-19 include basic information on prevention and how to address in case a person feels ill, as well as how to wear a mask.

Although information is increasingly accessible in sign languages, the availability of information in Flemish SL about COVID-19 continues to be less compared to the information available in the Dutch language on the official government website.

- **Belgian equality body obliged hospitals to provide reasonable accommodation, but implementation is problematic**

Based on the Belgian non-discrimination law, the Belgian Equality Body wrote an advice obliging hospitals to provide reasonable accommodation but still the provision of SL interpreters is problematic. It is not a priority for law enforcement, unfortunately.

- **Education: online education leaves some students behind**

All schools are closed. Access to education for deaf students is done through remote interpreters. The learning process for deaf students has been delayed, especially for those without access to a computer or Internet.

- **Healthcare: remote interpreting encouraged to facilitate communication in hospitals as no visitors are allowed**

A hospital in Flanders (University Hospital of Gent) is the only one that provides sign language support on the spot. It also provides distance interpreting to a certain number of other hospitals.

To ensure access to communication, the Flemish NAD advised deaf persons who need to go to the hospital to download in advance the software for distance interpreting on their smartphone and always take their smartphone with just to be sure to have access to an interpreter in case the hospital refuses to use or provide a laptop or tablet or in case the software hasn't been downloaded (a password has to be asked in advance).

Therefore, in order to properly inform Flemish deaf people properly, the Flemish NAD created a video to explain to deaf persons how to make sure they have access to communication in hospitals.

- **Hotline & crisis centre: extra hours increased for deaf persons**

A corona hotline was established by the government. The Flemish NAD succeeded in convincing the federal crisis centre and the Federal Government Service Public Health to provide additional funding to the distance interpreting service "CAB" so that they

could expand their opening hours to 8-18h during the corona crisis so that deaf people could call the hotline through the distance interpreting service.. The NAD will advocate for this amount of hours to be maintained after the COVID-19 outbreak.

- **NAD requested to have a deaf member in the Medical Board**

The Flemish NAD requested the Flemish government to employ a skilled deaf sign language user at the contact tracing & call centre equipped with the task of finding people who are possibly infected with the virus in order to contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The idea is that this deaf person does the outreach to the deaf community and is responsible for both the contact tracing and awareness raising among the deaf population. This is still being negotiated.

- **Masks: communication barrier & lack of official measure**

The Belgian and the Flemish government were struggling with the supply of face masks – like most governments in Europe. There is no strategic stock of face masks in Belgium – therefore governments were not able to provide any mask at the outbreak of the covid-19 virus. A citizens’ initiative “Make your own face mask” was launched – www.maakjemondmasker.be . The people behind this initiative were contacted by staff working at deaf schools and together they developed a model for a DIY transparent mask. This is certainly only a temporary solution as in some cases people need to wear those masks, e.g. at work, at school, etc.

The Flemish NAD has pointed out that an official standard needs to be developed for safe transparent masks – this is for the government to follow up – they can look at the examples/models available in the US.

- **Employment: telework is the rule and continues to be up to date**

(ii) Wallonia

- **Masks: disability organisation distributing transparent masks**

In the Brussels' area, government funded an adapted company of persons with disabilities to make transparent masks, these were distributed free of charge to funded organisations, especially deaf representative organisations.

A group of hearing and deaf volunteers created a tutorial on how to make transparent masks. This tutorial was translated into sign languages and was subtitled by both NADs in Belgium, as well as other parts.

- **NAD paying attention at mental health & domestic violence during lockdown**

The NAD created a chat hotline accessible in sign language, with anonymous support. The NAD asked to form a group of volunteers made up by psychologists and social workers. There is not government funding for this support. The NAD did not request for funds for this initiative because they explored it for the first time. However, the NAD would like to continue exploring this possibility after the holidays.

- **Communication in hospitals: interpreters accompany deaf persons maintaining social distancing or use video remote interpreting services**

For emergency cases or to provide comfortable accessibility to the hospitalised deaf people, the interpreters providing service searched for solutions to make this service accessible at night and during weekends. They implemented very temporary solutions and they were blocked by technical brakes.

- **Hotline: the NAD is supporting deaf persons with mental health problems and suffering domestic violence and exploring alternative ways to provide anonymous support.**

The NAD is considering ways to provide anonymous support to deaf persons with a group of volunteers. There are constraints, as there is not government funding for this support.

- **NAD used an official crisis centre to ensure accessibility of information**

Both NADs of the Belgium requested the crisis management department of the government to be accessible for deaf people. The NAD in Wallonia has requested to interpret the press conferences directly with the aim that all TV channels are forced

to rebroadcast information without being able to remove the interpreter. The NAD also requested them to call deaf translators to provide for as clear information as possible to the deaf. Following these requests, an interpretation service has been established to offer a price offer for an interpretation with both hearing and deaf interpreters.

As a result, the press conferences of the public health department for the government and of the prime minister and the national council of security are broadcasted, and they do have two deaf interpreters, for two languages of Belgium (VGT and French Belgian Sign Language). Also, some public health messages are translated by deaf interpreters on the official website “info-coronavirus.be”.

The info-coronavirus hotline was also made accessible by the video remote system developed by the interpreting service (Relais-signes, a service managed by two interpreting services, one in Wallonia and one in Brussels area). These prior three solutions are funded directly by the government.

Bulgaria

- **No interpreters at first, but after lobbying it's been provided**

In the beginning there were no interpreters present at the press conferences, and the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria had to get in contact with the government and lobby for access to the press conferences through an interpreter.

It took approximately one week of lobbying, however, until now there's been no problems, whatsoever, getting access. The interpreter has been provided all the time, and that's actually the first time in history that an interpreter was so present in Bulgaria. For deaf people this has been a very positive development.

- **No travelling outside the country**

During the lockdown it is not allowed to travel outside of county, so deaf people are also not able to travel. It is very strict order, police is on the streets and is making sure that people are staying within the country.

- **No requirements to wear masks**

With regards to wearing masks, there were some requirements to wear masks, but that's no longer in place. The President of the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria spoke to the Ministry of Health regarding deaf people wearing masks and what issues would that entail to deaf persons.

The Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria is considering if deaf people should have a transparent window in the mask, however, they get foggy really easily, so there is no good solution found yet. And from what they've heard, it can be even a higher risk if you wear a mask with a transparent window.

Currently it is decided not to require using the masks, and the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria hopes it does not change. If there are any solutions that some countries have come up with regards to wearing masks, they'd like to hear about that.

- **Hopes for the same level of accessibility post-coronavirus crisis**

The Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria hopes that after the coronavirus crisis the same amount of interpretation and access to information will continue to be funded.

- **The office of the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria and deaf clubs are closed**

The offices of the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria and deaf clubs are closed nationally.

- **No relay interpreting services but volunteers work through Skype of WhatsApp**

The Sign Language Associations are also closed and are protecting the rights of interpreters however, unfortunately, as a consequence deaf people do not have video relay services or remote interpreting services, but there do are volunteers that are interpreting via Skype or via WhatsApp, so even if currently there is no official video relay service in place, deaf people have interpreters that are interpreting through these informal online ways, so that's been positive.

- **Infections and deaths in the deaf community**

No information.

- **The unemployment rate has increased significantly**

With regards to unemployment, the unemployment rate has increased, and the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria is concerned about the mental health implications for deaf people who are losing their jobs.

- **Lobbying for an access for the deafblind community**

There are some issues with regards to ensuring accessibility for the deafblind community, and the deafblind association has been asking for the access to the information for the deafblind. The Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria has been advocating for the deafblind community to have access as well.

- **Official recognition of Bulgarian Sign Language has been postponed**

The Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria has been working and lobbying for the official recognition of the Bulgarian Sign Language, and the government was supposed to discuss this matter in March or April 2020. It has been postponed indefinitely, which is frustrating because the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria had worked hard for it, and this piece of legislation was almost finished and recognized, but that's been postponed.

- **The funding of the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria was not been affected.**

Croatia

- **Interpretation provided at large press conferences, however sign language interpreter was not on site anymore due to social distancing rules**

On television, two large press conferences are providing interpretation. However, the crisis headquarters had a sign language interpreter only for two days, as it was considered dangerous to have so many people on site.

At first information provided at regional and local levels was not interpreted, however some regional and local governments had sign language interpretation, and some had an interpreter on site.

- **National TV has a sign language interpreter in the studio, but not all news programs are interpreted**

The national television, Hrvatska radiotelevizija, has a sign language interpreter in the studio, but not all news programmes were signed. They were the only camera allowed to capture the press conference. They share their signal with other broadcasters in Croatia, but the footage of a sign language interpreter was not included. Some broadcasters used the internet signal on which sign language interpreter “window” attached.

The NAD has worked intensively and made the information that the Crisis headquarters and Croatian public health institute accessible for deaf persons by filming videos on Croatian sign language, those videos were posted on our website, YouTube channel and Facebook page.

- **Rules on masks have interfered with the right to access information and communication**

In relation to masks, rules have interfered with the right to access information and communication by deaf persons.

- **Deaf community has been very active in providing accessible information on YouTube and other video sharing platforms**

On a positive note, the deaf community has been very active in providing accessible information on YouTube and other online platforms.

Republic of Cyprus

- **Interpretation about containment measures has been interpreted**

Information about the main containment measures has been interpreted. Measures have included compulsory lockdown until 18:00, and different measures applying to the elderly, vulnerable people and youth. Companies with more than 50 employees were not allowed to open.

- **Salary compensation packages have been introduced**

Financial support measures have been introduced, such as salary compensation packages. All relevant information about the containment measures has been interpreted and made accessible.

- **Access to interpretation in relation to justice, police and hospitals has been made accessible**

Access to interpretation in relation to justice, police, hospitals has all been made accessible.

- **Education: interpretation available**

Children between the ages 10 and 12 had access to distance education between 3 and 4 hours daily. University education students had access to interpretation.

Czech Republic

- **No interpreters at first, but provided afterwards**

In the beginning there was no interpreters present during the conferences, but Czech Republic Union of Deaf and Hard of Hearing lobbied for access to the press conferences and now deaf people have access to information.

- **Obligation to wear a mask is an issue**

With regards to wearing a mask, unfortunately, it's required and mandatory, which is an issue. However, when someone is using an interpreter, the interpreter is allowed to take it off or else deaf people would not be able to understand them.

When the government imposed the requirement to wear masks, Czech Republic Union of Deaf and Hard of Hearing lobbied to at least allow interpreters to wear a plastic mask, and so that has now been changed so luckily now interpreters can wear a plastic mask.

Also, there was enough funding dedicated to getting masks, so they're available.

- **Access to interpreters via phone or online – not a problem**

Accessing interpreters via telephone or online has not been a problem at all, and there is enough funding to pay interpreters, so that's been great.

- **Access to information during press conferences has brought a positive change**

Having access to the press conferences or any access to information has been a positive change for the deaf community. Not all of the information on television is accessible, just a selected few, but at least it's more than what deaf people had before.

- **Access to remote education was also ensured**

Access through interpretation to remote education was also ensured. Additional funding was allocated for it.

- **The deaf community was not disproportionately affected by the crisis**

The coronavirus itself, it's very negative. But in terms of the deaf population specifically, it was not affected more disproportionately than hearing population.

- **Czech Republic Union of Deaf and Hard of Hearing activities supported deaf communities in light of the closures of deaf clubs**

The deaf clubs are closing down. Some people are totally isolated. Czech Republic Union of Deaf and Hard of Hearing has helped out and acted as a bridge between the deaf communities trying to gain access to information especially the older population and information on the coronavirus.

Czech Republic Union of Deaf and Hard of Hearing tried to help the elderly and gave some tech advice on how they can get access information and communication with their iPhones.

- **The youth helped the elderly**

Also, the youth has been helping the elderly with regards to food-shopping and that's been a positive change.

- **The inclusion of sign language interpretation for the government announcements would last only until the end of May 2020**

Deaf Association in Czech Republic has received a letter from the TV channel that the inclusion of sign language interpretation for the government announcements would only last only until the end of May, and so they are now lobbying to make sure it lasts until at least the end of this coronavirus crisis.

Denmark

- **No interpretation in sign language at first, but then provided**

During the first week of the coronavirus pandemic, government's press conferences were not interpreted in sign language. Danish Deaf Association lobbied very hard during the first week. And during the second week and onwards, until today, there is a full access through sign language interpreters, during media conferences and et cetera. That is a positive side effect. The TV news at night are interpreted as usual.

- **No information in sign language on health**

The governmental information on health, which is only provided through the internet, is not accessible in sign language. Danish Deaf Association has been requesting for it, but until now, there were no positive response to the requests. The Department of Health has provided a lot of information in text about the coronavirus, what to do and what are the measures taken. It is translated in 25 different written languages. But not into any sign language, despite the requests from the Danish Deaf Association.

- **Red Cross hotline for information on Covid-19 – accessible for the deaf**

Danish Deaf Association contacted the Red Cross, that has a hotline for people who want to know more information about the coronavirus situation. So now, Danish Deaf Association in cooperation with the Red Cross established a help line that is accessible for deaf people.

Danish Deaf Association has partially professional workers, partially deaf volunteers working there. So, if deaf people want, they can have a video chat about the coronavirus situation. That hotline in sign language was used very heavily initially. Now the number of requests has gone down. It was decided to close down that sign language hotline, but if needed, they are ready to reopen it again. There was over 80 deaf people calling in and communicating in sign language. There clearly was a need to have access through sign language for deaf people.

- **Remote and in-person interpreting is available in hospitals**

In terms of access to hospitals, there are remote interpreting services in place.

If there is an emergency situation and a person must go to the hospital, then in the triage phase, the staff of the hospital will make a judgment if this person should receive remote interpreting or interpreting by physically present interpreters.

- **Positively – increased visibility of and general interest in Danish Sign Language in Denmark**

One really positive outcome of the coronavirus crisis is that it hugely increased the visibility of sign language. The fact that the press conferences were interpreted has made sign language a lot more visible. Danish Deaf Association has been approached to interview for media and television on the topic of sign language and the need to make content accessible. This is very positive.

Danish Deaf Association's website has basic information about sign language and the fact that information needs to be accessible. The statistics show that the number of people viewing Danish Deaf Association's website has incredibly gone up.

Danish Deaf Association established online sign language training classes through Zoom and other media. Danish Deaf Association has been able to add three full classes of 50 students and established a waiting list of people wanting to have access to online sign language classes. Those people on the waiting list will probably have to wait until after the summer. That increase in popularity of Danish sign language has been really positive.

Estonia

- **Before the pandemic, there was less accessibility in sign language and during the pandemic deaf people had full access**

Covid-19 crisis brought a lot of positive changes in terms of accessibility of information and communication for the deaf.

Back in 2007, the quality of interpreting of communication wasn't good but now almost every platform has performed very well with regards to ensuring accessibility. Estonian Association of the Deaf didn't expect to see so much work being done by media industry to increase accessibility. The media industry also collaborated closely and actively with the Estonian Association of the Deaf since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis.

The press conferences on the lockdown and crisis management provided sign language interpreters. The interpreters were clear and pictures in a good size on the screen. The provision of sign language interpreting happened for a month then it decreased but also the amount of the press conferences decreased too, so it makes sense.

Deaf community didn't have any concerns, they were well informed.

- **Estonian Deaf Association was contacted by the media to inform the audience about the need to have information accessible in sign language**

Evening news has contacted Estonian Association of the Deaf to inform the audience about the sign language interpreters being broadcasted on the right low corner. This was highly appreciated by the Estonian Association of the Deaf.

The governmental videos are being broadcasted on YouTube. It is poorly done, because the interpreter is in a small box but still this is impressive overall.

- **Available VRS increased**

New video relay services are available from 9am to 5pm. But since the pandemic, its availability has been increased; from 8 am to 8pm. Normally its available 5 days per week but during pandemic its available 6 days per week.

Finland

- **Much more visibility to Finish Sign Language**

Finish Sign Language has become much more visible and present. There are more sign language interpreters on TV.

- **Much more accessibility for the deaf persons on TV**

Usually it is very difficult to find channels that are accessible. After the requests from the Finnish Association of the Deaf, this was changed. There is a huge increase in the available information. There is a huge increase in sign language interpreters on TV, also there is a huge increase in programs being subtitled.

- **Technology plays a major role while ensuring accessibility**

Technology for remote interpreting has developed significantly. Also, remote teaching for deaf children has been developed. The technology has hugely improved in these fields.

- **Remote access to volunteers for the deaf elderly**

Elderly people who were suffering from the consequences of the lockdown and isolation now have a remote access to volunteers.

- **Report on access to information shows increase**

Finnish Association of the Deaf launched an inquiry, a small-scale survey about the impact of the coronavirus on the daily lives. There were 100 individuals who answered the survey. Most of them were employed. Finnish Association of the Deaf found an increase in accessibility in everyday life e.g. the use of interpreting in employment, at home, while shopping.

The report compiled around 100 individual stories of people sharing their experiences with regards to employment and social security. There was a smaller number of people sharing with their experiences in education after the coronavirus pandemic hit.

- **Deaths and number of persons infected**

No information on deaths, but there were some people that were sick.

France

- **Interpretation by the President about COVID-19 provided upon request of the NAD, interpreter stood beside the Prime Minister for the first time**

The NAD has been in close contact with the Government. Information from Monday to Friday has been made accessible in French Sign Language upon request, especially information from the President.

The interpreter would be placed in a small box, but however there has been major progress, as now the interpreter is beside the President for the first time in history, which has got a lot of media attention. There have also been negative reactions and mocking of sign language by the general public too.

- **Information by other Ministries has not been interpreted**

However, information coming from other Ministries, such as the Ministry of Education, Labour, Economy has not been interpreted, despite the requests of the NAD.

- **Compulsory order to wear masks has been a communication barrier**

Mask have been made compulsory, which has not been well-received by deaf persons. Many deaf persons have requested transparent masks.

- **Mental health & COVID-19 hotline: Accessible all week during COVID-19**

The hotline has become accessible during weekdays for questions regarding COVID-19, after a complaint was presented by the NAD.

A association affiliated to the NAD has volunteered to provide a platform to address the issues of deaf persons. Usually, this accessible platform was open 2/3 of the week, however during COVID-19 it has open every day.

- **Education: Platform for distant learning is not accessible for deaf students**

Distance learning for deaf children has not been adapted to the needs of deaf students. There is a platform for distance learning but it is not accessible to deaf signing students. The teachers did not have adequate materials and support. Many deaf students have been isolated and deprived of Sign Language because their parents did not sign.

Deaf children should have access to appropriate e-learning. A webinar could highlight best practices on how to help deaf children access online education.

Germany

- **Access to information: Information on the Internet compliments interpretation in press conferences**

On TV, press conferences and information about COVID-19 is not always interpreted. This is complemented with a lot of information accessible on the Internet. At the federal level with Germany's Chancellor, sign language interpretation of press conferences was only made available in May.

Regarding access to information about health and employment, information has been available, and interpreters have been deployed twice a day on Television.

- **COVID-19 hotlines: not accessible despite official requests by NAD**

Deaf people who can access an interpreter through mobile communication can have access to health services and doctors, however, the official hotlines of the Department of Health remain inaccessible despite the NAD's requests.

- **Healthcare & communication: NAD requested the government to provide laptops in hospitals to access remote sign language interpretation**
- **Masks: flexibility about wearing masks increased**
- **Education: situation greatly varies among federations**
- **Employment: Family life affected by telework**

Greece

- **Interpretation provided but not captioning – the NAD requested for the interpreter to be displayed in a larger box**

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, interpretation has been provided on TV, however the NAD requested for the interpreter to be displayed in a larger box. While interpretation is provided, captioning is not guaranteed.

- **External funding received for interpretation of government official announcements**
- **Interpretation provided on government official announcements**

During the COVID-19 funding for interpretation, the NAD has received external funding to have government official announcements available

During the COVID-19, government provided interpretation on official announcements with her own funding.

- **Education: distance learning worked, but deaf students with multiple disabilities and/or at risk of poverty did not have access to education**

Distance education has been implemented, sometimes with online classes three times a week, and sometimes with lasting up to two and a half hours a day. Sometimes, communication took place via email. However, deaf students with multiple disabilities and/or at risk of poverty could not access this format of classes. Greece will soon re-open its schools.

- **Daily school program on TV has sign language interpretation**

First day the school TV was broadcasted, was only provided in Spoken Greek. The NAD has been active immediately in advocating for sign language interpretation and we succeeded it. Although, our request for captioning was not successful. On daily school program on TV participated a deaf teacher, with educational material, playing also the role of a deaf role model.

Hungary

- **No interpretation at first, but provided after lobbying the government**

Since the start of the pandemic the number of press conferences was constantly increasing. There was no interpretation at first and so the Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing lobbied the government for it to be provided.

After a week, sign language interpretation was presented every day, sometimes it went on to an hour, two hours and all-important press conferences were interpreted.

Also, Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has been very effective.

- **Flexibility provided for the members of the Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing with regards to their membership fees**

For the members of the Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing their annual membership contributions are due by the end of the third month of each year. If members do not pay during the first three months of the year, then they get two extensions after which members lose their membership in case of non-payment. Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing faced an increase in numbers of hard-of-hearing and deaf members who can no longer pay their membership fees, so they've decided to be a little more flexible with regards to the payment deadlines.

Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has membership-related costs, for example, travel costs and cards that allow members to travel for free. But now that many people are staying at home and the office is closed, the government has declared that given this exceptional circumstance such cards are still valid even though they may have expired. This was part of an official government announcement that the membership-related cards are valid regardless of the expiring dates.

- **Work continues from home**

Staff members of Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing are working from home, and they've managed to overcome the first wave of the crisis. Membership fees are starting to come back in again and the work is going well.

- **Collecting information from members: infections and deaths**

Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing collected stories of deaf people being contaminated by the coronavirus and how to address the needs of sign language interpretation.

So far hearsay has it that two deaf persons died. There is no confirmation yet.

- **Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing provides with interpretation, VRS and VRI services where needed for free**

Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing provides with interpretation when needed. The association also provides with VRS and VRI services.

Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing provides with interpretation when needed and agreed that if any deaf or hard-of-hearing person wants to have access to VRI or VRS during the time of the coronavirus crisis, it will be provided for free. So far, 500 new users have registered for that service.

VRS and VRI services are 100 percent free and 100 percent unlimited in terms of time of use of the service.

- **No obligation to wear masks**

There is no legal obligation in Hungary to wear masks, only in food markets.

- **No budget cuts for the Hungarian Deaf Association**

According to the government, there will be no budget cuts for the Hungarian Deaf Association. Hungarian Deaf Association received the funding for the first half of the year. Hungarian Deaf Association will receive their full funding for the next half of the year. For the next year's budget, Hungarian Deaf Association will discuss with the government and will negotiate a similar budget. The government has promised an easy procedure. The Hungarian Deaf Association is explicitly mentioned as one of the funding receivers, along with other disability organizations, in the budget for this year.

For the next year, there might be a more generalized budget from the government for organisations of people with disabilities. That may cause competition among disability organizations, so Hungarian Deaf Association is lobbying for maintaining the current budget allocated.

- **Plans to propose amendments to Hungarian Sign Language Law: some amendments postponed**

Since last year the government is planning to propose the amendments on the Hungarian Sign Language law; for example, to increase the number of interpretation hours in higher education and now it's now been suggested it to postpone such proposal for the later stage as such amendments would mean an increase in budget needed to implement them.

Ireland

- **Interpretation about COVID-19 provided in all daily government announcements**

Upon request of the NAD, interpretation was provided. Since March, daily government announcements about the number of people infected by COVID-19, as well as other relevant information, has had sign language interpretation. This has raised the visibility of sign language and has increased deaf awareness.

- **Department of Health: Information about COVID-19 has been interpreted**

The Department of Health is responsible for providing the daily updates about COVID-19. The NAD lobbied and requested the Department of Health to provide live interpretation. The Health Service Executive is responsible for providing plans and information about COVID-19 in health sector and provides live interpretation.

The government press office is responsible for providing update information in general and announced government plans in relation to COVID-19. They provide the live interpretation.

- **Close contact with Youth, Women and Interpreters organisations**

The NAD has been in close contact with organisations from other groups, such as deaf organisations and interpreters to ensure that information reaches all deaf persons. They consult with the state organisations. So far there has been great teamwork. The NAD has achieved the following

- General Practitioner access scheme extended to include Covid testing and treatment.
- Sign language interpreters for all public briefings from the Department of Health and Health Service Executive. We are still communicating with Government Press Office and Department of Finance to ask for the same.
- Sign language videos and contact information for Deaf people on the Health Service Executive website.
- The Health Service Executive are currently approving our recommended changes to the testing and contact tracing process to make them more accessible for Deaf people. These changes are not in place yet and the NAD continues to monitor progress
- The local authorities have all been asked to provide text numbers for contact and 15 have confirmed they are in place.
- The NAD is currently working with the Gardaí and ALONE to improve information and services for the Deaf community.

- The NAD has distributed free phones from Huawei with call credit from Vodafone to members of our community who needed access to technology

NAD immediately setup a special page on the NAD website "IDS coronavirus sign language support" and uploaded new information in sign language video to support deaf community almost every day.

- **Isolation and loneliness: lack of interaction in sign language**

Several Deaf people lives alone or live with people who do not know sign language which led more frustrated communication and increased loneliness. NAD is working at the moment to outreach at the grassroots level of Deaf community to keep persons in communication and keep all deaf persons informed. The NAD has been developing new ways to provide education and advocacy online.

- **Education for children: difficulty due to lack of sign language at home**

School at home is difficult due to lack of sign language at home. NAD worked with national TV: RTE to include Irish Sign Language access on RTE popular TV programme home school hub which means Deaf children access to info on an equal basis to hearing peers

NAD has worked closely with the "Covid-19 working group" with Centre for Deaf studies and Council of Sign Language Interpreters to develop and agree on new scientific words and pandemic expressions for Irish Sign Language. Weekly, they made video to explain vocabulary of medical terms and new terms in Irish Sign Language through the NAD's website and social media to make Deaf people understand the terms and what signs they will use.

- **Masks: rules disrupt communication**

Social distancing guidelines include mask wearing and it makes it very difficult for Deaf people. Irish Sign Language is about 70% facial expression. Deaf people rely on facial expression in part of communication. Lip reading is also a problem with facemasks.

The NAD have been consulting with Health Service Executive and called on National Public Health Emergency team to issue additional guidance that it was safe to lower facemasks at a social distance. This is of benefit to communication for everyone.

Regarding transparent masks, a consensus has not yet been achieved.

- **Volunteers have provided assistance to persons in lockdown**

The NAD has been active to ensure that human rights of deaf persons are respected. Volunteers at local level have provided assistance to persons in lockdown, providing medication or food. There is an excellent volunteer group - Deaf COVID Roadrunners - they are working with the "Community Call" and local authorities to support members of the Deaf community who need help or are cocooning

- **Communication support document approved by Health Service Executive**

The NAD had consulted with Health Service Executive and it created a document that makes it clear what communication supports a Deaf person is entitled to in a healthcare setting so that they are treated equally and their rights are respected. Health Service Executive approved this document - "Approved Communication Supports for Deaf patients in Healthcare settings during COVID-19" for deaf persons who need to get medical assistance, and now deaf persons can contact doctors via remote Interpreting services or use ISL access at hospital.

Please find attached in the email.

- **Employment: Not everyone can benefit equally from telework**

A lot of employment has been adapted to an online format, with online meetings and teleworking. However, not everyone can benefit from technology due to poor broadband or wireless connection across Ireland. The NAD will support any efforts to roll out of national broadcast or wireless system and it will be one of the significant issues after the pandemic.

Italy

- **Many deaf persons were affected by COVID-19**
- **Press conferences by the Government have all been interpreted**
- **The NAD is cooperating with a mobile phone operator company to provide remote interpreting services to deaf persons with COVID-19**

Due to hospitals being overcrowded and continuous lack of budget allocation, hospital could not treat all patients with COVID-19.

As sign language interpreters are not allowed in hospitals, the NAD requested government funding to arrange interpreting for deaf patients. The NAD finally received government funding and is now cooperating with a mobile phone operator company is supporting the Italian NAD with devices to enable communication to deaf patients through remote interpreting services.

Latvia

- **The visibility of sign language increased**

Latvian Association of the Deaf requested the government to provide access through sign language interpretation urgently, and it was provided which also increased visibility of sign language. The government reacted immediately.

Also, Latvian Association of the Deaf is trying to provide information through videos in Latvian Sign Language about the coronavirus situation.

- **Deaf schools are closed, people are finding ways to introduce remote interpreting in educational settings**

Deaf children were learning at home through their families and through TV and internet. The Government organised special programme for all schools known as 'My classroom'. This Programme was interpreted in sign language.

The Latvian NAD requested the government to provide access to remote interpretation. Distance interpreting and distance education has been accessible since Covid-19. As a result, deaf people are finding ways to include interpreters to provide with access to remote interpretation. the Latvian NAD does not yet know how successful it will be. Yet there has not been any complaint from deaf people in this regard.

The Latvian NAD is trying to provide video information in Latvian Sign Language about the COVID19 situation each working day. Social workers of the Latvian NAD provided help to deaf families and children.

- **Deaf clubs are closed**

Before the COVID19 crisis, deaf people used to have meetings in deaf clubs where they would share information, organise different events, among other events. With the containment measures, the clubs have been closed. the NAD's regional groups set up closed groups for their members on Skype and Facebook, where information was exchanged and remote appointments took place. Social workers, psychologists, creative workshop leaders also worked remotely. Educational video recordings were created for the deaf to watch at home and perform the tasks offered, such as dancing, exercise, making jewellery or meals, etc.

- **Latvian Association of the Deaf is still struggling in raising the budget to have more subtitles and more sign language interpreting on TV.**
- **Interpretation is provided if people need to go to the hospital**

During working days from 8:30 to 17:00, interpreters are available and can agree to go with a deaf patient to the hospital, while 2 interpreters were available for 24 hours a day in emergency cases (labor, trauma or major health problems). The State provides deaf people with tablets for free, so many could use interpreters remotely.

It was harder for seniors who struggled to use the new technologies. For these seniors, the NAD's social workers and volunteers provided assistance.

- **More accessible information for the deaf on Facebook or YouTube**

In Latvia a lot of information in sign language is available on Facebook or in closed groups on Facebook. The elderly generation is more on YouTube and younger generation is more oriented towards closed Facebook groups. Many deaf people found ways to find groups that move them out of isolation and allow them to have face-to-face meetings, even though they're virtual.

- **Interest in technology is increasing**

Three years ago, the community was provided iPads for free. And traditionally, elderly people thought they are too old for it and they did not want it.

Now there is an increase interest in technology and the access to social media.

Also, many people are now starting courses for physical exercise, and some of those online physical exercise training programs are now being interpreted. Hearing persons and State agencies have also started to use technologies more often in communication with the NAD.

- **The government has become more aware of the need to consult the deaf community**

The government asked the deaf community if there were any problems with the policies to wear masks. Also, the deaf community is provided with free disinfectants.

- **Infections or deaths**

There are no deaths and no infections of COVID19 amongst the deaf community.

Lithuania

- **No access to technology for deaf elderly causes isolation**

Older people at home do not have access to technology and are very isolated. This is definitely an issue. Lithuanian Deaf Association does not know how to help them.

Lithuanian Deaf Association thinks that it is an important issue and it needs attention.

- **Families with children face issues working and learning at home**

Children are not going to school. So, parents need to provide home education, however they also need to work. So that creates a lot of stress and frustrations.

- **Positive development: interpretation services available 24 hours per day**

Deaf people have been enjoying better and better access to information as different good measures were being introduced. And now it has just increased significantly.

In the past, Lithuanian Deaf Association requested for 24-hour access to interpreters, and the government said there was no budget for this. Once coronavirus hit, right away, deaf people were provided with an access to interpretation 24 hours a day.

Lithuanian Deaf Association was concerned that once the coronavirus crisis is over, the funding would be stopped, but they had a meeting just last week, and it was approved that deaf people will have access to interpretation 24 hours a day. So, this is extremely positive.

- **As of July – an app for accessible 112**

With regards to 112 access - as of July, deaf people will have an app that has real-time remote access to 112 services. So that will be effective in July. This is a fantastic development.

- **Since the Covid-19 crisis – interpreters stand next to the President or any other high-level Official**

Lithuanian Deaf Association has continuously requested the government speeches and conferences or any of their information to be interpreted, and it was refused due to the budget restrains or other arguments that for instance the interpreter cannot stand on stage with the President.

However, ever since coronavirus crisis, there has been an interpreter standing right next to the President or any high-level Official.

Lithuanian Deaf Association hopes an interpreter will join the presidential team. This is a great example of accessibility. Lithuanian Deaf Association hopes this level of accessibility will be continued.

Luxembourg

- **Access to information: sign language interpretation has been provided**

All governmental press conferences are available in sign language (streamed live and accessible later). All the active sign language interpreters work together with the government to ensure the interpretation of the press conferences.

A governmental homepage informs regularly about the situation, the recommendations and other aspects during the coronavirus crisis in 4 languages: German, French, Luxembourgish and English.

- **Hotlines are accessible by mail and through sign language interpreter via a social service centre**

Help hotlines, both governmental and non-governmental regarding health care, psychological support and support in case of domestic violence are accessible by mail. The social service centre for deaf persons (HörgeschädigtenBeratung) offers the possibility for deaf people to make phone calls with the help of its sign language interpreter. The social service centre presents the information from the governmental press conferences in written form in German and French shortly after the event on its homepage. The social service centre was functioning during the whole corona crisis and was reachable as always during office hours via sms, mail, video-conference, phone and fax. Important information is send via newsletter and posted on Facebook. Sign language videos explaining corona-vocabulary are accessible on the homepage of the centre.

- **Masks and communication barriers: the social service centre for the deaf has provided face shields for the deaf and hard of hearing**

Concerning the problem with the obligation to wear a mask, the social service centre distributed, and continues to do so, face shields for the needs of deaf and hard of hearing people. A countrywide information campaign (press releases, articles in national newspaper and radio interviews, posters, etc.) released at the beginning of May informed about the need to wear face shields due to the negative impacts of covering the mouth and nose on deaf and hard of hearing persons. Face shields are also used in the schools for deaf and hard of hearing pupils.

- **Access to healthcare: sign language interpreters accompany deaf and hard of hearing patients to hospitals**

A team of persons from the social service centre for the deaf ensure communication with medical personnel and were able to accompany the deaf and hard of hearing people to their appointments in hospitals or medical facilities.

- **Infections of COVID19 by deaf persons: the NAD has no information**

Malta

- **Interpretation provided on TV only after ongoing requests by the NAD – lack of access to information continues**

When the COVID-19 hit the country, the government started to hold press conferences, and the NAD contacted the Government to request for sign language interpretation. Interpretation was provided, however, only on Facebook and not on TV. The NAD requested for the information to be interpreted on TV, as not all deaf persons have access to Facebook, which was accepted by the authorities. There has been some improvement regarding accessibility.

The NAD has been actively advocating for sign language interpretation, trying to have it on the main TV channels. The Government has not provided for sign language interpretation automatically, but in many occasions the Government has accepted to provide for sign language interpretation.

There have been at least four high-level press conferences with the Prime Minister that did not have interpretation, the deaf community still informs about an ongoing lack of access to important information.

- **Information less accessible to deaf elderly**
- **Good relations with Ministry of Health, however not other ministries**

Relations with Ministries such as the Financial or Tourism Ministries have been very poor, as they lack awareness about the deaf community.

- **Many deaf persons concerned about employment and financial support**
- **Education: Adapting was challenging but ended up well & but lack of official interpreters**

At the start of the lockdown, there was lack of clarity in relation to timing, scheduling and education materials. The situation improved during the second and third week, as parents understood more the importance of having interpretation. The NAD is satisfied with the current situation regarding education.

- **Lack of official language interpreters**

Due to high demand of official sign language interpreters for official press conferences and education, it has been difficult to ensure interpretation in all settings.

The Netherlands

- **The World Deaf Day event 2020 was cancelled**

The coronavirus had a big impact on the society. The World Deaf Day event was supposed to take place on the 29th of September 2020 has been cancelled due to the coronavirus.

- **In the beginning very little information on the coronavirus was available in Dutch Sign Language.**
- **“Where’s my sign language interpreter?” protest gave results**

On the 18th of March 2019 there was a terrorist attack in Utrecht and many deaf people from Utrecht missed the important information about this attack. They did not get the information in their mother tongue language, Nederlandse Gebarentaal (NGT, Dutch Sign Language). Last year, the Government committed to hiring a sign language interpreter for the next press conferences.

When the coronavirus reached the Netherlands, the Government started with a press conference to provide with information about the crisis. However, sign language interpretation was not provided during the live broadcast of the press conference.

A deaf man from Hertogenbosch found out that the national broadcasters were planning to film and record a video for TV on the coronavirus in his town. He visited the place in the town where the broadcaster was with a with a sign with the message “Where’s my sign language interpreter?”. This protest delivered results, and a sign language interpreter was immediately hired at the press conferences of the Dutch Government.

- **Live press conferences included a sign language interpreter**

The Government organised several press conferences for which the sign language interpreter was hired and always present. After several weeks, the Government decided to stop the press conferences, which also meant that the interpreting would stop as well. In the first weeks of the coronavirus, the Government, with support of Dutch Sign Language Centre (Nederlands Gebarententrum), hired sign language interpreter Irma Sluis, and they added a second interpreter for last weeks. The interpreter Irma Sluis gained national fame due to the big attention from the Dutch society. She instantly became famous and she had been asked for countless shows and performances. The deaf community did not show appreciation for this, as the interpreter received national attention instead of the deaf community itself.

- **More attention to access information in Dutch Sign Language**

Sign language gained a lot of attention nationwide, both positively and negatively. One of the positive consequences was, for example, that Dutch society showed curiosity about sign language, but on the other hand, some made satire videos about sign language. Many discussions have arisen as a result.

Another advantage of the increased attention is that more companies were aware of the need to offer more information in Dutch Sign Language. The Dutch government started providing more information in Dutch Sign Language, and some organisations have joined these efforts, such as the Dutch Railways. The Dutch media organisation for the deaf and hard of hearing, DoofCentraal, decided to do a weekly live show about the coronavirus (facts, myths, etc.), this happened ten times. Another Dutch deaf-owned company provided for accessible information for the healthcare sector, resulting in better assistance for the deaf and hard of hearing.

The deaf society has increased their efforts to help each other.

Poland

- **No interpretation at first, but improvements made after lobbying**

There was no sign language interpretation for President's announcements and government's official announcements of how to deal with the coronavirus crisis at first.

The President of the Polish Association of the Deaf, supported by local deaf clubs, has been requesting sign language interpretation access and the government has decided to have every second hour interpreted in Polish Sign Language, so there were only certain time slots when government's information was provided in sign language.

Poland has many regions. In those regions, many authorities make official announcements without sign language interpretation so, again, the Polish Association of the Deaf has requested for an access to interpretation and in many regions, that request has been successful.

In other regions, government announcements have been translated and made available in video formats and disseminated through social media at the later point in time. This inclusion of interpreters has been positive. However, if authorities put the interpreter in a little bubble at the corner of the screen, it's not good enough.

- **Minimum 1/8 of the screen should be occupied by the interpreter according to the University of Warsaw**

The University of Warsaw looked into the appropriate sizes for the interpreter's box and recommended that one-eighth of the screen should be a minimum size that the interpreters should be projected or broadcasted on.

The University has done some interesting research and the outcomes of that research will be shared with EUD.

- **Subtitles sometimes hinder the visibility of the interpreter on the screen**

With regards to subtitling and the way the interpreters are being broadcasted, there were some issues because the interpreters were invisible due to the projection of the subtitles over the sign language interpreter, there is an ongoing lobby to change it.

That problem is not yet solved, as deaf people need access by subtitling and interpreters, and one can't interrupt the other.

- **Ongoing lobby for VRS and VRI availability 24/7**

For an access to information on the coronavirus, the President of Board of the Polish Association of the Deaf has been lobbying for VRS services to be available 24/7. The Polish Association of the Deaf has now received funding for this, and this service will start on the 14th or 15th of May 2020, and the Polish Association of the Deaf will look for additional funding to make this service prolonged, so deaf people have 24-hour VRS, VRI services at all times.

For VRS and VRI services, deaf people have been using Skype, IMO and also an app provided by the Polish Deaf Association, basically, a help line, in which the Polish Deaf Association can provide information to deaf people of how to access VRS services.

- **The Government allowed not to wear masks for deaf people who lip-read**

There is an obligation to wear masks, which is ok for deaf people who can speak, but the government has now allowed deaf people who lip-read not to wear masks.

- **More attention to Polish Sign Language in Poland**

There's a story of one woman who produced a video on Facebook in Polish Sign Language teaching, some basic signs, such as: hello, goodnight, good morning, allowing an overall population to have at least basic communication with deaf people.

- **Will the Presidential debate be available in Polish Sign Language?**

In Poland, there is a debate going on, as the Presidential elections will be held, and the Presidential election campaigns are going on. But at those political campaigns, no interpretation is being provided at the moment, so how can deaf people know who to vote for? The elections should've taken place on the 15th of May. They've been postponed till probably the 28th of June. However, there's a clear breach of the legislation because Polish law stipulates that people have to vote in-person. Government is not considering voting per mail, which is actually illegal according to current Polish law.

- **Deaf club activities are available online but need 24/7 accessibility**

The local deaf associations and deaf clubs have been closed. However, some of the deaf clubs are having VRS and VRI services so attending the deaf club virtually is possible.

Polish Deaf Associations wants to establish accessibility 24/7 for deaf community for local and regional members of deaf clubs.

- **No information on infected deaf people going to report on the situation in Poland**
- **Polish Deaf Association is requesting for 24/7 accessibility**

Polish Deaf Association is asking the government for an increase of funding for the 24-hour, seven-day a week access to interpretation. Polish Deaf Association is also lobbying for an increase in budget to make information accessible for the deaf (through subtitles and interpreting) and transpose EU accessibility requirements to Polish national law.

Portugal

- **Access to information: Overall improvement**

At this time, the presence of a Portuguese Sign Language Interpreter has been ensured in the various communications from government entities and representatives, thus ensuring the accessibility of the Deaf Community. This work is crucial, and in most cases, the Interpreter is positioned next to the speaker. This has been the case, for example, with messages from the President of the Portuguese Republic (link [here](#)), the presentation of the “Epidemiological situation of Covid-19 in Portugal” (link [here](#)), or the Prime Minister's statement after the European Council meeting (link [here](#)), among other high level communications.

The presence of a Portuguese Sign Language Interpreter has also been ensured in the daily press conferences of the portuguese Directorate-General for Health, thus ensuring the accessibility of the Deaf Community. This work that is being done is very important, namely the fact that the Interpreter is present and is positioned next to whoever is doing the communication (link [here](#)).

There has been a greater reinforcement of the accessibility of Deaf People in this very complicated phase by increasing the number of hours of interpretation in Portuguese Sign Language. Before that, not all lunchtime and evening newscasts had an interpreter, but now they have it on most Portuguese channels. Some examples can be found in the following links: ([Daily news](#), [morning session](#), [afternoon session](#) [evening session](#))

- **Access to Health Services: distance interpreting has been enabled**

A new accessible service to ensure the accessibility of Deaf Citizens to the Contact Centre of the National Health Service (SNS24) through a distance service in Portuguese Sign Language in which the Interpreter enables communication between SNS24 agents and Deaf Citizens through video call. This distance service in Portuguese Sign Language operates 24 hours a day (including weekends) and aims to:

- a) Ensure the communication of Deaf People with the SNS24 telephone line;
- b) Ensure the communication of Deaf People during hospitalisation (communication between doctors/nurses/deaf patients);
- c) Ensure the communication of Deaf People during the quarantine (communication between doctors/nurses/deaf patients);
- d) Ensure the communication of Deaf People with health centres for information;
- e) Ensure the communication of Deaf People on health matters;

The provision of this service results from a partnership between the National Institute for Rehabilitation, the Shared Services of the Ministry of Health, and the Portuguese NAD (Link [here](#)).

The right of access to health services is one of the main struggles that the NAD and the Deaf Community have had for many years and finally steps are being taken in this direction: as is the case with this accessibility service to SNS24

- **Access to the 112 emergency number: an application allows access to the Deaf**

The MAI112 mobile application has been operating since July 2019, which grants accessibility for Deaf Citizens to the 112/CODU emergency service. Deaf persons can ask for help through this application through the Portuguese Sign Language answering service (Links [here](#), and [here](#)).

- **Education: remote education does not work for everyone**

Deaf students are accompanying classes through distance learning (internet) and through the tele-school.

Each reference school was organised to provide support to Deaf Students in distance learning (e.g. ZOOM, MicrosoftTeams, etc.), also with the presence of Portuguese Sign Language interpreters.

In addition, the Ministry of Education in conjunction with RTP (a public channel) provided the service known #IStudyAtHome ([#EstudoEmCasa](#)), which is a complement of educational resources for Basic Education with content organised for different years of schooling (content broadcast on television and also available on the website). Moreover, the NAD and other institutions of the Portuguese Deaf Associative Movement have been articulating with the tutelage of education to inform about the needs and about some points that can be improved in this distance learning for Deaf Students.

- **Masks: certified transparent masks presented by a private company on the 5th of June**

On the 5th of June, a certified transparent mask was presented to respond to the limitations in communication of deaf persons. The President of the Portuguese NAD, together with other state representatives and stakeholders, visited the company Elastoni Confeções who produced a certified mask adapted to deaf persons. More information in Portuguese [here](#).

- **Funding has increased by 80%**

In relation to funding, the NAD has received additional funding (80% increase) during the COVID-19.

Romania

- **Interpretation provided only after request of the NAD**

Upon request of the NAD, interpretation has been provided with a sign language interpreter standing next to the Prime Minister for the first time in history.

- **The interpreter standing beside the Prime Minister got a lot of media attention**

This got a lot of media attention and raised awareness of the needs of deaf people. When a press conferences has not been interpreted, the NAD has been active in interpreting the information.

- **Some elderly persons do not understand official interpretation, the NAD has provided local interpretation**

A percentage of the elderly deaf population do not understand the interpretation provided, so local interpretation has been arranged by the NAD. Despite achievements, deaf persons continue to demand for more accessible information.

- **Online education & TV teaching program interpreted**

Online education has taken place, complimented with an educational program on the TV, however there have been complaints that the interpreter was not displayed big enough for children. People who do not have access to technologically advanced devices and/or internet connection were not able to access online education.

Slovakia

- **Access to information: both negative and positive outcomes**

Negatively, there has been a general lack of accessibility about the new situation created by the COVID-19 outbreak. There has not been captioning available of press releases of public bodies, and there has been an ongoing lack of sign language interpreters to ensure the personal needs of deaf persons.

However, the NAD has provided information about COVID19 about social networks under ANEPS brand, and a certain level of sign language interpretation has been provided in public TV. Press releases have been interpreted into sign language. There has been an increase in the use of online sign language interpretation, and an increase in online learning through social media and other online tools. Another positive outcome has been the increase about sign language and deaf persons on media.

- **Not many people have been infected by COVID-19**
- **Communication barriers: lack of sufficient interpreters & compulsory wearing of masks**

There is an important lack of sign language interpreters. Rules on compulsory wearing of masks have posed a communication barrier, however, transparent masks have been provided to sign language interpreters, and masks with a sign of an ear have been provided to deaf persons, this has improved communication for deaf persons.

- **Deaf volunteers have produced protective masks for the public, institutions and disadvantaged persons**
- **Employment: Increase in unemployment & difficulty to find new employment for deaf persons**

Many deaf persons have lost their jobs, the NAD expects that it will be difficult for deaf persons to find new employment opportunities.

The work for deaf persons has been limited or restricted, which has reduced the income of by 60%-80% and impacting negatively on many families.

- **Education: deaf schools were closed**

Closed have been closed and deaf learners stayed home and carry out their curriculum obligations online

- **Decrease in funding for organisations**

Donations and grants for many organisations have been cancelled or limited at different levels, together with funding restrictions.

- **Closure of institutions, NGOs and deaf clubs**

Slovenia

- **Slovenian Deaf Association helped in disseminating information**

Slovenian Deaf Association disseminated the information delivered during the press conferences and on television.

- **Elderly is experiencing issues accessing information and communication through video**

However, older people don't have access to video or access to video-calling, which is an issue. The Slovenian Deaf Association is hoping they can maybe find some funding, which would help ensuring that older people can have access to people and information online.

- **No one in the deaf community has been infected**

So far in the deaf community there is no one that has contracted with Covid-19.

- **Interpreters do not have to wear masks if they respect social distancing measures**

In Slovenia if a person goes to see the doctor and he/she needs an interpreter, the interpreter is allowed to remove her/his mask as long as she/he is a meter and a half away, so maybe that is one simple solution that EUD can suggest that all interpreters are allowed not to wear masks as long as they are 1.5 meters away.

Spain

- **Accessibility of communication: obstacles to access 112 & Covid-19 hotlines, but a COVID-19 video interpretation platform has been put in place**

One of the main obstacles facing deaf people has to do with accessibility to communication both to access 112 in the different regions and to the phones of information about COVID-19. Likewise, point out the existing barriers both to carry out procedures with public administrations or private companies. Most of the resources have been dial-in or, at most, by email or written chat.

The specific telephone of attention COVID-19 is accessible to deaf people thanks to the SVisual video interpretation platform of the Spanish Disability Council supported with public and private funds. Several regional members of the NAD at regional level collaborate expanding the template of videointerpreters to serve the whole of Spain in Spanish sign language and Catalan sign language.

In addition to SVisual, regional members of the NAD have also used other platforms that include video calling to perform the services that were usually done in person. Social, labour, and other media services have also been provided.

- **Accessibility of information: a lot of information is provided, however not all deaf persons receive it equally**

Access to information campaigns, infographics published on the institutions' telematics channels and all official advertising that is being generated on COVID19 should incorporate both sign language and written/subtitled texts.

Television is essential, especially for deaf elderly or those who don't use social media platforms. Television and radio channels are powerful means of raising awareness of needed habits and behaviours.

Information is constantly provided, however, not all deaf persons receive all of the messages, either because even when much of the programs are subtitled, the quality of subtitling is not good, or because as is the case, there is hardly any interpretation to sign language.

In relation to social media, official messages appear with a screen of the interpreter and subtitles, and others only with subtitling.

The communication team of the NAD constantly prepares and disseminates videos in sign language of signs of official information with all health, security, legal measures, etc.

Also translated and explained all the Royal Decrees that have been published as a result of the state of emergency in Spain. In the same way, members of the Spanish NAD produce signed videos related to the information of interest of their regional governments.

The NAD has made available to the institutions all its professional and technical resources. Spanish sign language interpreters attend all the press conferences that are delayed as well as the sessions of the Spanish Parliament. It occurs similarly in the different Spanish regions.

- **Masks: communication barrier & continuous lack of clarity on the best alternative**

Masks have posed a communication barrier. There are volunteers making transparent masks that enable communication, however, there is a lack of clarity whether transparent masks meet requirements for certified masks. In the Basque Country the TKNIKA Innovation Center has a project underway to establish the requirements that such masks must meet.

- **Vulnerable deaf and deaf elders**

Information has barely been published for women victims of gender-based violence in a way that is accessible to deaf women.

The State Public Service for Gender-Based Violence, the phone number 016 is accessible through SVIsual videointerpretation platform, but the new telephones of care that emerged from the Ministry of Equality and Spanish regions and civil councils are not.

The ALBA service, put forward by the Spanish NAD, continues to provide care for deaf women victims of gender-based violence.

The NAD has published specific guides for deaf women against gender-based violence in addition to translating and disseminating signed videos of important information from the Ministry of Equality.

- **Health: not accessible in sign language in all regions**

In some regions, health care is not accessible through sign language, as they did not have the video call service set up. In others, few of them had the mode of both face-to-face and video calling for some time.

Health services have been provided through the state Svisual videointerpretation platform as well as other platforms with video calls.

In the field of mental health, an educational care network specific to this situation has been created with the regional federations, also with the foundation Psychologists Without Borders and with the Centro Alava Reyes, with this latter center, the NAD has prepared and disseminated accessible videos on mental health during confinement.

- **Education: different situation per region**

There is inequality by region. Some educational administrations terminated the contract of sign language interpreters and deaf sign language advisers, despite the fact that the deaf pupils continued their studies from home. On the contrary, in others they have maintained these resources.

These professionals are part of the pedagogical team and as such, to do without their work is to violate the legislation. On the other hand, the educational programme available on TV include subtitles, however they have not included sign language since the beginning. However, they later contacted the NAD to include sign language.

Some regional members of the NAD have followed and supported deaf students and their families.

At all times, the Spanish NAD has been claiming to the public authorities the obligation to ensure that deaf students are not excluded from education during the pandemic.

The training in sign language offered by the NAD (CNSE State Sign Language Teaching Network) became all in online mode through our platform signocampus.

- **Employment: a lot of dismissals due to COVID-19 & uncertainty about access to social benefits**

Many deaf persons have lost their jobs. There is uncertainty about the future situation for newly unemployed deaf persons. There is also lack of information about how to access social security benefits, as many deaf persons have to fill forms, and the proceedings are not accessible in sign language. The NAD is providing as much support as possible to regional and local deaf organisations.

- **General actions put forward by the NAD**

The NAD and its members has acted in solidarity sharing resources to serve deaf people throughout Spain. The care services provided by the NAD during COVID-19 are the following: <http://www.cnse.es/recursos/atencioncovid19/red-cnse-covid-19.pdf>

The NAD has been an important part of the response of the Spanish government and regional governments to all citizens.

The NAD has continued to report violations of the rights of the deaf people during the state of emergency.

The NAD has actively cooperated with CSOs and platforms that make up the territorial sector of social action in Spain, both in the care of deaf people and in the demands and proposals for measures in favor of the most vulnerable groups of society.

Sweden

- **Interpretation has been provided since the beginning of the pandemic but with support from the Swedish National Association of the Deaf**

In the very beginning of the pandemic, Swedish National Association of the Deaf had to lobby for the full access to information during the press conferences. Swedish National Association of the Deaf had to inform and educate authorities on how to have the interpreter on the screen.

However, the interpreter has been provided all the time. Even for longer press conferences, sign language interpreting has been available, so that's been positive.

With regards to the Department of Health's press conferences, they also provided with an interpreter, but via YouTube because their information channel is through YouTube.

The YouTube broadcast actually had two cameras. They had one camera on the presenter, and one on the interpreter. Which is different than what they did on television. On television, they had one camera for both the speaker and interpreter. Their approaches were different. That was interesting.

In Sweden, there are different broadcast companies and television channels that produce interpretations. So, one has used a split screen technology and that was the first-time people experienced that. That was really nice.

Deaf people had a choice which television channel they wanted to follow for the news conferences. They weren't forced to only choose one channel. Deaf people felt like they had an equal access to information like hearing people do, because they were able to choose the news channel.

- **Activities of Swedish National Association of the Deaf continue but the office is closed**

Swedish National Association of the Deaf has four staff members, the President, the Communications Officer, one more Officer and the Policy officer. They met very frequently and prepared a document that collected best examples or terrible situations. Before staff members had meetings every day and now, they meet two times a week. The office of the Swedish National Association of the Deaf is closed.

- **Before the covid-19 crisis interpretation was provided on the website and now it's live**

With regards to the sign language interpretation that has been provided, it was available on the website. That's how it used to be provided until the coronavirus crisis, and now it is provided live. There is much more visibility. That's really great that interpreting in sign language has gotten so much more visibility in the public.

- **Deaf clubs are closed which poses issues to organising the General Assembly and reporting to the government**

Deaf clubs are closed, people are not able to socialise. In the beginning, everyone was a bit put off guard, people didn't know how to come together and how to hold meetings.

One huge issue that came up for many deaf clubs/deaf associations was how to organise the General Assembly. The General Assembly is coming up, and deaf clubs/associations have statutes they need to follow. They have requirements that they need to follow and provide quarterly reports to the government. All the deaf associations were concerned about how they still comply to their responsibilities. People are very concerned if they don't provide the reports, they won't get funding next year. If the government didn't receive the reports, they would cut the funding.

- **Positive developments**

There are some positive developments. There are more remote meetings on political debates and the governmental information is also available remotely.

There is more awareness of the deaf community, and the fact that technology can provide access for the deaf community.

The governmental department has really given some attention to the fact that the interpretation needs to be provided to the deaf community. Also, they are realizing that remote interpreting is possible, but not always flawless.

So before, the government was really pushing for online interpreting solutions: distance interpreting and remote interpreting. Thanks to the situation, the government has seen that it is not always the best solution and that there are times that you really do need a live interpreter. Swedish National Association of the Deaf thought the government was considering adding that into certain measures or laws, but they've now taken that back.

- **In hospitals deaf people receive remote interpreting and deafblind people receive interpreting services as usual**

In hospitals deaf people can receive live interpreting services. During the coronavirus crisis this service has been recommended to be switched to remote interpreting service to protect the interpreters. For exceptional cases, sign language interpreters can interpret for deaf people in person with protective masks.

However, for deafblind people who prefer tactile sign language interpreting, the live interpreters will provide the service. This kind of service for the deafblind community is not provided in all areas.

Switzerland

- **Press conferences about COVID-19 became accessible after requests of NAD – live interpretation into 3 sign languages for the first time in history**

Initial information about COVID-19 was not accessible, but the NAD advocated to have information interpreted into the three main sign languages. All daily information about COVID-19 is now accessible, with three interpreters. This is the first time in history that live interpretation takes place, as before information would be summarised and communicated afterwards. This has also raised the awareness about deaf people and sign languages in Switzerland. The statements of the World Health Organisation are also being interpreted in International Sign.

- **Online information about COVID-19 being interpreted**

Important information about health online is also being interpreted into the three sign languages in video formats. But just after permission has been applied to the responsible administration.

- **Masks: not compulsory**

In Switzerland, wearing masks is not compulsory as long as social distancing is respected. Deaf people usually rely on written information. The NAD is not advocating for transparent masks, but rather communication with social distancing.

- **Education: digital divide**

The NAD has found that in the deaf community, there is an unequal access to digital services is not equal.

- **Employment: remote work & online meetings via Zoom**

Remote work and online meetings were absolutely common during this crisis. A lot of employees had to work from home and were distant from their normal workplace environment. Communication for the deaf was possible during this time period due to remote interpreting.

- **NAD funding remained stable**

Funding has always been very limited, but during COVID19 has remained stable.

- **Remote interpreting: new**

As interpreters are not allowed to accompany deaf persons, remote interpreting services are being used for the first time. But some problems remain, such as lack of space on the screen for interpreters, unclear views, etc.

Norway

- **Time for accessible information in sign language was extended**

Before the crisis, sign language access on TV was available from 6:00 to 9:00 in the evening. Now, the amount of time has been extended from 10:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. That has been a major achievement. Norwegian Association of the Deaf e hopes this will continue after the crisis. That's a positive impact.

- **Safety equipment for sign language interprets is sufficient**

Norwegian Deaf Association is of an opinion that the safety equipment in the hospital for interpreters is sufficient. The interpreters should use it.

- **Remote interpreting not always works**

During Easter, a man suffered a stroke and was sent to the hospital. His wife was not allowed in because of the security measures. The interpreter did not want to interpret physically. The man had to receive interpretation through remote interpreting on the iPad. It didn't work because he had a hard time looking at and following the screen. Norwegian Deaf Association is of an opinion that this is not a good solution.

- **Deaf elderly is isolated**

Many elderly deaf people are isolated in their homes. They're no longer able to attend their signing cafes, their deaf clubs, they're stuck in their homes. Some older people went to the cafe anyway to meet other people, who they couldn't avoid.

- **Infections and deaths**

There was one person who died. A group of people went to Austria to go skiing and then that person got infected. He was 62 years old. There were eight men that went to Austria for a ski vacation, and one of them was infected, but the other seven weren't.

Iceland

- **A big part of deaf elderly is isolated**

In Iceland, a big part of older generation is very isolated. And when the country went through a lockdown the many older deaf people were not able to take advantage of online solutions, as many of them don't have access to it or don't use webcams.

- **No interpreter at first, but then provided**

Once the number of infected people started rising, the evening news and the press conferences were not interpreted in sign language. But now, the interpreter is present daily, so the deaf community has full access to information. Also, Icelandic Association of the Deaf disseminated information via videos online.

Since the number of infections started decreasing and the coronavirus crisis slowed down, the interpreters are no longer present during an evening news on the national channel. However, during the press conferences on the pandemic they are still present.

- **Will the interpreting services continue after the pandemic?**

Icelandic Association of the Deaf is wondering whether, once the coronavirus ends, the services will be continued or not.

- **Guidelines how to ensure sign language interpreting**

Regular media and press conferences are interpreted live. However, if a press conference takes place somewhere else or the government wants to share with some news in a different place, the media company is not as experienced with working with interpreters, so the interpreters are not provided.

There is no standard yet with regards to providing with an interpreter. So Icelandic Association of the Deaf is thinking of creating a guideline for all of the cameramen, for all of the responsible staff on how to make sure that they provide with access to interpretation.

The United Kingdom

- **Four different Home Nations with four different approaches to COVID-19**

Each Home Nation of the UK - England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (NI) - has their own policies, which are not necessarily the same as each other's. For example, when the lockdown measures started, people in England were still allowed to go out. However, Scotland had stricter lockdown measures. There is some common area around shielding (minimum period of 12 weeks) but there are still variations in each of the four Home Nations of the UK - including schooling, travel, and testing.

- **Access to information: Sign Language Interpretation provided, but format varies**

British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation of the UK Government's official briefings is relayed on BBC News. In Scotland and Wales, there is an in-situ sign language interpreter beside their First Minister. In NI, BSL and ISL interpreters were filmed in another room and this was relayed onto TV monitors in the same room as the Joint First Ministers. However, after Stormont (home of the political administration in NI) entered lockdown, the filming was done off-site and fed to TV monitors. There is no interpreter standing next to the Prime Minister of the UK which is what some people want. The NAD has, since 31st March 2020, advocated to have sign language interpretation on BBC1, the main TV channel in the UK. Currently, the interpretation is on a different BBC News channel and the NAD wants this switched to a more mainstream channel. This is part of its overall strategy towards a legal status for BSL. Other information such as rules applying to funerals and other gatherings is not always accessible or creates confusion among Deaf people.

- **Scotland: Fact-checking and reliability of information**

In Scotland, the Government has requested that the NAD gives a daily culturally-appropriate BSL presentation of the official briefings with information taken from the Scottish Government or the World Health Organisation. This gives more scope to deliver a Deaf user-friendly service. This service, funded by the Scottish Government, has included 'Myths' and a weekly Live Stream session on different topics such as Deaf young people's education/home schooling, caring for Deaf people with dementia, Deaf mental health, Scottish Ethnic Minority Deaf Association, Deaf services Down Under, and other topics.

- **Masks: NAD advocating for transparent masks**

The NAD is advocating for transparent masks to facilitate communication. This has been led by National Deaf Children's Society and the NAD has been a co-signatory. The NAD's own quote - "Don't mask the message" - has been shared in the media many times. Some private initiatives have been established, however, there are concerns about whether these are hygienic or meet appropriate standards.

- **Mental health of elderly Deaf is a concern due to isolation, loneliness, lack of family members and lack of IT equipment or competency.**
- **Deaf people infected by COVID-19: data varies per country**

The way data is collected varies significantly per Home Nation. No specific data relating to infections in Deaf people - only those stories shared by some Deaf people on social media. Confusion over the term, and sign, "positive". This is not "positive" as in "good news" but "positive" as in "confirmation" of the virus.

- **Known deaths of Deaf people**

The NAD knows of 14 deaths of Deaf people and 8 have been directly attributed to COVID-19.

- **Health helpline was not accessible in Northern Ireland but the NAD worked with the relevant authorities and, as a result, along with a campaign by local interpreters and Deaf people, a remote video service is now in place.**

The NAD continues to advise on service standards and monitoring.

- **Healthcare & access to communication**

Barriers to communication in hospitals remains, mobile devices for remote interpretation and/or attendance of an interpreter to the hospital have been a challenge/denied. A new app for on-demand health access to interpreters has been set up by a Deaf health charity.