



EUROPEAN UNION OF THE DEAF

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

EUD Alternative Report to the CRPD Committee in the framework of the EU Reporting before the CRPD Committee

Outline of the European Union of the Deaf:

Based in Brussels, Belgium, The European Union of the Deaf (EUD) is a not-for-profit European non-Governmental organisation (ENGO) whose members comprise of National Associations of the Deaf (NADs). It is the only supranational organisation representing deaf people at the European level and is one of the few ENGOs representing associations from all the 27 EU Member States, in addition to Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom with an affiliate member in Ukraine. EUD aims to establish and maintain European Union (EU hereafter) level dialogue and guide these institutions in their policies and legislation impacting the rights of deaf people. EUD is a full member of the European Disability Forum (EDF), is a Regional Co-operating Member of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) to tackle issues of global importance and has participatory status with the Council of Europe (CoE).

Introduction:

As a State Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD hereafter), the EU is evaluated and reviewed by the CRPD Committee, based on Articles 35 to 40 CRPD. The EU's first review took place in 2015 and the second review cycle started in March 2022. The first alternative report of the EUD was designed for the second review cycle, covering the period of implementation between the 2015 CRPD Committee's Concluding Observations to the EU up to this day. Accordingly, the Committee addressed its List of Issues to the EU which, in turn, provided responses to this List of Issues. The present report provides the perspective of the European deaf community to the EU response to the List of Issues.

The present report is the result of collaborative work with our membership – the 31 National Associations of the Deaf (NADs hereafter), various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs hereafter), and other relevant stakeholders.

In the line of our work in monitoring the implementation of the CRPD by the EU, we contributed to the report made by the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability Rights, Dr Gerard Quinn. In his [report](#) on his visit to the EU, the Special Rapporteur highlighted a key issue for the deaf community in terms of their rights by way of the EU granting official language status to its 29 national sign languages (NSLs)

President: Sofia Isari – Executive Director: Frankie Picron
European Union of the Deaf – Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 26/15 – 1040 Brussels – Belgium
www.eud.eu



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hereafter).¹ Dr Quinn mentioned that there are “*some obvious issues of law reform, like the granting of official European Union language status to sign language...ought to be contemplated and put on the agenda for change.*” In other words, the Special Rapporteur strongly recommended the EU to give the 29 EU NSLs a status of official EU languages, alongside the current 24 official spoken languages.

This alternative report is based on the crucial recommendation made by Dr Quinn, in addition to the longstanding requests made by the European deaf community through EUD and its 31 NADs. We highlight the work the EU has done to implement the CRPD that is beneficial to the European disability movement as well as the European deaf community, taking into consideration the unique situation of deaf people as both persons with disabilities and persons belonging to a cultural and linguistic minority group. Additionally, we highlight the existing gaps in the current EU legislation, policies, and initiatives preventing the full and meaningful implementation of the CRPD that is beneficial to the European deaf community. Ultimately, we bring several recommendations for the EU to improve its policy and legislation, as follows:

- **Official status of National Sign Languages in the EU (Article 2):** There is a need for the officialization of the EU 29 NSLs as official EU languages alongside the current 24 EU official languages to align its multilingual policy with the CRPD.
- **Equality and Non-Discrimination (Article 5):** There is an urgent impediment to unblock the Equal Treatment Directive, consulting relevant stakeholders, including EUD, and align with the CRPD’s definition of ‘reasonable accommodation’ in Article 2; In developing its anti-discrimination legislation and policy, the EU should consider both the linguistic/cultural and disability perspectives of deaf people to ensure their inclusion.
- **Accessibility (Article 9):** The 112-emergency number across the EU must be accessible to deaf people through their NSL; The EU should establish a new European accessibility agency to provide information, adopt standards, monitor implementation, and involve deaf people and their representative organisations in the process.
- **Freedom from Violence, Exploitation, and Abuse (Article 16):** New legislation and/or policies to ban forced sterilization, criminalise rape, improve data collection on women and girls with disabilities, and provide information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including right to parenthood have to be adopted and disseminated in the 29 NSLs of the EU.

¹ See annex for full list of the national sign languages of the EU.



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- **Liberty of Movement and Nationality (Article 18):** The EU should harmonise social security for persons with disabilities moving abroad, including deaf people, ensuring access to NSL interpreting services and coordinating disability assessments across Member States.
- **Freedom of Expression and Opinion, and Access to Information (Article 21):** The EU must revise Regulation 1/1958 determining the languages used by the European Economic Community to incorporate the 29 EU NSLs as official EU languages. Furthermore, EU institutions must also review the relevant provisions of their respective Rules of Procedures to achieve the rights of EU deaf citizens to interact with and impart official information to these institutions.
- **Work and Employment (Article 27):** The EU should design policies fostering inclusive employment through NSL for deaf people; collect comprehensive employment data on persons with disabilities, including deaf people, disaggregated by disability and intersecting identities; adopt subsequent policies ensuring access to training programmes and career development for deaf people in their NSLs to increase the level of deaf people in quality and high-paid jobs; consult OPDs, including EUD, to consider diverse perspectives in AI policy in relation to employment and ensure a human rights-based approach to protecting deaf citizens;
- **Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport (Article 30):** The EU should proactively promote deaf culture as part of the existing EU cultural landscape while promoting NSLs as being full EU languages in addition to officialising them.
- **Data collection (Article 31):** EUROSTAT should establish a human rights-based indicators system that goes beyond the disaggregation by impairments and disability group and operates with an approach reflecting the specific intersectional experience faced by deaf people and persons with disabilities. The EU should revise its Social Scoreboard to include indicators disaggregated by disability group, including deaf people, reflecting their intersecting identities alongside their disability, including racial or ethnic origin, languages, gender identity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age and any other layers of identities, in line with its commitment under the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030 to set new indicators.

This report has three sections, namely Purpose and General Obligation, covering Article 1 to 4 of the CRPD (Section A); Specific Rights, which cover Articles 5 to 30 (Section B); and Specific Obligations covering Articles 31 to 33 (Section C). Each section presents the specific issues of faced by the European deaf community before providing recommendations (Section D). Each section will specifically respond to the questions asked by the Committee to the EU that are relevant to the European deaf community.

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A. Purpose and General Obligations (Articles 1-4)

In response to **paragraph 2(a)** of the List of Issues requesting the EU to highlight how the rights of persons with disabilities are mainstreamed in the European Union legislation, the EU mentioned the disability coordinators, the Task Force on Equality, and the CRPD Network of the European Parliament.

EUD acknowledges and welcomes these initiatives that foster the mainstreaming of the rights of persons with disabilities within EU legislation. However, we deplore the lack of consideration given to operating a paradigm shift from NSLs as communication tools and accessibility features to NSLs as full languages, in line with Article 2 CRPD – Definitions, which defines languages as including signed languages. NSLs are natural languages with linguistic properties, including grammatical features, such as morphology, phonology, and syntax, they have these qualities in common with all spoken languages as it has been analysed by the academic world as early as 1965. Yet, NSLs are often viewed as communication tools/formats/means to help deaf people communicate, alongside braille, assistive devices and easy-to-read format, rather than as full languages with their own linguistic properties. The officialization of NSLs as official EU languages would align the EU with its multilingualism policies.

Multilingualism policies

One of the core principles of the EU is the principle of multilingualism which entered into force in 2009 with the Treaty of Lisbon. Article 3 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) was amended to provide a clearer definition of the EU's objectives and competencies.² This article emphasises the importance of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the EU and that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced, which ties directly into its multilingualism policies.

The Treaty of Lisbon also made the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (“the Charter” hereafter) legally binding, which means that it has the same legal weight as the EU treaties. Within the Charter, two provisions are to be highlighted for the purposes of this report, namely Articles 21 and 22.

Article 22 of the Charter states that “*the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity*” while Article 21 establishes languages as a ground for discrimination that is prohibited. In other words,

² The Treaty of European Union, URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012M%2FTXT>



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all EU citizens have the right to use the language of their choice and any discrimination based on this choice and language should be prohibited.

Furthermore, the citizen's right to communicate with the institutions in any official language is treated as part of the right to good administration as outlined in Article 41(4) of the Charter.

The Treaties do not list official or working EU languages, but rather indicate which language versions of the Treaties are considered original and authentic. More specifically, Article 55 TEU indicates the 24 languages in which the Treaty's text is considered original.³

Article 55(1) provides the list of Treaty languages, but not the full list of official languages of the EU or working languages of the institutions, which are determined by Regulation No 1. Furthermore, Articles 20 and 24 TFEU regulate the right of citizens to address the EU institutions and bodies in any of the authentic Treaty languages.⁴

In legal terms, the EU's multilingualism falls into three categories: the original languages of the Treaties, the official languages of the EU, and the working languages of the EU. Furthermore, each institution may create its own internal rules on working languages. The main legal act governing the official and working languages of the Union is Council Regulation No. 1/1958. However, when it comes to language recognition, the EU has limited competency.

Limitation in EU recognition of National Sign Languages through the principle of subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity, outlined in Article 6 TFEU, recognises that the EU only has competencies to carry out actions supporting, coordinating, or supplementing the actions from Member States without substituting their competencies in these areas. Recognition of NSLs as full languages is part of culture, which falls upon Member states meaning they must recognise their languages, including their NSLs. Thus, the EU does not have the competencies to recognise the EU NSLs as *full* languages as this is a competence of EU Member States. However, the EU does possess full competence to recognise its *official* languages as regulated in the EU Regulation 1/1958.

Full competencies of the EU to recognise National Sign Languages as Official EU Languages

³ Official languages are Bulgarian, Spanish, Czech, Danish, German, Estonian, Greek, English, French, Croatian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Maltese, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Finnish and Swedish

⁴ Maňko, R., *Legal Aspects of EU Multilingualism*, European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), January 2017, URL:



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The officialization of EU NSLs as EU languages is an obligation of the EU stemming from an interpretation of Articles 2, 21(b) and 21(e) CRPD alongside the principle of multilingualism embedded in Article 3 TEU.

To achieve this officialization, a comprehensive review of, and amendment to the existing corpus of legislation is essential.

Regulation 1/1958

Firstly, there is a need to review Regulation 1/1958. This foundational regulation needs to incorporate the 29 EU NSLs as official languages alongside the existing 24 spoken languages.

Recommendations: Adding the 29 EU NSLs alongside the existing 24 EU official languages listed in Regulation 1/1958.

Rules of Procedure of EU Institutions

Secondly, the EU institutions' Rules of Procedure need to be amended to ensure the inclusion of NSLs as working languages of the institutions. Thus, NSL users will be able to interact with and impart information to the relevant institutions in their NSLs and not only through the spoken language.

European Parliament:

Rule 167 on Languages/Rules of Procedure outlines the language provisions within the Parliament, ensuring accessibility in its proceedings. Firstly, it mandates that all official documents be prepared in the official languages. Secondly, it grants MEPs the right to speak in their preferred official language, with simultaneous interpretation provided. In committee and delegation meetings, interpretation is facilitated based on the languages used and requested by MEPs.

Furthermore, Rule 226 foresees the right of EU citizens to submit petitions before the Committee of Petition of the European Parliament on any matter that falls within the EU fields of activity, and which directly affect the petitioner.

Petitions must be submitted in one of the EU's official languages. If a petition is written in a non-official language, it will only be considered if accompanied by a translation into an official EU language, and all correspondence from the Parliament to the petitioner will use the language of the translation. Additionally, the Parliament's Bureau has the discretion to allow petitions to be tabled and

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correspondence to be conducted in other languages that hold official status within specific regions or entire Member States, as per their constitutional arrangements.

Recommendation: Amending Rule 226 to reflect the rights of EU deaf citizens to submit petitions in their national sign language on an equal footing with their hearing counterparts.

European Commission:

The “correspondence” section of the general principles of the EU Commission Rules of Procedure, foresees that:

“In accordance with Article 21 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, the Commission shall reply to letters in the language of the initial letter, provided that it was written in one of the official languages of the Community.”

Furthermore, in Article 17, a definition of “authentic language or languages” is provided. It refers to the official language of the EU.

Recommendation: Amending the Article 17 of the Rule of Procedure of the EU Commission to comply with Articles 2 and 21(b) CRPD by enabling the Commission to reply to letter in the same EU national sign languages as the NSL used to submit the letter.

European Council

With regards to the European Council, Article 7 of its Rules of Procedure states that:

“The opening to the public of Council meetings relating to the ‘Legislative deliberations’ part of its agenda shall be made through public transmission by audiovisual means, notably in an overflow room and through broadcasting in all official languages of the institutions of the European Union using video-streaming. A recorded version shall remain available for at least one month on the Council's Internet site. The outcome of voting shall be indicated by visual means.”

In addition, Article 14 outlines the language protocol governing deliberations and decisions within the Council. Unless unanimously decided otherwise due to urgency, the Council shall deliberate and make decisions solely based on documents and drafts prepared in the languages designated by the existing language rules.

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Recommendation: Amending Article 7 of the Rules of Procedure to impose the obligation of the Council to ensure the broadcasting of the Council's meeting in all EU NSLs in addition to the official languages of the institutions, as long as Regulation 1/1958 has not been amended.

Once these steps are achieved, this will allow the EU to align itself more closely with the CRPD and its own principles of Multilingualism and a Union of Equality.

B. Specific Rights (Articles 5-30)

- Article 5 CRPD, Equality and Non-Discrimination:

- In response to **paragraph 6 (a)** of the list of issues requesting the EU to adopt its proposed horizontal directive on equal treatment, including information on the current state of the adoption process, the main obstacles, and the prospects of and envisaged time frame for its adoption, the EU is yet to adopt this crucial Directive (2008/0140(APP)) as it remains blocked by the Council since 2008. EUD deplores the lack of action taken by the EU to ensure the swift adoption and effective implementation of this Directive. However, before adopting the Directive, the EU must ensure it consults OPDs, including EUD, and other relevant CSOs, to ensure all perspectives are included.

We understand that one outstanding issue, in terms of reaching the required unanimity for this Directive, is the definition of reasonable accommodation. The EU should refer to the definition provided in the CRPD (Article 2 – *Definitions*) It is defined as meaning the *“necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”*.⁵ Furthermore, this same definition was used in the [European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on sign languages and professional sign language interpreters \(2016/2952\(RSP\)\)](#).

Recommendation: EU to take action to bridge the legislative gap posed by the lack of an harmonised legislation on equality and non-discrimination.

⁵ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *Article 2 – Definitions*, URL: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-2-definitions.html>



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- With regards to **paragraph 6 (b)** of the list of issues requesting the EU to include the prohibition of disability-based discrimination in all its anti-discrimination legislation in all areas of life, the EU has yet to fulfil this obligation. Whilst some progress has been made, the EU has not included the definition of 'discrimination on the basis of disability' as per Art. 2 CRPD, which includes the denial of reasonable accommodation, within all its anti-discrimination legislation.

Recommendation: The EU to meaningfully consult with OPDs to add the perspective of persons with disabilities in their equality and non-discrimination legislation.

- In response to **paragraph 6 (c)** of the list of issues which requests the EU to recognise multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination faced by persons with disabilities as well as to report on the situation of persons with disabilities belonging to ethnic and minority groups, and on measures to ensure protection against discrimination, this neglects to mention deaf people as part of the cultural and linguistic minority group. Article 30(4) CRPD obliges State Parties to recognise and respect the cultural identity of deaf people. Importantly, deaf culture stems from the use of NSLs, yet this perspective is often overlooked by the disability movement itself as well as within the wider EU policy landscape.
- **Recommendation:** Respecting and including the dual belonging of the European deaf community as both persons with disabilities and cultural and linguistic minority groups in all upcoming policies and legislation pertaining to disability, cultural and linguistic rights. This can be reached by taking steps towards recognising the 29 EU NSLs as official EU languages.

- Article 9 CRPD, Accessibility:

- With regards to **paragraph 10 (a)** of the list of issues, which requests information from the EU about any current and planned legislation and other measures, EUD welcomes and applauds the recent adoption of the delegated regulation implementing the European Electronic Communication Code (EECC). This regulation defines equivalent access for persons with disabilities and complements the landscape of accessibility legislation fostering the inclusion of deaf people in their societies, alongside the European Accessibility Act (EAA), and the Audio-Visual Media Service Directive (AVMSD).

However, EUD would like to highlight the persistent lack of accessibility, via national sign language interpretation, of the 112-emergency number through Total Conversation. The choice of whether to implement the EAA and EECC through Total Conversation or Real-Time Text is a

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competency of EU Member States. However, a harmonized accessible 112 emergency number, accessible via NSL interpretation or directly with a NSL user, is a matter of life or death for deaf people.

Recommendation: The EU should urgently adopt subsequent legislation and policies incentivising Member States to adopt the Total Conversation format when implementing the EECC and EAA.

EUD welcomes that the most recent State of the European Union speech, delivered by the EU Commission President, Ms Ursula Von Der Leyen, was interpreted for the first time in International Sign. Nevertheless, deaf EU citizens did not have the option to translate the speech into their NSLs, whilst it was possible for all hearing EU citizens to translate the speech into their 24 spoken languages.

It is important to highlight that accessibility measures should not be confined to issues pertaining only to persons with disabilities, but be mainstreamed in all areas of EU policies. All EU deaf citizens have the right to access information, regardless of the topic, on EU policies in their language – their NSL.

Recommendation: Providing all official information and press conference not only in International Sign but also in all EU NSLs.

The EU Commission launched its AccessibleEU Centre in July 2023 - a deliverable under the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030. EUD welcomes this initiative as a step towards coordinating best practices, knowledge exchange on accessibility in the EU. However, EUD, alongside the wider EU disability movement, calls for the EU Commission to establish a new regulatory European agency for accessibility as a follow-up to the AccessibleEU centre.

Recommendation: Establish a new regulatory European agency for accessibility.

- Regarding **paragraph 10 (d)** of the list of issues which requests the EU to inform the CRPD Committee of all measures taken to fully realise the rights of persons with disabilities in the development and use of digital technologies and services, such as websites, and of artificial intelligence, EUD acknowledges and welcomes the EU's recent adoption (13th March 2024) of the Artificial Intelligence Act. However, the proposed accountability and transparency framework for high-risk AI is too weak and presents risks of not fully protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, including deaf people.

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The Act places some very modest limits on the use of dangerous AI systems without taking a human-rights based approach. The text includes phrases such as “*human-centric and trustworthy AI*”, “*in accordance with fundamental rights obligations*”, and “*non-discriminatory*”. However, there are no real corresponding actions outlined in the text to fulfil these measures. Instead, the needs of the AI industry are prioritised rather than human rights. Positively, the AI Act references the CRPD, prohibits AI systems that exploit any of the vulnerabilities of a person or a specific group of persons due to their disability (Article 5), and recognises persons with disabilities as a group at higher risk of harmful effects of AI systems. Nevertheless, there aren’t any concrete actions provided to combat potential discrimination against persons with disabilities in its articles.

Women and girls with disabilities, including deaf women and girls, in relation to healthcare, gender-based violence, and intersectional discrimination:

- In response to **paragraph 17 (b)** of the list of issues, which asks the EU to inform the Committee about the collection of statistical data on violence against persons with disabilities, by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE); **paragraph 17 (c)** which requests the EU to provide information on measures taken to accede to the Istanbul Convention, and on the current status of the proposal of a Directive on Combating Violence, and how persons with disabilities are included therein; **paragraph 18** which requests the EU to provide information on measures taken to ensure the right to free, prior, and informed consent to medical treatment; **paragraph 19** which requests the EU to report on policy and legal frameworks in place to prevent forced contraception and forced sterilization of women with disabilities across European Union member States; **paragraph 25 and paragraph 27(a)** which requests the EU to provide information on measures taken to promote access to sexual and reproductive rights for women and girls with disabilities, including accessible information on contraception, sexual education, gynecological services and abortion services; EU highlights the following:

The EU Directive on Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence - forced sterilization and a lack of measures to ensure the accessibility of information in the national sign languages of the EU:

- EUD welcomes the EU’s recent adoption of the **Directive on combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence**. This Directive recognises that victims experiencing intersectional discrimination, such as deaf women and girls, are at a heightened risk of experiencing gender-based violence. This directive was the perfect opportunity to **ban forced sterilisation** in the EU. However, it failed to do so. This harmful practice is still happening in some EU countries where women and girls with disabilities, including deaf women and girls,

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are at a higher risk of being subjected to it⁶. This directly contravenes Article 23 CPRD which obliges State Parties to ensure that persons with disabilities, including children, retain their fertility on an equal basis with others.

- Moreover, the Directive does not include a common definition and criminalisation of rape, despite calls from the EU disability movement.
- Furthermore, all mentions of ‘sign languages’ were removed, in the negotiation process of developing this Directive, in place of vague statements about ensuring accessibility. For example, the Directive does not include concrete measures to ensure the accessibility of information on sexual and reproductive rights and healthcare for deaf women and girls in the NSLs. This reflects the inconsistency in the intersectional approach of the Directive and a lack of alignment with the principles of the Convention.

Recommendation: The EU to urgently adopt subsequent legislation explicitly banning forced sterilization of women with disabilities, criminalizing rape and ensuring that all healthcare services and information on sexual and reproductive rights are available in the NSL. The design of these legislation should meaningfully involve OPDs.

Healthcare - free and informed consent:

- Article 25(d) CRPD on *Health* obliges State Parties to ensure healthcare professionals are providing care on the basis of **free and informed consent**. To facilitate this for deaf people, the highest attainable standard of health is translated by the right to inclusive healthcare environments in the national sign language. Moreover, the EU must take measures to prohibit a medical-based approach to women and girls with disabilities in relation to parenthood or otherwise and enforce the obligation of healthcare providers in this field to employ a human-rights based approach in line with the CRPD. This is further outlined in EUD’s [policy recommendations on the access to healthcare for deaf people in the EU](#).
- However, following research conducted for a recently published EUD report on “*Combating Gender-based Violence and Discrimination against Deaf Women and Girls in the EU*”, the findings showed that deaf women are still facing discrimination in healthcare settings, especially in relation to **sexual and reproductive healthcare**, including being subjected to coerced abortions on the basis that their child might be deaf, denial of IVF treatment based

⁶ European Disability Forum. *Forced sterilisation in the EU*. Retrieved from <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/forced-sterilisation-eu/>



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on their disability, denied the right to adopt children on the basis of disability and being “unfitness” to become parents, forced sterilization, as well as having cochlear implants fitted on their children without prior consent of the parents. EUD urges

Recommendation: The EU to take urgent action to ensure all healthcare services are provided on the basis of free and informed consent and combat all forms of discrimination in healthcare.

EU-level data collection on women with disabilities and GBV:

- There is a **significant lack of data at the EU level disaggregated by disabilities, in line with Article 31.2 CRPD**. Whilst EIGE has collected some data on this topic, it is disaggregated according to the degree a disability affects a person’s daily activities, which fails to highlight the specific experiences of deaf women and girls in relation to gender-based violence. In 2024, EUD published a report “*Combatting Gender-based Violence and Discrimination against Deaf Women and Girls in the EU*”, which is the result of desk and qualitative research, involving focus group meetings with our membership. The findings of the report included multiple cases of deaf women and girls encountering exacerbated discrimination and challenges in their societies due to the intersectionality of their gender, languages, and disability. To date, there are no existing statistics and data at the EU level which reflect these experiences in relation to GBV. This data is crucial to support the development of effective, and evidence-based policies to protect deaf women and girls from gender-based violence in line with Article 16 CRPD, on Freedom from Violence, Exploitation, and Abuse.

Recommendation: Collecting data disaggregated by disabilities with a particular focus on highlighting the lived experience faced by deaf women and girls.

Istanbul Convention:

- The **EU’s recent accession of the Istanbul Convention** reflects its commitment to prevent, prosecute, and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence in line with Article 16 CRPD. This political action constitutes an important step for the full protection of deaf women and girls within the EU. Still today, deaf women and girls are exposed to a higher risk of violence and often face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination due to their dual belonging – cultural and linguistic minority as well as the disability community, in addition to the gender dimension. Among the main barriers experienced by deaf women and girls, several issues have been raised regarding the communication of their requirements to ensure preventive protection against violence, when accessing services, reporting abuse, or seeking

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justice.

Recommendation: The EU to continue its momentum, following its accession of the Istanbul Convention to combat all forms of violence against women with a focus on the specific situation of women and girls with disabilities.

- Article 18 CRPD, Liberty of Movement and Nationality: In response to **paragraph 20 (a)** of the list of issues, which requests the EU to provide information on the impact of administrative requirements, such as disability assessments and qualifications for and transfer of social security benefits, on the ability of persons with disabilities to exercise their right to move and reside freely within the territory of European Union Member States, the EU has taken a significant step by adopting the Directive establishing a European Disability Card (EDC). Whilst EUD welcomes the EDC as it represents a step forward in addressing the barriers faced by the European deaf community in realising their fundamental right to freedom of movement within the EU, there were some calls from the disability movement that were not included in the final text. For instance, the lack of opportunity for temporary access to disability support in another EU country while applying for the national disability support system. If a deaf person from EU country X wishes to move to another EU country Y, that person will not be able to receive NSLs interpretation to undertake the administrative procedure in country Y to become a resident and access disability support schemes of this country. The current provisions of the EDC directive do not allow for the access to social services to bridge the gap from when a deaf person moves to a host country and when they have their disability registered. EU Member States will have 42 months to start providing the Cards, including 30 months to transpose the legislation, therefore, the Card will only fully become a reality in 4 years.
- Article 21 CRPD, Freedom of Expression and Opinion, and Access to Information:
 - Regarding **paragraph 23 (b)** of the list of issues, which requests the EU to provide information on measures taken to facilitate the availability to accessible languages, formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of impairments, including sign languages, and other accessible means, modes, and formats of communication of the user's choice, EUD would like to highlight the EU's lack of recognition of its 29 NSLs as official languages of the EU as well as amending the relevant Rules of Procedures of EU institutions (see *supra* in section A).
- Article 27 CRPD, Work and Employment:
 - With regards to **paragraph 28 (a)** of the list of issues, requesting the EU to inform the Committee on measures taken to address inequalities affecting women with disabilities in employment,

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including efforts to promote their access to the open labour market, the EU is yet to adopt policies addressing the situation of employment for women with disabilities.

Whilst the EU Commission has taken measures to develop its Disability Employment Package, and Eurostat has introduced a new thematic section on disability to its website, the disability employment gap persists. It is crucial that data on persons with disabilities and employment is disaggregated by disability and other intersecting identities. Specifically, actions taken to address inequalities affecting women with disabilities in employment are non-existent. We outline specific recommendations on the access to the labour market for deaf people in the EU in our [Policy Recommendations on Access to Labour Market for Deaf Persons in the EU](#). Such recommendations include the prohibition of discrimination based on disability and ensuring the provision of reasonable accommodation, improving data collection of deaf people in employment, ensure access to training programmes and career development to increase the level of deaf people in quality and well-paid jobs.

- EUD also emphasises the necessity of establishing employment targets to inform effective policies to enhance the employment rate of persons with disabilities in the EU. EUD outlines this point, along with the importance of ensuring inclusive national sign language work environments, in our [policy recommendations on establishing targets for the employment of deaf people in the EU](#). Finally, EUD and the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) published a [joint submission](#) to the CRPD Committee's General Comment no.8 on Article 27 – this report outlines the key issues facing deaf people within and accessing the open labour market in the EU and calls for the promotion of “*national sign language inclusive labour markets*”.

Recommendation: The EU to promote the concept of “*National sign language inclusive labour market*” to foster the employment of deaf people.

- In response to **paragraph 28 (e)** of the list of issues requesting the EU to inform the Committee of measures taken to protect persons with disabilities from discrimination using artificial intelligence in recruitment, selection, promotion, and termination decisions in employment, EUD highlights the adoption of the AI Act as outlined previously.

Article 30 CRPD, Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure, and Sport: In response to **paragraph 31** of the list of issues, EUD wishes to note that there is no specific mention of Article 30.4 CRPD which obliges State Parties to ensure that “*Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity,*”

President: Sofia Isari – Executive Director: Frankie Picron

European Union of the Deaf – Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 26/15 – 1040 Brussels – Belgium

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including sign languages and deaf culture".⁷ EUD highlights the need for the EU to promote deaf culture, in consultation and collaboration with the European deaf community. This will support the EU in shifting its view of deaf people as purely being part of the disability community, to understanding they also belong to a cultural and linguistic minority group.

Recommendation: The EU to include deaf culture and national sign language as part of its cultural and linguistic landscape.

C. Specific Obligations (Articles 31-33)

Article 31 CRPD, Statistics and Data Collection:

In response to paragraph 32(a) of the list of issues highlighting the use of the Washington Group Set of Questions by Eurostat, EUD welcomes the new [Eurostat thematic section](#) on disability and the new disability employment gap indicator in the EU Social Scoreboard.

However, these resources have a monolith approach to disability, placing all the diverse experiences and challenges faced by various persons with disabilities within a single category. This approach neglects to recognise the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by persons with disabilities, by not disaggregating the data collection by their intersecting identities alongside their disabilities. In that regard, no quality and accurate data measuring the inclusion of deaf people by Eurostat exists.

Furthermore, responding to paragraph 32(b) calling for the establishment of a human rights-based indicators system, EUD released its [Findings and results of the survey on the available data related to deaf people at national level](#). The findings reflected that, within EU Member States, there is a lack of data on the number of deaf people at the national level. Moreover, the existing data does not consider the intersecting identities of deaf people. This absence at the national level is a reflection of the absence at the EU level.

Recommendation: The EU to go beyond disaggregation by impairment and disability-type, and operate with an approach reflecting the specific intersectional experience faced by deaf people and

⁷ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *Article 30 - Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure, and Sport*, URL: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-30-participation-in-cultural-life-recreation-leisure-and-sport.html>



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persons with disabilities. Accordingly, the data should be disaggregated, in addition to the disability type, by racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disabilities, sexual orientation, languages and gender identity, socio-economic status.

In response to paragraph 32(d) highlighting the use of its collection of data on persons with disabilities for the Social Scoreboard, the EUD published its [EUD Policy Recommendations on the establishment of targets for the employment of deaf people](#). In these recommendations, the EUD recommended the European Commission to:

“Revise the Social Scoreboard to include indicators disaggregated by disability group, including deaf people, reflecting their intersecting identities alongside their disability, including racial or ethnic origin, languages, gender identity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age and any other layers of identities, in line with its commitment under the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030 to set new indicators”

D. Overview of recommendations:

- **Article 5 - Equality and Non-Discrimination:**

- The EU to unblock the Equal Treatment Directive with urgency and ensure to meaningfully consult all relevant stakeholders – OPDs such as EUD – , before its final adoption. The definition of “reasonable accommodation” used in the Directive should borrow the existing definition in the Convention.
- When developing policies and legislation to further the rights of persons with disabilities, including deaf people, the EU should pay attention to include the linguistic and cultural minority perspective of deaf people in addition to the traditional disability perspective.

- **Article 9 – Accessibility:**

- The EU to take urgent action, in consultation with EUD, to strongly recommend Member States to adopt Total Conversation when implementing the European Accessibility Act, the European Electronic Communication Code and its delegated regulation to ensure deaf people have the rights to access life-saving emergency communication services in their NSL.

President: Sofia Isari – Executive Director: Frankie Picron
European Union of the Deaf – Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 26/15 – 1040 Brussels – Belgium
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- The EU to consult with OPDs, including EUD, to include various perspective on how to mitigate the negative impact AI might potentially have on marginalised groups such as deaf people.
 - The EU to set up a new regulatory European agency for accessibility. The mission of the agency should include: providing specialised information and policy recommendations to EU Institutions and Member States; adopting technical specifications and standards to support EU accessibility legislation; supporting and monitoring the implementation of accessibility legislation; ensuring the meaningful involvement of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities.
- **Article 16 – Freedom from Violence, Exploitation, and Abuse:** The EU to legally ban forced sterilization, criminalise rape, improve data collection on women and girls with disabilities, and provide information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including right to parenthood, in the 29 NSLs of the EU in subsequent legislation and policies. This is to complement the existing Directive on Violence Against Women.
- **Article 18 – Liberty of Movement and Nationality:** The EU to urgently take further action to harmonise the social security access for persons with disabilities to benefit reasonable accommodation measures when moving abroad until their disability has been reassessed. A Directive on freedom of movement of persons with disabilities in the EU would constitute an adequate step. The Directive would highlight the shared responsibility of Member States for disability support towards EU citizens moving permanently from one Member State to another by:
- Retaining coverage from one's Member State of origin through the “portability” of their benefits from the country of origin to the reassessment of its disability status the host-country. Such reassessment is expect to deliver disability-support services by the host-country.
 - The right to undergo assessment from the new host-country before moving there while still residing in the country of origin. still in one's Member State of origin, after proving the intent to move. The purpose is to have the disability assessment ready when moving.
 - Better coordinate the disability assessment procedures between the different EU Member States to allow for mutual recognition of disability status between EU Member States.

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- **Article 21 – Freedom of Expression and Opinion, and Access to Information:**
 - The EU to revise Regulation 1/1958 determining the official languages of the EU to incorporate the 29 EU NSLs as official EU languages.
 - Amending Article 226 of the Rule of Procedure of the European Parliament to reflect the rights of EU deaf citizens to submit petitions in their national sign language on an equal footing with the other EU citizens.
 - Amending Article 17 of the Rule of Procedure of the EU Commission to comply with Articles 2 and 21(b) CRPD by enabling the Commission to reply to letters in the same EU national sign languages in which the letter was submitted.
 - Amending Article 7 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Council to impose the obligation of the Council to ensure the broadcasting of their meetings in all EU NSLs in addition to the official languages of the institutions, as long as Regulation 1/1958 has not been amended.

- **Article 27 - Work and Employment:**
 - The EU should promote the access to inclusive national sign language work environments across the EU. In inclusive employment in an inclusive workplace and labour market, deaf people have the right to thrive through their NSL. This can be reached either by working in a full NSL work environment; an environment where hearing colleagues know and use the NSL; or an environment where NSL interpreters are available.
 - The EU to take measures to collect comprehensive data on persons with disabilities at all stages of employment as outlined in Article 27 of the CRPD, including the recruitment phase. The data should be disaggregated by disability group and other intersecting identities. This data will be crucial to support the development of effective policies and measures targeted to bridge the gaps evidenced by the data and research.
 - Furthermore, the EU should take steps to combat harmful stereotypes, particularly of women with disabilities, including deaf women and girls, when accessing and within the labour market in the EU. The EU should also ensure access to training programmes and career development for deaf people in their NSLs to increase the

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level of deaf people in quality and well-paid jobs.

- **Article 30 - Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport:** The EU to include deaf culture and national sign language as part of its cultural and linguistic landscape
- **Article 31 – Statistics and data collection:** The EU to go beyond disaggregation by impairment and disability-type, and operate with an approach reflecting the specific intersectional experience faced by deaf people and persons with disabilities. The data should be disaggregated, in addition to the disability type, by racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disabilities, sexual orientation, languages and gender identity, socio-economic status.
- The EU to establish targets disaggregated by disability groups and other intersectional identities to foster the employment of persons with disabilities in the EU.

Annex:

List of National Sign Languages of the EU:

	Name of the national sign language	EU Member State	Year of Recognition
1	Österreichische Gebärdensprache Austrian Sign Language) (ÖGS)	Austria	2005-05-01
2	Vlaamse Gebarentaal (Flemish Sign Language) (VGT)	Belgium (Flanders)	2006-04-26
3	Langue des Signes de Belgique Francophone Belgian Francophone Sign Language) (LSFB)	Belgium (Wallonia)	2003-10-22
4	Български жестомимичен език (Bulgarian Sign Language)	Bulgaria	2021-01-21
5	Hrvatski Znakovni Jezik (Croatian Sign Language)(HZJ)	Croatia	07/07/1905 2015

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6	Κυπριακή Νοηματική Γλώσσα (Cypriot Sign Language)(KNT)	Cyprus	2006
7	Český Znakový Jazyk (Czech SignLanguage)(CZJ)	Czech Republic	1998
8	Dansk Tegnsprog (Danish Sign Language)	Denmark	2014
9	Eesti Viipekeel (Estonian Sign Language)(EVK)	Estonia	2007
10	Suomalainen Viittomakieli (Finnish Sign Language)(SVK)	Finland	1995
11	Finlandssvenskt Teckenspråk (Finland-Swedish Sign Language) (SRVK)	Finland	1995
12	Langue des Signes Francaise (French Sign Language) (LSF)	France	2005
13	Deutsche Gerbärdensprache (German Sign Language) (DGS)	Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium	Germany – 2002; Luxembourg – 2018; Belgium - 2019
14	Ελληνική Νοηματική Γλώσσα (Greek Sign Language)(ENΓ)	Greece	2000 and 2017
15	Magyar Jelnyelv (Hungarian Sign Language)	Hungary	2009
16	Irish Sign Language (ISL)	Ireland	09/10/2013 2017
17	Lingua dei Segni Italiana (Italian Sign Language) (LIS)	Italy	2021
18	Latviešu Zīmju Valoda (Latvian Sign Language) (LZV)	Latvia	2000
19	Lietuvių Gestų Kalba	Lithuania	1995

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	(Lithuanian Sign Language) (LGK)		
20	Lingwa tas-Sinjali Maltija (Maltese Sign Language) (LSM)	Malta	16-Mar-16
21	Nederlandse Gebarentaal (Dutch Sign Language) (NGT)	The Netherlands	13-Oct-20
22	Polski Jezyk Migowy (Polish Sign Language) (PJM)	Poland	2011
23	Lingua Gestual Portuguesa (Portuguese Sign Language) (LGP)	Portugal	1997
24	Limba Semnelor Române (Romanian Sign Language) (LSR)	Romania	2002
25	Slovník Posunkovej Reci (Slovak Sign Language) (SPR)	Slovakia	1995
26	Slovenski Znakovni Jezik (Slovenian Sign Language) (SZJ)	Slovenia	28/05/2020 and 2002
27	Lengua de Signos Española (LSE)	Spain	2007
28	Lengua de Signos Catalana (LSC)	Spain	2010
29	Svenskt Teckenspråk (SSL)	Sweden	1981, 2006 and 2009

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