



## EUROPEAN UNION OF THE DEAF

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

# Ethical Framework On Ai And Sign Language

## By Prof. Dr Filipe Venade

### 1) **Deaf Digital Law as a Foundational Principle**

Any application of AI in the context of sign language must adhere to the principles of *Deaf Digital Law*—a developing legal framework aimed at regulating and safeguarding the equitable and ethical use of digital technologies by and for deaf people. Its purpose is to uphold deaf people's right to full digital citizenship and participation in the digital sphere.

### 2) **AI as a Tool for Inclusion, Not Substitution**

AI must function as a driver of inclusion, complementing rather than replacing national (and regional) sign language interpreters. It must not undermine the indispensable role of human professionals in critical communication settings, particularly those involving legal, medical, educational, and democratic participation.

### 3) **Balancing Innovation and Cultural Preservation**

Technological development must be pursued in tandem with the preservation and respect for sign language as an element of intangible cultural heritage. The deployment of AI in this context should enhance, not erode, the linguistic and cultural richness of deaf communities.

### 4) **Empowerment Through Accessible Participation**

AI technologies should be harnessed to promote the full participation of deaf people across all sectors of society—education, healthcare, employment, civic engagement, and digital environments—ensuring their language rights and removing barriers to access in public and private life.

### 5) **Human Rights-Centred Design**

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The development and deployment of AI systems must respect the principles of equality, non-discrimination, accessibility and proportionality in all areas of everyday life.. They must actively prevent harm and ensure that sign language users are not marginalised in the design or outcome of AI systems.

#### **6) Deaf Technologies as Universal Design**

AI should be understood not merely in terms of accessibility but as a pathway to innovate “deaf technologies”—technological solutions rooted in deaf experiences that offer broader societal benefits. Such developments should follow the principles of universal design.

#### **7) Co-Creation with Deaf Communities**

AI systems involving sign languages must be developed through meaningful and sustained collaboration with deaf communities. Co-creation ensures that technological innovation contributes positively to the present and future of sign languages and aligns with the needs and values of the deaf community.

#### **8) Intersectional Approaches to Fairness**

Deaf people often experience intersectional forms of discrimination, including on the basis of disability, language, ethnicity, and gender. AI systems must be tested and audited using an intersectional lens to ensure they do not reinforce or exacerbate existing inequities.

#### **9) Culturally Respectful Data Collection**

The collection of sign language data must involve native signers of national and regional sign languages, respecting linguistic variation, facial grammar, and cultural context. Special care must be taken to include and fairly represent regional, minority, and underrepresented variants to avoid algorithmic bias and cultural erasure.

#### **10) Informed and Voluntary Consent**

Signers must provide informed and voluntary consent prior to data collection. Clear and transparent information must be given regarding the purpose, use, and potential reuse of the data. Any use beyond the original intent requires renewed consent.

#### **11) Respect for Original Expression**

AI developers must not modify or alter sign language recordings in a way that distorts or misrepresents their original meaning or cultural expression. Authenticity must be maintained throughout the development lifecycle.

#### **12) Safeguarding Cultural and Linguistic Integrity**

Sign language data must not be used to train AI systems unless robust safeguards are in place to preserve its cultural and linguistic integrity. Misuse or misrepresentation risks cultural appropriation and harms the legitimacy of AI outputs.

### **13) Protection of Personal and Cultural Identity**

Signers' names, images, voices, facial expressions, and signing styles constitute integral parts of their professional and cultural identities. These must not be reproduced, simulated, or cloned through avatars or AI-generated content without the signer's explicit, prior, and separate written authorisation.

### **14) Fair Compensation for Data Use**

Signers must be fairly remunerated for their contributions, with compensation proportionate to the duration, scale, and nature of the data's use in AI systems. Transparent agreements must outline terms of use and duration.

### **15) Accountability and Responsibility**

AI developers, providers, and operators bear ethical responsibility not only for the technical performance of their systems but also for ensuring cultural and linguistic appropriateness. They must be held accountable for any harm resulting from misuse or misrepresentation of sign language data.