



Resolution 2247 (2018)¹

Protecting and promoting sign languages in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Sign languages are the natural languages of millions of people worldwide. They are a means of communication and a vehicle for ensuring the inclusion of deaf people in society. However, few States have recognised sign languages as official languages, and access to education and public services using sign languages remains limited.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that the official recognition of sign languages can make all the difference in terms of access to education, public services, employment and participation in political life. It refers to its [Recommendation 1492 \(2001\)](#) on the rights of national minorities, in particular its paragraph 12.xiii on sign languages, and [Recommendation 1598 \(2003\)](#) on the protection of sign languages in the member States of the Council of Europe, in which it recognises sign languages as “the expression of Europe’s cultural wealth” and took the view that “official recognition of these languages will help deaf people to become integrated into society and gain access to justice, education and employment”. It also refers to its [Resolution 2155 \(2017\)](#) “The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue”, which calls for the official recognition of sign languages.

3. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is the international benchmark in the field of protecting the rights of people with disabilities and ensuring their inclusion, calls for the official recognition of sign languages and access to sign language interpretation in public services.

4. The Assembly is convinced that official recognition of sign languages signals recognition of the culture of deaf people and awareness of the aspirations of the deaf community. It welcomes the publication, in spring 2019, of an empirical study on the status of sign languages in Europe, under the aegis of the Finnish presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

5. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to:

- 5.1. recognise sign languages as official languages, if this is not already the case, in the constitution or by means of a specific law;
- 5.2. ensure that deaf people have access to public services by providing sign language interpretation;
- 5.3. ensure inclusive education, offer deaf children education in sign languages and, where necessary, sign language interpretation;
- 5.4. train teachers in sign languages;
- 5.5. offer sign language lessons for parents and siblings of deaf children;
- 5.6. support the training and recruitment of sign language interpreters to assist deaf people;
- 5.7. support the creation and broadcasting of cultural programmes in sign languages and broadcast television programmes with sign language interpretation;
- 5.8. support the teaching of sign languages beyond the deaf community, including in kindergartens;

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 23 November 2018 (see [Doc. 14660](#), report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Miren Edurne Gorrotxategui). See also [Recommendation 2143 \(2018\)](#).*



- 5.9. support research and development in technologies to assist deaf people;
 - 5.10. support the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages, in particular its activities concerning sign languages;
 - 5.11. provide, on a voluntary basis, information on the use and protection of sign languages to the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (COMEX) which may be useful in the event of future discussions on this topic;
 - 5.12. run awareness-raising campaigns to deconstruct negative stereotypes about deaf people and celebrate the International Day of Sign Languages on 23 September by proposing activities to promote sign languages.
6. The Assembly calls on national parliaments to ensure sign language interpretation of debates and to broadcast them on television and on the internet.
 7. It also calls on political parties to provide sign language interpretation at their congresses and large-scale conferences so as to ensure the participation of deaf people at these events and encourage them to participate in political life.
 8. The Assembly welcomes the activities to promote and protect sign languages undertaken by non-governmental organisations and calls for them to be supported.