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Summary

Sign Language Legislation in the European Union



The book “Sign Language Legislation in Europe” is the first comprehensive study of laws relating to sign language. It covers all legislation in the European Union that mentions sign language. Written by the European Union of the Deaf (EUD) it was researched in close co-operation with the National Associations of the Deaf and the National Associations of Sign Language Interpreters.

The first part introduces concepts central to the Deaf Community, sign language and sign language legislation. It includes an overview of supra-national legislation both at UN and EU level and claims sign language as a Linguistic Human Right as stated by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. It details how the national sign languages are the mother tongues of Deaf people and describes the concept of additive bilingual education.

The second part of the book gives an account of each EU country, detailing existing legislation and quoting relevant articles in their English translation. Each country description includes the national sign language(s), the estimated number of Deaf sign language users and the latest figures regarding registered sign language interpreters.

The book shows that the indigenous national sign languages of Europe are recognised and mentioned in a number of different ways and documents: constitutions, disability laws, educational acts, and language laws. Additionally, some countries have separate acts for their sign language(s) or incorporate them into other national or regional legislation.

The last part (appendix) of the book concentrates on the actual pieces of legislation and quotes the relevant articles or full laws, if a separate sign language law is in place.

An overview like this has become necessary, as more and more countries are passing sign language legislation. Policy makers need to be aware of the lack of protection in some countries and the positive examples of others in order to adequately safeguard European indigenous sign languages, which form an important part of Europe’s diverse language background and its culture.

This publication gives essential insights into sign language legislation and will aid policy makers and researchers alike.

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