



EUROPEAN UNION OF THE DEAF

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

13th SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Speaker: Mark Wheatley, EUD Executive Director

Agenda item 5 (b)(i): 1 December 2020 – 10.00 am to 12.00 pm (Virtual). Round Table 1: Disability and business: realizing the right to work in open, inclusive and accessible environments for persons with disabilities.

The European Union of the Deaf (EUD) is the only supranational organisation representing deaf people in the European region, with member organisations in 31 European countries. EUD's vision is to achieve the full equality of deaf persons in both public and private aspects of life.

States Parties to the UN CRPD must ensure that deaf persons have a full and equal access to open labour markets. Inaccessible working environments that do not embrace diversity are not only against the legal obligations stemming from the UN CRPD, but they also prevent further economic and sustainable growth. Indeed, securing a structural shift towards an inclusive, accessible and innovative economic and business models is in the interest of us all, as it will strengthen economies and build more resilient societies.

In this regard, when ensuring the access to work and employment of persons with disabilities, States Parties need to consider all the different approaches to inclusion and accessibility. To enable an inclusive and accessible working environment for deaf persons, States Parties must recognise the cultural and linguistic identity of deaf communities, and the fundamental role of national sign languages. Indeed, access to information, communication and knowledge in national sign languages is the best means for the full inclusion of deaf persons in society, including guaranteeing the realisation of the right to work and employment.

In light of this, States Parties must ensure that reasonable accommodation measures guarantee that deaf persons access the labour market on an equal basis with others, either by providing fully sign language working environments, or by providing high quality, free, and professional sign language interpreting services in those workplaces where a sign language is not the mainstream language. Government funding should cover sign language interpreting services in the workplace, but also cover the period before an employment relationship for deaf jobseekers seeking opportunities.

Reasonable accommodation measures must also enable deaf persons to exercise their trade union and labour rights in national sign languages on an equal basis with others.

States Parties should also ensure that deaf persons can access all levels of education and vocational training in national sign languages. Only by obtaining qualifications and skills on an equal basis with others, will deaf persons be able to use their full potential in the labour market.

In order to monitor the levels of employment of deaf persons and other persons with disabilities, figures play an essential role. Particularly, States Parties must collect data disaggregated by disability type, as well as other grounds, to identify employment gaps and unused work force. Only with robust, reliable and disaggregated data by disability type will States Parties be able to put in place targeted policies to ensure the full inclusion of deaf persons in the labour market. Data disaggregated by disability type will also allow to monitor whether existing reasonable accommodation measures are sufficient and satisfies the demand. EUD recommends States Parties to use existing tools for the collection of disaggregated data by disability type, such as the Washington Group on Disability Statistics Question Sets.

States Parties should also promote self-employment and entrepreneurship of deaf sign language users to fully use their potential and promote the creation of fully signing working environments that would be fully accessible to other deaf sign language users. Successful deaf entrepreneurs can also become important deaf role models and contribute to diversify business leadership.

Moreover, EUD underlines that many of the barriers that deaf persons face to access work and employment continue to be based on stereotypes and stigma. In light of this, States Parties must develop comprehensive awareness raising campaigns to promote a positive image about the potential that deaf persons and other persons with disabilities bring to the labour market. These awareness raising campaigns should be designed with the meaningful consultation of persons with disabilities through their representative organisations.

Lastly, States Parties should recognise the intersectional and multiple discrimination faced by different deaf persons when accessing the open labour market. In this regard, policies aiming at the full inclusion of deaf persons in the open labour market should take into account the additional barriers faced by deaf women, deaf elderly and deaf persons living in rural areas, deaf gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, deaf persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion, deaf refugees and asylum seekers, deaf persons from ethnic minorities and deaf persons with multiple disabilities, including deafblind persons, and deaf persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities.