SignUnity

Inter-Continental Collaboration in Sign Language Interpreter VET Education

D2.2. Research report on mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in Europe and Sub-Sahara Africa

Co-funded by the European Union

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IMPRESSUM

Project	Inter-Continental Collaboration in Sign Language Interpreter VET Education
Acronym	SignUnity
Programme	Erasmus+ – Co-funded by the European Union
Action	Capacity Building in Vocational Education and Training (CB VET)
Work Package	WP2
Deliverable	D2.2 – Research report on mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa
Lead partner (WP2)	*Co-lead University of Ghana and Youth Power*
Version	v1
Date	*June 2026.*
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Dissemination level	Public

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Abstract

This report provides an overview of the research conducted to map existing educational programmes, national legislation, and legal frameworks related to sign language interpreter education and practice across Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa. It examines the structure and content of interpreter training curricula, looking at aspects such as learning outcomes, key competencies and teaching and assessment methodologies. In addition, the report reviews national policies and legal instruments governing sign language recognition, interpreter provision, and accessibility. A total of six research reports are included in this document providing a comprehensive understanding of the current state of sign language interpreter education and regulatory frameworks across the partner countries.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and Context 10

2. Methodology 11

2.1 Research Design 11

2.2 Programme Mapping Methodology 12

2.3 Policy and Legislative Alignment Assessment 12

2.4 Data Sources 13

2.5. Methodological Limitations 14

3. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in KENYA 15

3.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Kenya 15

3.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal framework in Kenya with International Sign Language Standards 17

3.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Kenya 19

3.3.1. Executive Summary 19

3.3.2. Introduction and Context 20

3.3.3. Methodology 21

3.3.4. Overview of Mapped Programmes 22

3.3.5. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes 25

3.3.6. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies 25

3.3.7. Competencies Developed 26

3.3.8. Availability and Accessibility of Training 26

3.3.9. Comparative Insights 27

3.3.10. Identified Gaps 27

3.3.11. Implications for VET Curriculum Development 27

3.3.12. Conclusion 28

3.4. Systematic report on how Kenya's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards 29

3.4.1. Introduction and Context 29

3.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment 30

3.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations 31

3.4.4.Detailed Alignment Analysis 32

3.4.5. Implications for VET and Ethics 34

3.4.6. Recommendations 35

3.4.7. Conclusion 36

4. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in GHANA 37
4.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Ghana 37
4.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Ghana with International Sign Language Standards 42
4.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Ghana 44
4.3.1. Introduction and context 44
4.3.2. Methodology 44
4.3.3. Overview of mapped programmes 45
4.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes 46
4.3.5. Programme structure and teaching methodologies 48
4.3.6. Competencies developed 49
4.3.7. Availability and accessibility of training 50
4.3.8. Comparative insights 51
4.3.9. Identified Gaps 52
4.3.10. Implications for VET curriculum development 53
4.3.11. Conclusion 54
4.4. Systematic report on how Ghana's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards 55
4.4.1..Introduction and Purpose 55
4.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment 55
4.4.3. Summary of alignment and deviations 56
4.4.4. Implications for VET and ethics 57
4.4.5. Recommendations 58
4.4.6. Conclusion 59
5. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in ETHIOPIA 60
5.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Ethiopia 60
5.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Ethiopia with International Sign Language Standards 63
5.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Ethiopia 64
5.3.1. Introduction and Context 64
5.3.2. Methodology 67
5.3.3. Overview of Mapped Programme 67
5.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes 68
5.3.5. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies 69

5.3.6. Competencies Developed 70
5.3.7. Availability and Accessibility of Training 71
5.3.8. Comparative Insights 73
5.3.9. Identified Gaps 75
5.3.10. Implications for VET Curriculum Development 76
5.3.11. Conclusion 77
5.4. Systematic report on how Ethiopia's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards 77
5.4.1. Introduction and Purpose 77
5.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment 78
5.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations 80
5.4.4. Implications for Vocational Education and Training and Ethics 83
5.4.5. Recommendations 84
5.4.6. Conclusion 86
6. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in GERMANY 87
6.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Germany 87
6.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Germany with International Sign Language Standards 99
6.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Germany 102
6.3.1. Introduction and Context 102
6.3.2. Methodology 103
6.3.3. Overview of Mapped Programme 105
6.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes 106
6.3.5. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies 108
6.3.6 Competencies Developed 109
6.3.7. Availability and Accessibility of Training 111
6.3.8. Comparative Insights 112
6.3.9. Identified Gaps 113
6.3.10. Implications for VET Curriculum Development 114
6.3.11. Conclusion 116
6.4. Systematic report on how Germany's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards 117
6.4.1. Introduction and Purpose 117
6.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment 118

6.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations 119
6.4.4 Implications for VET and Ethics 122
6.4.5. Recommendations 123
6.4.6 Conclusion 124
7. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in CROATIA 126
7.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Croatia 126
7.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Croatia with International Sign Language Standards 129
7.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Croatia 133
7.3.1. Introduction and Context 133
7.3.2. Methodology 134
7.3.3. Overview of Mapped Programme 136
7.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes 137
7.3.5. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies 139
7.3.6. Competencies Developed 140
7.3.7. Availability and Accessibility of Training 143
7.3.8. Comparative Insights 144
7.3.9. Identified Gaps 145
7.3.10. Implications for VET Curriculum Development 146
7.3.11. Conclusion 147
7.4. Systematic report on how Croatia's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards 148
7.4.1. Introduction and Purpose 148
7.4.2. Methodology of the Alignment Assessment 149
7.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations 150
7.4.4. Implications for VET and Ethics 155
7.4.5. Recommendations 155
7.4.6. Conclusion 156
8. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in ESTONIA 157
8.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Estonia 157
8.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Estonia with International Sign Language Standards 168
8.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Estonia 171
8.3.1. Introduction and Context 171

8.3.2. Methodology 172
8.3.3. Overview of Mapped Programme 174
8.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes 175
8.3.5. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies 176
8.3.6. Competencies Developed 177
8.3.7. Availability and Accessibility of Training 179
8.3.8. Comparative Insights 180
8.3.9. Identified Gaps 181
8.3.10. Implications for VET Curriculum Development 182
8.3.11. Conclusion 184
8.4. Systematic report on how Estonia's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards 184
8.4.1 Introduction and Purpose 185
8.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment 185
8.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations 186
8.4.4. Implications for VET and Ethics 189
8.4.5. Recommendations 190
8.4.6. Conclusion 192
9. Conclusion 192
10. References 197

1. Introduction and Context

The ability to communicate effectively is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of inclusive societies. For Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, sign language serves not only as a primary means of communication but also as an essential component of cultural identity, education, social participation, and equal access to public services. The provision of qualified sign language interpreters is therefore critical to ensuring that Deaf individuals can fully exercise their rights and participate meaningfully in education, healthcare, employment, legal proceedings, governance, and community life. International instruments, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), recognise the importance of sign languages and call upon States to facilitate their use through appropriate legislative, educational, and institutional measures.

In recent years, many countries have made significant progress in recognising sign languages and promoting inclusive education and accessibility. However, the availability and quality of professional sign language interpreting services continue to vary considerably across regions. In many contexts, there remains a shortage of qualified interpreters, fragmented training opportunities, inconsistent certification mechanisms, and limited pathways for continuing professional development. Existing educational programmes often focus on teaching sign language as a communication tool without fully equipping learners with the specialised linguistic, ethical, cultural, and technical competencies required for professional interpreting. These gaps have important implications for the quality, consistency, and accessibility of interpreting services available to Deaf communities.

Against this backdrop, the **SignUnity** project seeks to strengthen vocational education and training (VET) for sign language interpreters by promoting evidence-based curriculum development and fostering greater harmonisation across participating countries. As part of Work Package 2, this mapping exercise was undertaken to systematically identify and evaluate existing educational programmes and training practices for sign language interpreters. The exercise also examines how national policies, legal frameworks, institutional arrangements, and educational practices align with international standards and respond to the evolving needs of Deaf communities and interpreting professionals.

This report covers findings from six partner countries, Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia, Germany, Croatia, and Estonia, representing diverse legal traditions, educational systems, and stages of

interpreter education development. The analysis involve formal degree programmes, diploma and certificate courses, continuing education initiatives, professional standards, curriculum content, teaching methodologies, practical training, competency development, assessment approaches, and certification mechanisms. The report identifies both examples of good practice and common challenges that hinder the preparation of competent sign language interpreters.

Although the countries differ in the maturity of their interpreter education systems, several recurring themes emerge. These include the need for stronger competency-based curricula, greater emphasis on supervised practical experience, enhanced training in specialised domains such as healthcare and legal interpreting, integration of digital and remote interpreting skills, clearer certification pathways, and closer collaboration with Deaf communities in programme design and implementation. Ultimately, this report presents a robust evidence base for the development of a harmonised and practice-oriented VET curriculum for sign language interpreters under the SignUnity project. It offers valuable insights for policymakers, higher education institutions, vocational training providers, professional associations, and Deaf organisations seeking to strengthen interpreter education systems and improve equitable access to high-quality interpreting services. By consolidating experiences from multiple national contexts, the report contributes to the broader goal of advancing inclusion, accessibility, and the professionalisation of sign language interpreting across Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This synthesis adopted a qualitative, comparative desk-review methodology to map existing educational practices and policy frameworks related to sign language interpreter education across the participating countries. A standardised methodological framework developed under SignUnity Work Package 2 (WP2) was applied consistently to ensure comparability of findings across national contexts. The framework provided common benchmark criteria for evaluating interpreter education programmes and assessing the alignment of national policies and legislation with international standards and best practices.

2.2 Programme Mapping Methodology

The mapping of educational programmes was conducted using the standardised SignUnity programme assessment template (Appendix 1a), which applies a systematic benchmarking and gap analysis approach. Under this framework, each programme was evaluated against predefined benchmark expectations representing good practice in sign language interpreter education.

The assessment considered multiple dimensions, including:

- curriculum content and structure;
- programme learning outcomes and competency development;
- teaching and learning methodologies;
- supervised practical training and work-based learning opportunities;
- assessment and quality assurance mechanisms;
- certification and professional recognition;
- programme accessibility and availability;
- digital and remote interpreting competencies; and
- preparedness for interpreting in specialised contexts.

For each programme, evidence was extracted from official curricula, module descriptions, programme specifications, institutional documentation, and publicly available educational resources. The documented evidence was compared with the benchmark expectations to determine the extent of alignment and to identify gaps, weaknesses, and areas requiring further development.

2.3 Policy and Legislative Alignment Assessment

The review of national policies and legislative frameworks employed a complementary desk-based alignment assessment using the SignUnity policy assessment template. designed under WP2 of the project. This framework examined the extent to which national legal and educational arrangements aligned with internationally recognised principles relating to sign language interpreting and the rights of Deaf persons.

The assessment covered key areas such as legal recognition of sign language, access to interpreting services in education and public services, interpreter training standards, certification systems, ethics, quality assurance, digital accessibility, Deaf community participation, affordability of services, and consistency with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Each benchmark area was qualitatively assessed and categorised as:

- Fully Aligns,
- Partially Aligns, or
- Does Not Align,

based on the available documentary evidence and expert judgement.

2.4 Data Sources

The analysis relied primarily on documentary evidence obtained from publicly available and institutionally verified sources. These included:

- university and vocational education programme descriptions;
- curriculum documents, module outlines, and course specifications;
- accreditation and institutional reports;
- national legislation and government policy documents;
- professional standards and certification frameworks;
- official institutional and organisational websites;
- professional association publications; and
- relevant project documentation and completed SignUnity mapping templates.

Programme selection across countries was guided by common inclusion criteria requiring direct relevance to sign language, interpreter education, interpreter competence, or professional preparation, as well as sufficient publicly available documentation to enable systematic assessment.

2.5. Methodological Limitations

Although the use of a standardised framework enhanced consistency and comparability across countries, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the analysis relied predominantly on desk research and publicly available documentation. Consequently, the level of detail varied considerably between institutions and countries, with some programmes providing comprehensive curriculum information while others offered only limited descriptions.

Second, not all relevant aspects of interpreter education such as detailed teaching practices, assessment rubrics, supervised field placements, internal quality assurance procedures, or graduate outcomes were publicly documented. In such cases, the absence of evidence should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of absence.

Third, the mapping reflects the information available at the time of data collection. Programme revisions, policy updates, accreditation changes, or newly established training initiatives occurring after the review period may not be fully captured in this report.

Despite these limitations, the consistent application of the SignUnity methodological framework and the systematic benchmarking approach provide a robust and transparent basis for comparative analysis and for informing the development of future sign language interpreter education programmes.

3. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in KENYA



3.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Kenya

Table 1: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Kenya

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; spoken language competence addressed; interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; professional ethics embedded; specialised domains covered; digital and remote interpreting included.	Confirmed evidence is uneven across providers. KICD establishes foundational KSL learning for Deaf learners at school level, including Pre-Primary and Grade 1-3 curriculum designs, but this is not interpreter training. USIU-Africa focuses on KSL production and reception for hearing learners and publishes structured short-course content, tuition hours, teaching methods and certification. SPU provides the clearest interpreter-specific curriculum content: KSL acquisition, grammar, structure, sociolinguistic properties, cognitive processes in interpretation between KSL and English/Kiswahili, Deaf-community structure, and consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. Pioneer's public site distinguishes KSL acquisition from KSL interpreting training and references accuracy, fluency and ethics. KISE confirms KSL training but publishes limited detailed module-level information in accessible public sources.	Digital and remote interpreting is not clearly visible in the public programme descriptions. Specialized domains are strongest in SPU's job-context description and entry-level pathways but are not presented as fully developed module sequences. The distinction between KSL learning and professional interpreting is not consistently visible across the ecosystem.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; bilingual fluency developed; interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; ethical decision-making addressed; professional conduct emphasized; context-specific competence developed.	SPU explicitly requires proficiency in KSL and English/Kiswahili or other languages and foregrounds interpersonal communication, integrity, confidentiality and interpretation skills. USIU-Africa develops KSL communication proficiency in production and reception and uses assignments, exams and video-based learning. KICD's pathway supports early and continuing language development for learners with hearing impairment. Pioneer references interpreter accuracy, fluency and ethics, while KISE confirms KSL training as part of its special-needs training role.	Competency statements are rarely written as measurable occupational outcomes. Public evidence does not consistently show assessment of interpreting accuracy, ethical decision-making, professional conduct or context-specific competence through observed performance.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; defined entry requirements; adequate programme duration; balanced theory-practice	USIU-Africa has the clearest short-course structure: 5 weeks, 175 tuition hours, on-campus delivery, full-time or part-time options, and all-semester intake. SPU publishes detailed admission requirements including KCSE mean grade C-, KSL proficiency or KSL KCSE, and English/Kiswahili proficiency. KISE lists minimum	Supervised practice, internships and progression from KSL proficiency to professional interpreting are not sufficiently documented.

	integration; supervised practice or internships included.	KCSE D+ and online/full-time/school-based modes for KSL. UoN publicly reports a six-month course and certificate. KICD provides sequential basic education curriculum designs.	
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; simulations and role-play; case studies based on real contexts; involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; digital learning tools.	USIU-Africa explicitly uses face-to-face training, assignments and exams, video shooting and video watching. KICD curriculum designs guide teacher delivery in school contexts and link learning to communication development. KISE references online training and flexible modules in sign language, Braille literacy and assistive technology. Pioneer and SPU publish content areas relevant to practical interpreting, but detailed pedagogy is not fully available.	Public sources rarely specify simulations, role-play, case studies, mentoring, or supervised feedback cycles. Where digital tools are mentioned, they are not clearly linked to remote interpreting competence.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; practical performance assessments; portfolio or reflective practice; clear assessment criteria; quality assurance mechanisms.	USIU-Africa explicitly mentions assignments and exams within the training period. TVETA's CBET assessment guidelines require assessment evidence to be valid, authentic, sufficient and current, providing a strong benchmark for future VET alignment. KNQA and TVETA frameworks provide national quality-assurance direction for qualifications. SPU and KISE operate within recognized institutional contexts, but public programme-level assessment detail is limited.	Most providers do not publicly specify whether assessment includes live interpreting performance, ethical scenario assessment, reflective portfolios. Quality assurance is more visible at institutional/regulatory level than at programme-performance level.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognized qualification awarded; alignment with national qualification frameworks; pathway to professional certification or licensing; CPD requirements; ethical codes linked to certification.	USIU-Africa awards a certificate of completion for the short course. UoN publicly reports a certificate at completion of the six-month course. SPU offers a diploma in Kenya Sign Language Interpretation and publishes entry requirements and curriculum areas. KISE has certificate-style KSL provision in public sources. TVETA and KNQA provide the relevant national architecture for CBET and qualification alignment.	There is no clearly visible national interpreter licensing pathway in the programme sources reviewed. CPD requirements and ethical-code linkage to certification are not consistently published.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; affordable or subsidized options; inclusive admission and learning supports; adequate intake capacity.	KICD's school curriculum pathway is nationally relevant through the basic education system. USIU-Africa is Nairobi-based and publishes KSh 35,000 course fees plus KSh 1,000 application fee.UoN reports KSh 50,000 for a six-month course. KISE offers public-sector training modes including online, full-time and school-based/distance arrangements. Pioneer provides a Mombasa-based specialist option outside Nairobi.	Affordability varies. Regional access beyond Nairobi and Mombasa is not fully clear. Intake capacity, subsidies, disability-inclusive supports for trainees, and scholarships are not comprehensively documented.
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; consistency with international standards.	The mapped ecosystem aligns with Kenya's broader recognition of KSL in education and disability policy. The Ministry of Education sector policy recognizes the need to support learners and trainees with disabilities, and KICD embeds KSL in the basic education curriculum pathway. TVETA and KNQA provide a national	The programme landscape has not yet translated this policy architecture into a clearly visible national interpreter-training standard.

		qualifications architecture that can support standardized interpreter VET.	
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; digital professionalism addressed; ethical remote practice included.	USIU-Africa uses video shooting and video watching as part of teaching methodology, and KISE references online training. These are useful digital-learning elements. However, the public programme descriptions do not show dedicated remote interpreting modules, platform protocols, digital ethics, online confidentiality or fatigue management.	Remote interpreting competence is a major missing area in public programme documentation. It should be treated as a professional competency, not merely as use of online learning tools.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education, healthcare, legal and judicial settings, employment and public services; readiness for complex or high-stakes situations.	SPU explicitly identifies entry-level interpreter work in NGO, medical, legal, educational and community settings and includes consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. USIU-Africa targets public-facing professionals including teachers, NGOs, police and judiciary workers, but as KSL communication training rather than interpreter specialization. Pioneer references interpreting skills but does not provide a full domain-by-domain curriculum.	Healthcare, legal, emergency, employment and higher education interpreting require explicit modules, supervised placements and assessed specialization. Current public evidence shows exposure and intended work contexts, but limited proof of structured readiness for high-stakes domains.

3.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal framework in Kenya with International Sign Language Standards

Table 2: Comparative assessment of educational and legal framework on sign language in Kenya with interanational standard

Standard Area	International Expectation / Benchmark	Fully Aligns	Partially Aligns	Does Not Align	Notes / Evidence / Gaps
Legal recognition of sign language	Sign language is legally recognised as a natural language in national law or constitution.	✓			Strong constitutional alignment. Article 7(3)(b) requires the State to promote the development and use of Kenyan Sign Language, Braille and other accessible communication formats. Article 54(1)(d) gives persons with disabilities the right to use sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication. Gap: recognition is strong, but implementation systems for interpreting services, curriculum quality and professional standards remain underdeveloped.
Right to sign language interpreting	National laws guarantee access to professional sign language interpreters in public services.		✓		Partial alignment. The Constitution protects access to information and communication and the right to use sign language, and disability law/policy creates a strong inclusion foundation. However, there is no fully operational, nationally harmonised right-to-interpreter framework across public services. The research found access is strongest in planned events and weakest in healthcare, legal, employment and emergency contexts.
Education access	Deaf learners have access to sign language		✓		Partial alignment. The 2009 SNE framework recognises Kenyan Sign Language as the primary/first language of

	and/or interpreters at all education levels.				Deaf children and as a language for instruction and communication. The 2018 sector policy moves towards inclusive education. KICD curriculum designs exist for learners with hearing impairment. Gap: access to qualified interpreters and KSL-fluent educators is uneven beyond basic/specialised settings, especially in tertiary, vocational and mainstream institutions.
Healthcare access	Interpreting services are available in healthcare settings without discrimination or delay.		✓		Partial alignment. General constitutional and disability rights cover access to information, health and reasonable accommodation, but the research found healthcare to be one of the most difficult contexts. Deaf users cited privacy, diagnosis, treatment instructions, cost and absence of interpreters as key risks. There is no clearly evidenced national medical sign language interpreter deployment system.
Interpreter training standards	Interpreter education programmes are formalised, structured, and competency-based.		✓		Partial alignment. Kenya has training pathways through KSL short courses, KISE, university/college programmes and the St. Paul's University Diploma in Kenyan Sign Language Interpretation. However, the education mapping and interpreter survey show uneven duration and variable practical exposure across programmes.
Certification and accreditation	Interpreters are certified or accredited through recognised national systems.		✓		Partial alignment. Some programmes issue certificates or diplomas, but a unified national accreditation/licensing system for interpreters is not fully evidenced. The Kenyan Sign Language Bill, 2025 proposes standards, accreditation and interpreter registration, but it should be treated as a Bill until enacted and operationalised.
Professional ethics	National ethical codes exist and are applied in interpreter practice.		✓		Partial alignment. Professional ethics are covered in some training pathways and may be promoted by practitioner networks, but the research identified role-boundary pressure, impartiality, confidentiality, institutions speaking to interpreters instead of Deaf persons, and interpreters changing or summarising messages. A mandatory national code linked to certification, complaints and CPD is still needed.
Quality assurance mechanisms	Systems exist to monitor interpreter quality and address complaints.		✓		Partial alignment. General accountability principles exist in law and policy, but there is limited evidence of a dedicated interpreter quality assurance mechanism. Service users reported uneven quality and lack of clear complaint channels.
Availability of interpreters	There are sufficient trained interpreters to meet national demand.		✓		Partial alignment. Interpreters exist and demand is growing, especially in urban and organised event settings. However, service users reported cost, no interpreter available, waiting time and lack of services in key settings. Interpreters also cited poor coordination, funding gaps and geographic limitations.
Accessibility and affordability	Interpreting services are accessible geographically and financially.		✓		Partial alignment. Access is more likely when institutions budget for interpreting. Deaf users face cost barriers when they must pay personally. Rural and county-level access is less predictable, and there is no widely used national

					booking platform or public financing mechanism for everyday service access.
Deaf community involvement	Deaf organisations are involved in policy-making and interpreter education.		✓		Partial alignment. The Constitution and UNCRPD principles support participation. Deaf organisations and Deaf professionals contribute to training and advocacy spaces, but involvement is not yet consistently embedded as a mandatory requirement across policy design, curriculum development, certification and quality assurance.
Digital and remote interpreting	Policies and training address remote/digital interpreting and ethics.		✓		Partial alignment. Remote interpreting is widely used in practice, but training and policy coverage are not yet sufficiently developed. The Kenya research found technical problems, reduced communication quality, privacy concerns, fatigue and limited training as major challenges.
Alignment with UNCRPD obligations	National laws and practices reflect UNCRPD Articles 2, 9, 21, 24, and 30.		✓		Partial alignment overall. Kenya has strong constitutional recognition and several policy foundations consistent with UNCRPD language, accessibility, education and participation standards. However, implementation gaps remain in interpreter availability, professional standards, health and justice access, affordability, digital interpreting, quality assurance and Deaf-led participation.

3.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Kenya

3.3.1. Executive Summary

Kenya has an important but uneven ecosystem of Kenyan Sign Language education and interpreter-related training. The ecosystem includes national basic education curriculum designs for learners with hearing impairment, public special-needs education capacity-building through KISE, university short courses such as USIU-Africa's Accelerated Kenya Sign Language course, the University of Nairobi/KSLRP research and training tradition, private KSL training providers such as Pioneer Sign Language Training Institute, and the St. Paul's University Diploma in Kenyan Sign Language Interpretation. Together, these pathways demonstrate that Kenya has a recognised base for KSL education and Deaf-accessibility training. However, only a narrow portion of the mapped landscape appears to be explicitly designed as professional interpreter education.

The strongest direct pathway identified is the St. Paul's University Diploma in Kenyan Sign Language Interpretation, because the mapping input indicates coverage of KSL acquisition, grammar, sociolinguistics, Deaf community knowledge and consecutive/simultaneous interpreting between KSL, English and Kiswahili. The USIU-Africa short course is well-

structured and publicly documented, with a 5-week, 175-hour on-campus format targeting hearing persons, parents, teachers, NGO workers, police, judiciary and public-service workers. However, it is primarily a KSL communication course, not an interpreter qualification. KICD and KISE provide important foundational and public-sector relevance, but their visible contribution is more closely linked to learner education, special-needs education and basic KSL capacity than to professional interpreter formation.

The key finding is that Kenya's interpreter education gap is not simply the absence of KSL courses. It is the absence of a consistently standardised, competency-based, practice-intensive and quality-assured pathway that transforms KSL fluency into professional interpreting competence. This is consistent with the SignUnity Kenya research findings, where interpreters reported gaps in digital/remote interpreting, specialised settings, ethics, practical training, mentoring and Deaf-community engagement, while Deaf service users reported inconsistent access, uneven quality, ethical concerns and challenges in healthcare, legal, employment and emergency contexts.

3.3.2. Introduction and Context

Kenya has a strong legal and educational foundation for Kenyan Sign Language (KSL), and KSL is visible in the basic education curriculum for learners with hearing impairment. At the same time, the country's post-school sign-language training and interpreter-education ecosystem remains unevenly documented. The available public evidence shows multiple entry points into KSL learning, but fewer clearly documented pathways into professional sign language interpreting.

This report supports SignUnity Task T2.2 by mapping existing Kenyan KSL and sign language interpreter education pathways and assessing them against the Appendix 1a benchmark expectations. The aim is to identify what exists, what is clearly verifiable, what remains unclear, and what this means for the design of a future VET curriculum for sign language interpreters.

The mapping is important because the research with Deaf service users and interpreters showed that service quality depends not only on the number of people who know signs, but on interpreter competence, ethics, preparation, professional conduct, domain specialization, and quality assurance. The education system therefore needs a clear distinction between general KSL acquisition and professional interpreter formation.

3.3.3. Methodology

The mapping used the standardised framework for systematic mapping of existing sign language interpreter education programmes as presented in **Table 1**. The framework assesses curriculum content, competency development, training models and structure, teaching methodologies, assessment and quality assurance, certification and professional recognition, accessibility, legal and policy alignment, digital and remote interpreting competence, and context-specific preparedness.

The selection criteria were deliberately broad. At least three education programmes or pathways were reviewed, including one formal interpreter education pathway, university short-course KSL training, public special-needs education and foundational national curriculum pathways. This broader approach was necessary because Kenya's interpreter education pipeline is connected to multiple feeder systems: Deaf education, KSL short courses, teacher training, university research, private training and formal diploma-level interpreter education.

Data sources included the national programme list compiled by the project team, official institutional webpages where accessible, and the SignUnity Kenya survey and FGD findings. The mapping also used contextual literature on Kenyan Sign Language and recent KSL research evidence to interpret the national landscape.

Methodological limitations should be noted. Some programme-level curriculum documents, module descriptors, practicum requirements, accreditation details and assessment rubrics were not publicly available in the evidence reviewed. Where details were provided by the project team but not confirmed through a public curriculum document, the report treats them as national mapping inputs requiring validation. The report therefore distinguishes between verified evidence, programme-input evidence and gaps requiring direct institutional confirmation.

3.3.4. Overview of Mapped Programmes

Table 3 summarises the main Kenyan programmes and pathways reviewed. The mapping intentionally includes both interpreter-specific and foundational KSL education pathways because Kenya's professional interpreter pipeline depends on the wider KSL education ecosystem.

Table 3: Overview of sign language programme in Kenya

Programme / pathway	Type	Awarding / host	Duration	Mode	Target group	Verified evidence	Caution / gap

		institution					
KICD CBC Kenyan Sign Language curriculum pathway[1]	Foundational school curriculum pathway for Deaf learners; not an interpreter-training programme	KICD / basic education system	Pre-primary and lower primary designs publicly available; broader CBC framework covers later basic education	School-based / curriculum designs	Deaf learners in basic education; possible KSL exposure for hearing learners in later curriculum pathways	KSL curriculum designs for Pre-Primary 1-2 and Grade 1-3; Lower Primary designs guide teachers to deliver curriculum; framework positions KSL within communication, further study and world-of-work preparation.	Not a post-school interpreter qualification; no publicly visible professional interpreter practicum or certification pathway.
Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) Kenyan Sign Language training	Public special-needs education institution offering KSL training/certificate-style provision	KISE	KSL training; certificate/distance-learning information is indexed on KISE site	Online, full-time and school-based/distance modes	Educators, SNE practitioners and learners seeking KSL skills	KISE lists Kenyan Sign Language among training programmes and publishes minimum KCSE D+ and mode information; KISE also references online training modules in sign language and a full-time KSL intake.	Publicly accessible detail is limited on full curriculum modules, assessment, practicum, exact duration for all modes and programme-level approval status.
USIU-Africa Accelerated Kenya Sign Language[2]	Short course / bridging KSL communication course	USIU-Africa, School of Humanities and Social Sciences	5 weeks; 175 tuition hours	On-campus; full-time or part-time; day/evening classes	Hearing persons, parents of Deaf children, teachers, social workers, NGOs, police, judiciary and	USIU-Africa publishes duration, 175 tuition hours, on-campus delivery, all-semester intake, fee of KSh 35,000, application fee of KSh 1,000, assignments,	Strongly documented as KSL communication training, but not a full interpreter diploma

[1] KICD Curriculum Designs page: https://kicd.ac.ke/cbc-materials/curriculum-designs/

[2] USIU-Africa Accelerated Kenya Sign Language programme page: https://www.usiu.ac.ke/programs/accelerated-kenya-sign-language/

					public-service workers	exams, video shooting and watching, and certification at completion.	
University of Nairobi / KSLRP-related sign language short course	University-based short course and historically important KSL research/training pathway	University of Nairobi / KSLRP history	Six-month sign-language short course publicly reported; historical KSLRP work from 1991	Short course; delivery details not fully specified in public source reviewed	Higher education community, Deaf students support ecosystem, and persons seeking sign-language skills	UoN publicly reported a six-month sign language course costing KSh 50,000 and issuance of a certificate at completion; UoN historical materials also reference KSLRP establishment with KNAD in 1991.	
St. Paul's University Diploma in Kenya Sign Language Interpretation[3]	Interpreter-specific diploma programme	St. Paul's University, School of Theology	Diploma duration not clearly stated on the public page reviewed	University diploma programme;	Prospective entry-level interpreters and working interpreters upgrading skills	SPU states that the diploma prepares students to communicate with and interpret for Deaf/hard-of-hearing persons; includes KSL acquisition, grammar, structure, sociolinguistics, cognitive processes of interpretation between KSL and English/Kiswahili, Deaf-community structure, and consecutive and simultaneous interpreting skills; entry	Strongest interpreter-specific public curriculum evidence

[3] St. Paul's University Diploma Programmes page: https://www.spu.ac.ke/index.php/diploma-programmes

						requirements are published.	
Pioneer Institute of Sign Language	Private/specialist KSL acquisition and KSL interpreting training provider	Pioneer Institute of Sign Language, Mombasa	Not publicly specified	Institution-based training; exact modes not fully specified	Learners seeking KSL acquisition and interpreter-related skills	Pioneer's site distinguishes KSL acquisition training from KSL interpreting training; interpreting training references professional skills including accuracy, fluency and ethics; the provider is Mombasa-based and appears in a TVET-CDACC RPL practitioner list.	Public pages do not clearly publish duration, fees, curriculum module breakdown, assessment, practicum, qualification level or exact accreditation scope.

3.3.5. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes

The mapped programmes show three broad categories of provision. The first is foundational school-level KSL curriculum, led by KICD under the CBC. This is critical for Deaf learners and for the long-term language ecosystem, but it is not a professional interpreter training programme. The second category is KSL communication training for hearing persons and public-service actors. The third category is interpreter-oriented provision, most clearly represented by St. Paul's University.

SPU provides the strongest publicly visible interpreter-specific content. Its diploma page explicitly covers KSL acquisition, grammar, structure, sociolinguistic properties, cognitive processes associated with interpretation between KSL and English/Kiswahili, Deaf-community structure, and consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. USIU-Africa's short course is not a full interpreter diploma. It develops KSL production and reception for hearing participants and uses face-to-face sessions, assignments, exams, video shooting and video watching. The

course is therefore best treated as a bridging or access course that may feed into interpreter education, not as a substitute for full interpreter formation.

KISE's public evidence confirms KSL training and modes of access, while UoN evidence confirms a six-month course and its historically important KSLRP work. Pioneer confirms both KSL acquisition and KSL interpreting training, but public details are insufficient for full benchmarking.

3.3.6. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies

Programme structure is clearest for USIU-Africa, which publishes five weeks, 175 tuition hours, on-campus delivery, full-time or part-time options, all-semester intake, teaching methods, fees and application requirements. UoN publicly reports a six-month course and certificate. KISE publicly lists entry requirement and modes, and KICD provides curriculum designs for early grades. SPU provides detailed entry requirements and curriculum scope.

Teaching methods are most explicitly described by USIU-Africa. The published methods include daily face-to-face training, assignments, exams, video shooting and video watching. These methods are useful for language learning and may support receptive and productive KSL competence. However, interpreter education normally requires further methods such as role-play, simulations, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting labs, guided feedback, field observation, reflective journals and supervised practicum.

3.3.7. Competencies Developed

The strongest visible competencies across the mapped ecosystem are KSL acquisition, KSL production and reception, communication with Deaf people, and awareness of Deaf culture.

Interpreter-specific competencies are most visible in SPU's diploma, which references bilingual language proficiency, cognitive processes of interpretation, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, confidentiality, integrity, interpersonal communication and work in varied settings. Pioneer's public pages also reference interpreter accuracy, fluency and ethics.

The competency gap is that most programmes do not publish measurable occupational outcomes. A future VET curriculum should define competencies in assessable terms, including interpreting accuracy, completeness, clarity, ethical decision-making, role boundaries, preparation, self-monitoring, team interpreting, remote interpreting and specialization in high-stakes domains.

3.3.8. Availability and Accessibility of Training

Access to KSL learning appears broader than access to professional interpreter education. KICD provides a national school-based foundation for Deaf learners. KISE offers public-sector KSL training options, including online and other modes. USIU-Africa and UoN provide Nairobi-based university short-course routes. SPU provides a dedicated interpreter diploma, and Pioneer adds a specialist private-sector presence in Mombasa.

Affordability vary. USIU-Africa publishes a KSh 35,000 fee and a KSh 1,000 application fee. UoN publicly reports KSh 50,000 for a six-month sign-language course. KISE has public fee-structure material for certificate-style KSL provision. Pioneer's fees and duration were not clearly public in the reviewed sources.

Regional availability is still limited in the public evidence. Nairobi dominates the visible university and public-sector offerings, while Pioneer gives some evidence of coastal access in Mombasa. More blended, county-level and subsidized pathways would strengthen access.

3.3.9. Comparative Insights

The comparative picture is clear: Kenya has a meaningful KSL learning ecosystem. KICD anchors the foundational school pipeline; KISE provides public special-needs training; USIU-Africa and UoN offer short-course access; SPU is the strongest documented interpreter diploma; and Pioneer represents specialist private provision.

USIU-Africa hort-course provider in terms of duration, fee, teaching methods and target participants. SPU is the strongest on interpreter-specific curriculum content. KICD is strongest on national curriculum integration. UoN is historically important and publicly documents a six-month course. Pioneer is relevant and specialist, but public documentation is insufficient for full benchmarking.

The main systemic issue is not the total absence of programmes. It is the absence of a clearly visible national ladder from KSL proficiency to certified interpreter competence, specialization, CPD and professional recognition.

3.3.10. Identified Gaps

The first gap is limited domain specialization. Healthcare, legal, education, employment, public service, media and emergency interpreting require explicit curriculum modules and practical assessment.

The second gap is digital and remote interpreting. Public programme descriptions do not clearly show training on remote platforms, camera framing, visibility, confidentiality, digital professionalism, fatigue management and ethics in remote settings.

The third gap is quality assurance and certification. Kenya has KNQA and TVETA frameworks that can guide a competency-based VET qualification, but the mapped programme pages do not show a common interpreter certification pathway, CPD obligation or licensing system.

3.3.11. Implications for VET Curriculum Development

The VET curriculum should be modular, competency-based and aligned to KNQF/TVETA expectations. It should be designed as a professional interpreter pathway, not only as a KSL language course. A suggested progression is: KSL proficiency and Deaf culture foundation; bilingual transfer and interpreting theory; consecutive and simultaneous interpreting; professional ethics and role boundaries; supervised practicum; domain specialization; remote interpreting; assessment and certification.

The curriculum should include Deaf professionals in governance, teaching, mentoring and assessment. Deaf community involvement should not be symbolic; it should shape the language standards, user expectations, ethical practice and quality assurance of the programme.

Assessment should use observed performance, practical simulations, ethical case analysis, portfolios, reflective journals, remote interpreting tasks and feedback from Deaf users and professional interpreters. Written exams alone are not sufficient for professional interpreter certification.

The future VET design should also include CPD modules for already-practising interpreters, because many practitioners entered through informal, short-course or on-the-job routes and require structured upgrading opportunities.

3.3.12. Conclusion

The mapping confirms that Kenya has important foundations for KSL learning and interpreter development. KICD's curriculum pathway strengthens the early language base for Deaf learners; KISE, USIU-Africa and UoN provide accessible KSL learning routes; SPU offers the clearest interpreter-specific diploma content; and Pioneer adds specialist private-sector provision.

However, the public evidence also shows that Kenya needs a clearer professional interpreter training ladder. The most urgent improvements are standardised competency outcomes, practical assessment, supervised practicum, domain specialization, remote interpreting competence, Deaf-led participation, and clearer alignment with national qualifications and quality-assurance systems.

These findings provide a defensible evidence base for SignUnity's VET curriculum design and for national dialogue on strengthening sign language interpreter education in Kenya.

3.4. Systematic report on how Kenya's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards

3.4.1. Introduction and Context

This report assesses the extent to which Kenya's national education and legal framework on Kenyan Sign Language, Deaf education and sign language interpreting aligns with international standards, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and complementary global expectations for Deaf linguistic rights, accessibility, inclusive education, interpreter training, professional ethics and quality assurance (United Nations, 2006).

The analysis is important because Kenya has a comparatively strong constitutional foundation for Kenyan Sign Language. Article 7(3)(b) requires the State to promote the development and use of Kenyan Sign Language, Braille and other accessible communication formats. Article 54(1)(b) recognises the right of persons with disabilities to access educational institutions and facilities integrated into society to the extent compatible with their interests, while Article 54(1)(d) recognises their right to use sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication.

However, the SignUnity Kenya research findings show that legal recognition has not yet fully translated into reliable, affordable and quality-assured interpreting services across everyday and high-stakes contexts. Deaf service users reported major barriers in healthcare, legal settings, employment, education and emergencies, while interpreters reported poor coordination, weak booking systems, variable training quality, ethical pressure and limited domain specialisation. This report therefore focuses not only on what the legal and policy

framework states, but also on the implementation architecture needed to make rights effective in practice.

The purpose of the report is to identify areas of strong alignment, partial alignment, deviation and priority reform. The findings are intended to inform the SignUnity VET curriculum, interpreter ethics framework, policy dialogue and future national collaboration with Deaf organisations, interpreter bodies, education institutions and public agencies.

3.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment

The assessment applied the alignment template (**Table 2**), which compares the national education and legal framework against international expectations on sign language recognition, interpreting rights, education access, healthcare access, interpreter training standards, certification, ethics, quality assurance, availability, affordability, Deaf community involvement, digital interpreting and UNCRPD obligations.

The main national documents considered were the Constitution of Kenya, 2010; the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework, 2009; the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities, 2018; the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2025; and the Kenyan Sign Language Bill, 2025 as an emerging legislative reference. The assessment also used evidence from the SignUnity Kenya research report on service-user and interpreter perspectives to test whether policy commitments are reflected in lived practice.

The benchmark framework is anchored primarily in the UNCRPD. Article 2 recognises signed languages as languages. Article 9 requires accessibility to information, communication, services and facilities, including through professional sign language interpreters. Article 21 requires access to information and official communication through communication forms of choice. Article 24 requires facilitation of sign language learning, promotion of the linguistic identity of the Deaf community, and qualified teachers and staff. Article 4 requires close consultation and active involvement of persons with disabilities through representative organisations.

The assessment used three rating categories. “Fully aligns” means that the benchmark is clearly provided for in law or policy and has evident implementation mechanisms. “Partially aligns” means that the benchmark is recognised but implementation is incomplete or uneven. “Does not align” means that the benchmark is largely absent or not supported by credible implementation measures. Most areas in Kenya fall under partial alignment because the

constitutional and policy foundation is strong but implementation, financing, coordination, certification and quality assurance remain underdeveloped.

3.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations

Overall, Kenya demonstrates partial alignment with international sign language standards as presented in **Table 4**. The country has strong constitutional recognition of Kenyan Sign Language and an education policy foundation that recognises KSL in Deaf education. However, the system is still transitioning from rights recognition to enforceable, funded and quality-assured service delivery. The main deviation is therefore not legal invisibility, but implementation weakness.

Table 4: Comparitive analysis of national education and legislative framework on sign language in Kenya with international standard.

Area	Alignment rating	Synthesis
Legal recognition of sign language	Strong alignment	The Constitution expressly requires promotion and use of Kenyan Sign Language and recognises the right of persons with disabilities to use sign language.
Education access	Partial alignment	KSL is recognised in special needs education policy and curriculum pathways exist, but access to interpreters and KSL-fluent professionals across all education levels is uneven.
Right to professional interpreting	Partial alignment	General rights to communication, access to information and reasonable accommodation exist, but there is no fully operational national right-to-interpreter system across public services.
Healthcare, justice and emergency access	Partial alignment	These are high-stakes contexts under international standards, but research respondents identified them as among the least reliable and most challenging areas.
Interpreter training standards	Partial alignment	Training pathways exist, but they are not yet nationally harmonised around competency-based standards, supervised practice, specialist domains and digital interpreting.
Certification, accreditation and registration	Partial alignment	Programme qualifications exist, but a unified national licensing/accreditation system is not yet fully evidenced. The 2025 KSL Bill is promising but pending enactment/operationalisation.
Professional ethics and quality assurance	Partial alignment	Ethics are covered in some training pathways, but user and interpreter evidence shows unresolved role-

		boundary, confidentiality, impartiality and complaint-handling gaps.
Digital and remote interpreting	Partial to weak alignment	Remote interpreting is used in practice but policy, curriculum and ethics frameworks have not yet sufficiently caught up with digital delivery realities.
Deaf community involvement	Partial alignment	Participation is supported by constitutional and UNCRPD principles, but it should be institutionalised in curriculum development, accreditation and quality assurance.

3.4.4.Detailed Alignment Analysis

Legal recognition of Kenyan Sign Language

Kenya's strongest alignment area is constitutional recognition. Article 7(3)(b) places a duty on the State to promote the development and use of Kenyan Sign Language, Braille and other accessible communication formats. Article 54(1)(d) recognises the right to use sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication. This aligns strongly with UNCRPD Article 2, which includes signed languages within the definition of language, and with Article 21 on access to information and communication. The remaining challenge is translating recognition into clear standards, institutional obligations, budgets and enforceable access mechanisms (Constitution of Kenya, 2010; United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006).

Education access and Deaf learners

Kenya partially aligns with international expectations on Deaf education. The National Special Needs Education Policy Framework, 2009 recognises KSL as the primary/first language of Deaf children and as a language for instruction and communication (National Special Needs Education Policy Framework, 2009). The Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities, 2018 strengthens the inclusive education principle (Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities, 2018.). These commitments align with UNCRPD Article 24, which requires facilitation of sign language learning, promotion of Deaf linguistic identity and education in appropriate languages and modes of communication. However, implementation gaps remain in mainstream, tertiary and vocational institutions, where interpreter availability and KSL-proficient professional support are inconsistent.

Professional interpreting as a public service right

Kenya's legal framework supports communication access, but the right to professional interpreting is not yet consistently operationalised as a public service guarantee. The SignUnity research found that service users can access interpreters more easily when organisations plan and pay for them, but access becomes difficult when individuals must personally arrange and finance interpretation. This creates unequal access and weakens the practical meaning of constitutional rights in healthcare, courts, employment, public services and emergencies.

Healthcare, justice and high-stakes contexts

International standards place strong emphasis on access to health, justice and emergency services without discrimination or delay. In Kenya, these areas remain among the most significant deviations between rights and practice. Deaf service users reported that healthcare communication barriers affect explanation of symptoms, diagnosis, treatment instructions, privacy and trust. Legal and court contexts were also difficult because of technical language and the consequences of inaccurate interpretation. This points to a need for specialised medical and legal interpreter training, public financing and institutional booking protocols.

Interpreter education, certification and accreditation

Kenya has multiple KSL and interpreting-related education pathways, including public, university, college and private provision. The education mapping identified KICD curriculum designs, KISE short courses, university/college short KSL courses, and St. Paul's University's Diploma in Kenyan Sign Language Interpretation. However, the mapping and interpreter research show that training is not yet fully standardised around national competency standards, supervised practice, applied ethics, digital interpreting and specialised domains. A national accreditation and registration framework would strengthen quality and public trust.

Professional ethics and quality assurance

The research evidence shows that ethics is not an abstract issue. Deaf users reported interpreters changing messages, taking sides, breaching confidentiality or behaving professionally only sometimes. Interpreters reported pressure from institutions, clients asking them not to interpret information, role confusion, conflicts of interest and weak mechanisms for resolving dilemmas. A national ethical framework should be linked to licensing, CPD, supervision, complaints and sanctions.

Digital and remote interpreting

Remote interpreting is already used by both Deaf service users and interpreters in Kenya, but it remains under-regulated and under-supported. Users cited poor video or connection,

difficulty seeing signs clearly, reduced personal interaction and privacy concerns. Interpreters reported technical issues, fatigue, reduced communication quality and limited training. Policy and curriculum should therefore include remote interpreting standards, digital professionalism, privacy, fatigue management, technology setup and emergency protocols.

Deaf community participation

UNCRPD Article 4 requires close consultation and active involvement of persons with disabilities through representative organisations. Kenya's constitutional and policy environment supports participation, but Deaf community involvement should be made more systematic. Deaf organisations and Deaf professionals should be included in policy review, interpreter curriculum design, accreditation boards, complaints mechanisms, research, quality assurance and CPD delivery. This is essential to avoid designing systems about Deaf people without Deaf leadership (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006).

3.4.5. Implications for VET and Ethics

The policy alignment findings directly reinforce the curriculum implications identified in the SignUnity Kenya research and education mapping reports. Summary of implicaton is presented in **Table 5**. The future VET curriculum should not only teach language; it should prepare interpreters to deliver rights-based, ethical and context-specific communication access in line with national and international obligations.

Table 5: Implication of policy alignment for VET in Kenya

VET / ethics implication	Recommended response
Competency-based interpreting	Develop measurable competencies for KSL fluency, English/Kiswahili transfer, message accuracy, completeness, voicing, receptive skills and expressive clarity.
Applied ethics	Use Kenyan case studies on confidentiality, impartiality, role boundaries, institutional pressure, conflicts of interest and Deaf autonomy.
Specialised domains	Introduce compulsory exposure to education, healthcare, legal/judicial, employment, public services, media and emergency contexts.
Remote interpreting	Train interpreters on platform use, camera/lighting, signing space, turn-taking, privacy, security, fatigue, online team interpreting and contingency planning.
Deaf-led pedagogy	Ensure Deaf professionals and Deaf organisations contribute to curriculum design, teaching, assessment and quality assurance.
Certification and CPD	Link graduation to practical performance assessment and create pathways for continuing professional development, re-certification and specialisation.

User orientation	Develop modules and tools that also educate Deaf service users and institutions on how to work with interpreters, direct address, preparation and feedback.

3.4.6. Recommendations

Policy reform and implementation: Translate the constitutional recognition of KSL into enforceable sector guidelines requiring professional interpreting access in education, health, justice, employment, public services, emergency communication and civic participation. Each sector should define responsibility, budgets, booking processes, minimum qualifications and complaint channels.

Interpreter certification and accreditation: Establish a nationally recognised system for interpreter registration, certification, accreditation and licensing, linked to competency-based assessment, ethical compliance, CPD and renewal requirements. The Kenyan Sign Language Bill, 2025 should be monitored and strengthened to ensure these provisions are clear and implementable (Kenyan Sign Language Bill, 2025).

Quality assurance and ethics: Develop a national code of professional conduct for sign language interpreters, linked to training, supervision, complaints, disciplinary processes and user feedback. The code should cover confidentiality, impartiality, role boundaries, competence limits, preparation, remote practice and conflicts of interest.

Financing and service coordination: Create a publicly supported interpreting access mechanism, including national/county rosters, booking protocols and funding arrangements for priority services. This should reduce reliance on personal networks and ensure Deaf users are not forced to pay personally for access to essential services.

Specialised services for high-stakes contexts: Prioritise interpreter training and deployment for healthcare, legal/court, police, emergency, education and employment contexts. These areas should have specialist vocabulary, protocols, safeguarding standards and preparation requirements.

Deaf community participation: Institutionalise Deaf-led participation in policy formulation, curriculum development, accreditation, certification boards, interpreter assessment, complaints mechanisms and research. This is necessary for compliance with UNCRPD participation principles and for quality, legitimacy and trust.

Digital and remote interpreting standards: Develop national guidelines for remote interpreting, including platform requirements, visual quality, privacy, data protection, emergency backup, fatigue management, team interpreting and ethical conduct online.

3.4.7. Conclusion

Kenya has a strong constitutional foundation for Kenyan Sign Language and disability inclusion. Its legal and policy framework recognises KSL, communication rights and education access for persons with disabilities. This creates a strong platform for alignment with the UNCRPD and international sign language standards.

The main challenge is implementation. The research and mapping findings show that access to professional interpreting remains uneven, especially in high-stakes settings. Interpreter training exists but requires stronger standardisation, certification, supervised practice, ethics, specialisation and digital competence. Quality assurance and complaint mechanisms are not yet sufficiently visible to users or practitioners.

The overall assessment is therefore partial alignment with strong potential for full alignment if Kenya moves from recognition to enforceable systems. The most urgent next steps are national standards for interpreter education, certification and ethics; funded access in public services; stronger Deaf community participation; and policy guidance on digital and remote interpreting. These actions would strengthen both the SignUnity VET curriculum and Kenya's broader implementation of Deaf linguistic rights.

4. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in GHANA



4.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Ghana

Table 6: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Ghana (Diploma Programme in Sign Language)[4]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; Spoken language competence addressed; Interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; Professional ethics embedded; Specialised domains covered (education, healthcare, legal, public services, media); Digital and remote interpreting included	✓ Sign language linguistics covered (DSL 121, DSL 231) ✓ Deaf culture included (DSL 234) ✓ Interpreting introduced (DSL 242) ✓ Communication and speech covered (DSL 115, DSL 233)	✓ Limited specialised domains (healthcare, legal, media) ✓ Limited digital/remote interpreting training
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; Bilingual fluency developed; Interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; Ethical decision-making addressed; Professional conduct emphasised; Context-specific competence developed	✓ Practical courses (Fundamentals I & II, Practicum I & II) ✓ Bilingual communication emphasized ✓ Interpreting introduction included	✓ Limited explicit competency framework ✓ Limited ethical decision-making focus
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; Defined entry requirements; Adequate programme duration; Balanced theory–practice integration; Supervised practice or internships included	✓ 2-year structured diploma (60 credits) ✓ Semester-based progression ✓ Practicum included	✓ Entry requirements not detailed ✓ Limited integration of theory-practice articulation
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; Use of simulations and role-play; Case studies based on real contexts; Involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; Use of digital learning tools	✓ Lectures, demonstrations, presentations ✓ Practicum and field exposure	✓ Limited simulation/role-play ✓ Limited involvement of Deaf professionals explicitly stated
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; Practical performance assessments included; Portfolio or	✓ Exams, quizzes, assignments	✓ Limited portfolio-based assessment

[4] University of Education, Winneba, Department of Special Education. (2022). Diploma programme in sign language: Information for programme re-accreditation application. University of Education, Winneba

	reflective practice used; Clear assessment criteria; Quality assurance mechanisms in place	✓ Practicum supervision	✓ QA mechanisms not clearly outlined
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; Alignment with national qualification frameworks; Pathway to professional certification or licensing; Continuing professional development requirements; Ethical codes linked to certification	Diploma awarded by UEW	✓ No clear pathway to interpreter certification/licensing ✓ CPD not specified
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; Affordable or subsidised options; Inclusive admission and learning support Adequate intake capacity	Regular and sandwich modes	Affordability, inclusiveness, intake capacity not detailed
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; Alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; Consistency with international standards	✓ Aligns with Persons with Disability Act (2006) ✓ Supports inclusive education policy	Limited explicit linkage to international standards
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; Digital professionalism addressed; Ethical remote practice included	ICT and Educational Technology courses	No explicit remote interpreting training
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; Preparation for healthcare settings Preparation for legal and judicial settings; Preparation for employment and public services Readiness for complex or high-stakes situations	General communication and deaf education contexts covered	Limited preparation for healthcare, legal, and high-stakes interpreting

Table 7: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Ghana (Diploma Course in Ghanaian Sign Language)[5]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; Spoken language competence addressed; Interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; Professional ethics embedded; Specialised domains covered (education, healthcare, legal, public	✓ Includes Sign Linguistics (GHSL 007) ✓ Interpreting theory and techniques (GHSL 003, GHSL 005) ✓ Deaf culture (GHSL 200) ✓ Professional ethics (GHSL 032)	✓ Limited explicit digital/remote interpreting training ✓ Limited structured specialised domain modules (health/legal depth not modularised)

[5] Ghana National Association of the Deaf, & University of Cape Coast. (n.d.). Programme for proposed diploma course in Ghanaian Sign Language interpreting. Department of Educational Foundations, University of Cape Coast

	services, media); Digital and remote interpreting included	✓ Covers interpreting in multiple settings (legal, medical, education, etc.)	
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; Bilingual fluency developed; Interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; Ethical decision-making addressed; Professional conduct emphasised; Context-specific competence developed	✓ Bilingual competence (GSL - English interpreting courses) ✓ Practical interpreting training ✓ Ethical awareness and professionalism	✓ No explicit competency framework outlined ✓ Limited structured evaluation of decision-making processes
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; Defined entry requirements; Adequate programme duration; Balanced theory–practice integration; Supervised practice or internships included	✓ Two summer intensive structure ✓ Entry requirements defined ✓ Includes project and field placement	✓ Short duration may limit depth ✓ Limited continuous supervised internship structure
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; Use of simulations and role-play; Case studies based on real contexts; Involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; Use of digital learning tools	✓ Practical training and real-life interpreting exposure ✓ Deaf tutors involved (GNAD collaboration)	✓ Limited use of simulations/role play explicitly stated ✓ No clear digital learning tools integration
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; Practical performance assessments included; Portfolio or reflective practice used; Clear assessment criteria; Quality assurance mechanisms in place	✓ Continuous assessment + exams ✓ Practical and written exams ✓ Faculty Board oversight	✓ No portfolio-based assessment ✓ Limited reflective practice mechanisms
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; Alignment with national qualification frameworks; Pathway to professional certification or licensing; Continuing professional development requirements; Ethical codes linked to certification	✓ Diploma awarded by UCC ✓ Recognised academic qualification	✓ No clear pathway to licensing/certification ✓ No CPD framework defined
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; Affordable or subsidised options; Inclusive admission and learning support Adequate intake capacity	✓ Programme aligned with national disability policy ✓ Targets individuals with prior GSL knowledge	Limited information on affordability and access scale Intake capacity not specified
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; Alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; Consistency with international standards	✓ Strong alignment with Disability Act 715 ✓ Supports constitutional rights of Deaf persons	No explicit linkage to international interpreter standards
Digital and Remote	Training on remote interpreting platforms; Digital professionalism	Minimal reference to audiovisual tools	✓ No structured training in remote

Interpreting Competence	addressed; Ethical remote practice included		interpreting platforms ✓ No digital professionalism training
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; Preparation for healthcare settings	✓ Covers interpreting in education, healthcare, legal, religious, media contexts ✓ Field placement included	✓ Limited specialised high-stakes scenario training ✓ No structured modules per sector

Table 8: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Ghana (Registered General Nursing Curriculum)[6]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; Spoken language competence addressed; Interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; Professional ethics embedded; Specialised domains covered (education, healthcare, legal, public services, media); Digital and remote interpreting included	Includes history, alphabet, numerals, deaf culture, healthcare context, clinical terminologies, family concepts, food, diseases, sign language in healthcare settings.	Lacks formal interpreting theory, digital/remote interpreting, legal/media domains, professional ethics explicit coverage.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; Bilingual fluency developed; Interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; Ethical decision-making addressed; Professional conduct emphasised; Context-specific competence developed	Learning outcomes define knowledge of sign language, deaf culture, and ability to assist and communicate with hearing-impaired patients	No explicit bilingual fluency standards, no formal interpreting accuracy assessment, limited ethical decision-making training.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; Defined entry requirements; Adequate programme duration; Balanced theory–practice integration; Supervised practice or internships included	Structured as 1-credit course within nursing curriculum; includes lectures and practical communication skills.	No internships, limited duration, no progressive levels or entry requirements beyond nursing programme.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; Use of simulations and role-play; Case studies based on real contexts; Involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; Use of digital learning tools	Lectures, demonstrations, interactive sessions, group discussions.	Limited use of simulations, role-play depth, no digital tools, minimal involvement of Deaf trainers
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; Practical performance assessments included; Portfolio or reflective practice used; Clear	Quizzes, assignments, group presentations, end-of-semester exams.	No competency-based or practical interpreting assessment, no portfolio

[6] Nursing and Midwifery Council of Ghana. (2025). Registered general nursing curriculum 2025: Based on semester course unit system. Nursing and Midwifery Council of Ghana.

	assessment criteria; Quality assurance mechanisms in place		use, limited QA mechanisms.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; Alignment with national qualification frameworks; Pathway to professional certification or licensing; Continuing professional development requirements; Ethical codes linked to certification	Embedded within nursing curriculum; no standalone certification.	No alignment to interpreter certification frameworks or CPD pathways.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; Affordable or subsidised options; Inclusive admission and learning support Adequate intake capacity	Accessible within nursing training institutions.	No broader public access, no flexible learning modes, limited intake scope.
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; Alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; Consistency with international standards	Implicitly supports inclusive healthcare delivery.	No explicit alignment with sign language legislation or international interpreting standards.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; Digital professionalism addressed; Ethical remote practice included	Not included.	No digital or remote interpreting skills training.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; Preparation for healthcare settings	Strong focus on healthcare settings (OPD, wards, maternity, labs, etc.).	No preparation for legal, education, or high-stakes interpreting environments.

4.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Ghana with International Sign Language Standards

Table 9: Comparative assessment of educational and legal framework on sign language in Ghana with interanational standard[7]

Standard Area	International Expectation/ benchmark	Fully Aligns	Partially Aligns	Does Not Align	Notes / Evidence / Gaps
Legal recognition of sign language	Sign language is legally recognised as a natural language in national law or constitution.		✓		The Inclusive Education Policy recognises learners with hearing impairment and promotes sign language support services. However, there is no explicit legal recognition of Ghanaian Sign Language as a national language. Policy mentions training in sign language and support services for learners with SEN.

[7] https://sapghana.com/data/documents/Inclusive-Education-Policy-official-document.pdf

Right to sign language Interpreting	National laws guarantee access to professional sign language interpreters in public services.		✓		The policy provides for sign language support and professional services for learners with hearing impairment, including examination assistance and communication support, but it does not explicitly guarantee interpreting services across all public sectors.
Education access	Deaf learners have access to sign language and/or interpreters at all education levels.	✓			The policy strongly promotes inclusive education for learners with hearing impairment across basic, secondary, and tertiary levels. It provides for assistive devices, sign language services, inclusive curricula, and teacher preparation.
Healthcare access	Interpreting services are available in healthcare settings without discrimination or delay.			✓	The policy discusses collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health for assessment and early intervention, but there is no direct provision for sign language interpreting in healthcare settings.
Interpreter training standards	Interpreter education programmes are formalised, structured, and competency-based.		✓		The policy promotes professional training in sign language and special education support services, but it does not outline a formal national interpreter training framework.
Certification and Accreditation	Interpreters are certified or accredited through recognised national systems.			✓	No evidence of a national interpreter certification or accreditation system is provided in the policy.
Professional ethics	National ethical codes exist and are applied in interpreter practice.			✓	The policy does not provide information on interpreter ethical standards or codes of conduct.
Quality assurance mechanisms	Systems exist to monitor interpreter quality and address complaints.		✓		The policy includes monitoring and evaluation systems for inclusive education generally, but no specific quality assurance system for interpreters is identified.
Availability of interpreters	There are sufficient trained interpreters to meet national demand.		✓		The policy recognises the need for more trained professionals, including sign language personnel, indicating current shortages in provision.

Accessibility and affordability	Interpreting services are accessible geographically and financially.		✓		The policy advocates equitable access, social protection, and assistive support services, but does not clearly guarantee nationwide affordable interpreting services.
Deaf community involvement	Deaf organisations are involved in policy-making and interpreter education.	✓			The Ghana Blind Union and Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations participated in the development of the policy, demonstrating stakeholder engagement of disability organisations.
Digital and Remote Interpreting	Policies and training address remote/digital interpreting and ethics.			✓	The policy does not address remote or digital sign language interpreting.
Alignment with UNCRPD Obligations	National laws and practices reflect UNCRPD Articles 2, 9, 21, 24, and 30.	✓			The policy is explicitly based on international frameworks including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and promotes inclusive education principles aligned with UNCRPD obligations.

4.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Ghana

4.3.1. Introduction and context

Sign language interpreter education in Ghana is evolving within a broader national commitment to inclusive education and disability rights. Despite this, there remains a shortage of trained interpreters across sectors such as healthcare, education, legal services, and public administration. Existing programmes including the Diploma in Sign Language (UEW), General Sign Language for Nurses, and the UCC Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting represent foundational efforts to address this gap. This report, guided by a standadized template, maps these programmes to assess their contribution to interpreter education and identify gaps for future VET curriculum development.

4.3.2. Methodology

The mapping was conducted using a standardised mapping framework. Mapping using the Template is presented in **Tables 6, 7,** and **8**. The template uses a systematic benchmarking and gap analysis methodology to assess sign language interpreter education programmes. Each

programme is first evaluated against predefined benchmark expectations that represent good practice across key areas such as curriculum, competencies, teaching methods, and certification. Verifiable evidence from official curricula or course outlines and assessment frameworks is collected under "Evidence from Programme" column. This evidence is directly compared with the benchmarks to determine the level of alignment, after which any missing, weak, or inconsistent elements are identified and documented as gaps, particularly those affecting training quality and interpreter competence. The results are finally synthesised across programmes to highlight common strengths and deficiencies, providing a structured, evidence-based foundation for curriculum development and policy improvement.

Three programmes were selected based on clearly defined criteria to ensure relevance and comparability. First, the programmes were chosen for their direct relevance to sign language and interpreting, as evidenced by structured training in Ghanaian Sign Language, communication, and interpreting practice within the Diploma programme and applied sign language use in healthcare contexts in the nursing curriculum. Second, the selection ensured representation across different sectors - education (Diploma in Sign Language), healthcare (Sign Language for Nurses), and professional interpreting - capturing diverse application contexts of sign language. Third, only programmes with clearly documented and structured curriculum content, including defined learning outcomes, course components, and assessment methods, were included to enable systematic mapping and reliable analysis.

Data sources

- UEW Diploma in sign language programme
- UCC Sign Language interpreter course
- General Sign language for nurses

4.3.3. Overview of mapped programmes

The three mapped programmes (**Table 10**) represent diverse approaches to sign language education across education, healthcare, and professional interpreting contexts. The Diploma in Sign Language offered by the University of Education, Winneba is a formal academic programme designed to build comprehensive competencies in Ghanaian Sign Language, deaf culture, and interpreting, delivered over a two-year period with both regular and sandwich modes. The Sign Language for Nurses course is a short, non-credit professional training embedded within the nursing curriculum, focusing on practical communication skills for

healthcare delivery to persons with hearing impairment. The third programme (Sign Language Interpreter training) represents a specialised professional pathway aimed at developing interpreting skills for broader service contexts. Collectively, the programmes target different learner groups, students, healthcare professionals, and aspiring interpreters highlighting varied training depths, delivery modes, and institutional frameworks.

Table 10: Summary of sign language interpreting programme in Ghana

Programme	Programme Type	Duration	Mode of Delivery	Target Group	Awarding Institution
Diploma in Sign Language	Formal academic (Diploma)	2 years	Regular & Sandwich (lectures, practicum)	Students, teachers, interpreters, professionals	University of Education, Winneba
General Sign Language for Nurses	Short professional course	Embedded (1 credit course)	Lectures, demonstrations, interactive sessions	Nursing students/health professionals	Nursing Training Institutions (Ghana)
Sign Language Interpreter Course	Professional training	Short–medium term (16 weeks)	Practical, competency-based	Aspiring interpreters	University/Training institution (e.g., UCC)

4.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes

Coverage across programmes

Strong areas

Across the three programmes, several strong and consistently covered areas emerge. First, all programmes demonstrate substantial emphasis on Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) structure and vocabulary, with the Diploma programme providing in-depth training through courses such as Fundamentals of GSL and Sign Linguistics, while the nursing course introduces learners to foundational elements such as alphabet, numerals, and basic communication relevant to practice. Second, Deaf culture and history are well integrated, particularly in the Diploma programme, which includes dedicated content on deaf culture, history of GSL, and sociocultural perspectives, and in the nursing course where understanding deaf culture is linked to effective

healthcare delivery. Third, communication skills and linguistics are strongly represented, with structured training in communication strategies, language development, and linguistic analysis of sign language in the Diploma programme, complemented by applied communication skills in healthcare settings in the nursing curriculum. Overall, these areas reflect a solid foundation across programmes in both theoretical knowledge and practical communication competencies.

Interpreting-specific content

Interpreting-specific content is primarily concentrated in the Sign Language Interpreter programme (UCC), which provides more specialised training compared to the other programmes. This includes structured coverage of interpreting theory, equipping learners with foundational concepts and techniques for professional practice. The programme also emphasises bidirectional interpreting (GSL - English), enabling learners to develop proficiency in both receptive and expressive interpreting across languages. In addition, there is clear focus on ethics and professionalism, preparing trainees to adhere to professional standards, confidentiality requirements, and appropriate conduct in diverse interpreting settings. In contrast, while the Diploma programme introduces basic interpreting concepts, it does not provide the same depth of specialised, practice-oriented interpreter training.

Sector-specific content

The Sign Language for Nurses programme demonstrates strong sector-specific orientation by integrating sign language skills within healthcare delivery contexts. The course emphasises clinical terminology, enabling learners to communicate essential medical concepts and procedures to patients with hearing impairment. It also focuses on patient interaction, equipping nursing trainees with practical communication strategies for consultations, diagnosis, and care delivery in clinical settings. In addition, the programme covers health-related vocabulary, including common signs related to symptoms, treatments, and healthcare environments, ensuring that learners can effectively engage with patients in real-life situations. Overall, this targeted approach enhances the ability of healthcare professionals to provide inclusive and accessible services.

Weak coverage areas

Across the analysed programmes, several gaps are evident in specialised and emerging areas of interpreter training. There is limited or no explicit coverage of legal and judicial interpreting, with the Diploma programme focusing more on general communication, education, and basic

interpreting concepts rather than specialised legal contexts. Similarly, media and public service interpreting are not systematically addressed, as training largely centres on classroom, community, and basic service interactions. In addition, digital and remote interpreting is weakly covered, with only general exposure to ICT tools in the Diploma programme and no dedicated training on remote interpreting platforms or digital professionalism. Finally, advanced interpreting techniques such as simultaneous interpreting, discourse management, or high-stakes interpreting are minimally developed, particularly outside the specialised interpreter programme, indicating a gap in preparing learners for complex, professional interpreting environments.

4.3.5. Programme structure and teaching methodologies

Structure

The analysed programmes demonstrate varied structures reflecting their different objectives and target groups. The UEW Diploma in Sign Language follows a semester-based structure (four semesters, 60 credits) with a balanced integration of theory and practice, including structured coursework in linguistics, deaf culture, and communication, alongside practicum components that provide supervised field experience. The UCC Sign Language Interpreter programme adopts an intensive modular (often summer-based) format, characterised by concentrated training sessions, high contact hours, and the inclusion of practical activities, project work, and field-based learning to strengthen interpreting competence. In contrast, the Sign Language for Nurses programme is designed as a short, introductory module, focusing on basic communication skills for healthcare settings, with limited depth and duration compared to the other programmes. Therefore, the structures reflect a progression from foundational awareness (nursing) to comprehensive academic training (UEW) and specialised professional preparation (UCC).

Teaching methods

From the assessed programmes, teaching approaches are largely practice-oriented but grounded in conventional instructional methods. All programmes utilise lectures and presentations as the primary mode of content delivery, particularly for theoretical components such as linguistics, deaf culture, and communication. This is complemented by demonstrations and practical sessions, which are essential for developing sign language proficiency and applied communication skills, especially in both the Diploma and nursing programmes. In addition,

there is limited but notable inclusion of practicum or field-based learning, particularly in the UEW Diploma (through structured practicum courses) and the UCC programme, where supervised practical exposure supports skill development in real-life contexts. Overall, while practical elements are present, they remain relatively constrained in depth and duration across programmes.

Gaps in methodology

Despite the inclusion of lectures, demonstrations, and some practical exposure, the programmes show notable methodological gaps. There is limited use of simulations and role-play, which are critical for developing real-time interpreting and decision-making skills. Similarly, case-based learning is not systematically integrated, with little evidence of structured use of real-life scenarios to build contextual competence. The use of digital tools is minimal, largely restricted to general ICT exposure rather than dedicated training in technology-enhanced or remote interpreting environments. In addition, there is no clear evidence of structured interpreter labs or specialised practice environments, which are essential for intensive skill development and feedback in professional interpreter training. These gaps suggest a need for more experiential, technology-enabled, and practice-intensive pedagogical approaches.

4.3.6. Competencies developed

Core competencies identified

Across the three programmes, a range of competencies are developed with varying depth and focus. Sign language proficiency is strongly covered across all programmes, supported by structured training in Ghanaian Sign Language, vocabulary development, and practical communication skills. Similarly, deaf culture awareness is well integrated, particularly within the Diploma programme through dedicated courses on deaf culture, history, and sociocultural contexts. Interpreting accuracy is developed to a moderate level, mainly within the UCC interpreter programme and to a limited extent in the UEW Diploma through introductory interpreting components. In contrast, ethical decision-making is only weakly addressed, with little explicit or structured focus across programmes. Professional conduct receives moderate attention, particularly through practicum and applied learning components, while context-specific interpreting (e.g., legal, healthcare, media) remains generally weak across programmes, with the exception of basic healthcare communication in the nursing course.

In short, the UEW Diploma programme emphasises general communication competence rather than full professional interpreting, the UCC programme develops intermediate-level interpreting competence, and the nursing programme focuses primarily on functional, context-specific communication skills for healthcare delivery.

4.3.7. Availability and accessibility of training

Accessibility factors

The availability and accessibility of sign language training across the analysed programmes remain constrained. Geographic access is limited, as programmes are offered by only a few specialised institutions, restricting nationwide reach. In terms of entry requirements, there is variation across programmes, with the UCC interpreter programme requiring prior knowledge of sign language, which may limit access for beginners. Affordability is not clearly standardised, with limited information on fees, subsidies, or financial support mechanisms, making it difficult to assess inclusiveness. Additionally, the mode of delivery is predominantly face-to-face, with little evidence of flexible or online learning options, potentially limiting participation for working professionals or learners outside major urban centres. These factors suggest moderate accessibility with significant room for expansion and inclusivity.

Inclusion

The analysed programmes demonstrate partial alignment with inclusive education objectives; some are explicitly designed to support communication with deaf individuals and aligns with national inclusive education policies and disability legislation. Others are designed to contributes to improving access to interpreting services across sectors. However, there is limited evidence of structured support for diverse learners, such as tailored learning accommodations, assistive technologies, or differentiated instructional strategies. As a result, while the programmes promote inclusion in principle, practical mechanisms to ensure full participation of learners with diverse needs remain underdeveloped.

4.3.8. Comparative insights

Strengths across programmes

Across the analysed programmes, several key strengths are evident. There is a strong grounding in Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL), with structured training in language development, vocabulary, and communication skills forming a core component of all programmes. In addition, Deaf culture is well integrated, particularly within the Diploma programme through

dedicated courses on deaf history, sociocultural perspectives, and community engagement. The programmes also show alignment with national disability legislation and inclusive education policies, as reflected in their focus on improving communication access and supporting the inclusion of persons with hearing impairment in education and service delivery. Collectively, these strengths provide a solid foundation for developing inclusive and contextually relevant sign language training in Ghana.

Differences

The comparison highlights that while each programme serves an important role, no single programme provides comprehensive interpreter training across all domains, particularly in terms of advanced interpreting, sector-specific applications, and professional standardisation.

The three programmes show clear differences in focus, depth, practical training, and professional orientation. The UEW Diploma is centred on general sign language and communication, offering a broad and foundational curriculum with moderate practical exposure through practicum components. In contrast, the UCC programme is focused on professional interpreting, providing more specialised and competency-based training with stronger emphasis on practical and field-based learning, and a higher level of professional orientation. The Sign Language for Nurses programme is more introductory and sector-specific, concentrating on healthcare communication with limited depth and minimal practical training.

4.3.9. Identified Gaps

Curriculum gaps

The analysis of the programme documents reveals several important curriculum gaps across the three programmes. There is limited or no structured inclusion of digital and remote interpreting, with training largely confined to general ICT exposure rather than specialised skills for online or platform-based interpreting. Similarly, legal and judicial interpreting is not explicitly addressed, as the curricula focus mainly on education, general communication, and basic service contexts. In addition, advanced interpreting strategies such as simultaneous interpreting, discourse management, and high-stakes interpreting are largely absent, with most programmes providing only introductory or intermediate-level interpreting exposure. Finally, professional ethics frameworks are not systematically embedded within the curricula, with limited explicit training on ethical standards, decision-making, and professional codes required

for interpreter practice. These gaps indicate a need for more specialised, practice-oriented, and professionally aligned curriculum development.

Structural gaps

The programme documents reveal certain structural limitations affecting the overall development of sign language and interpreting training. There is a lack of a nationally standardised curriculum, as programmes differ significantly in content, depth, and focus, reflecting institutional priorities rather than a unified framework. In addition, there are limited progression pathways, with no clearly defined academic or professional ladder from introductory training (e.g., nursing) to advanced or specialised interpreter qualifications. Furthermore, there is weak integration of theory and advanced practice, particularly in relation to higher-level interpreting skills, where theoretical knowledge is not consistently reinforced through intensive, structured practical training environments. These structural gaps limit coherence, comparability, and professional standardisation across programmes.

Competency gaps

The programme documents indicate certain competency gaps that affect the development of fully professional interpreters. Interpreting accuracy and speed are not consistently developed across programmes, as most training emphasises general communication or introductory interpreting rather than intensive, real-time practice required for high-level performance. Ethical decision-making is also insufficiently addressed, with limited structured training on professional ethics, confidentiality, and interpreter conduct. In addition, there is weak preparation for multi-domain interpreting readiness, as programmes do not adequately equip learners to operate across specialised contexts such as legal, healthcare (beyond basic communication), media, or public services. These gaps highlight the need for more advanced, competency-based and context-driven training approaches.

Access gaps

The programme documents highlight notable access limitations across the training landscape. There is limited programme availability, as sign language and interpreting training is offered by only a few institutions, restricting opportunities for wider participation. In addition, entry requirements can be restrictive, in some of the programmes, prior knowledge of sign language is required, potentially excluding beginners or those without prior exposure. These factors collectively constrain access and limit the expansion of a broader, inclusive training pipeline

4.3.10. Implications for VET curriculum development

The analysis of the mapped programmes highlights several priorities for strengthening VET curriculum development in sign language and interpreting. Key priority competencies include the development of advanced interpreting techniques, stronger grounding in ethical and professional standards, improved capacity for context-specific interpreting (particularly in healthcare, legal, and educational settings), and the integration of digital and remote interpreting skills, which are currently underdeveloped across programmes.

To address these gaps, curricula should adopt a modular, competency-based design that allows for progressive skill development and flexibility. Teaching and learning approaches should be enhanced through the integration of simulations, role-play, and real-life interpreting scenarios to strengthen practical competence and decision-making. In addition, the involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers is critical to ensure authenticity, cultural competence, and real-world relevance in training delivery.

Structurally, there is a need to establish clear progression pathways from basic to intermediate and advanced levels, enabling learners to build competencies systematically across programmes. The adoption of blended learning approaches can improve accessibility and flexibility, while certification should be aligned with recognised professional standards to enhance credibility, quality assurance, and employability outcomes.

4.3.11. Conclusion

The analysis shows that Ghana has important foundational programmes in sign language education, but interpreter-specific training remains underdeveloped and fragmented. While some of the sign language provides provides broad linguistic and cultural grounding and as well, delivers targeted interpreter training, there is no comprehensive, standardised national framework that fully prepares interpreters across all domains.

The findings highlight the urgent need for a structured, competency-based VET programme that integrates advanced interpreting skills, digital competencies, and sector-specific training to improve the quality and availability of interpreting services in Ghana.

4.4. Systematic report on how Ghana's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards

4.4.1.Introduction and Purpose

This report assesses the extent to which Ghana's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards on sign language and inclusive education. Currently, Ghana do not have a single educational policy document on sign language, however, the closest document which relates to sign language education and legal framework is the national inclusive education policy. The assessment is therefore based primarily on the Government of Ghana Inclusive Education Policy (2015) and guided by the international benchmarks outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and recommendations of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD).

The report focuses on legal recognition of sign language, accessibility to interpreting services, educational inclusion of Deaf learners, interpreter training and certification, ethical standards, quality assurance systems, and participation of Deaf communities in policy implementation. The purpose is to identify areas where Ghana demonstrates strong alignment with international standards, as well as areas where policy and implementation gaps remain. The report further highlights implications for vocational education and training (VET), interpreter education, and ethical practice in sign language services.

4.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment

The assessment was conducted using the "Template for Alignment of National Educational System with International Sign Language Standards (**Table 9**)." The template compares national educational policies and legal provisions with international standards and benchmarks derived mainly from the UNCRPD Articles 2, 9, 21, 24, and 30. The Inclusive Education Policy of Ghana (2015) served as the principal policy document for the review. Additional guidance was drawn from international sign language standards established by the World Federation of the Deaf and international inclusive education principles. The assessment adopted a qualitative document analysis approach. Relevant sections of the Inclusive Education Policy were reviewed to determine whether they fully align, partially align, or do not align with the identified international benchmarks. Evidence was extracted from policy provisions relating to inclusive education, teacher preparation, sign language support, disability inclusion, assistive services, and stakeholder participation.

The alignment ratings were interpreted as follows:

- Fully Aligns: where international standards are clearly reflected in legislation, policy, and implementation mechanisms.
- Partially Aligns: where some elements of the standards exist, but implementation or policy coverage remains incomplete.
- Does Not Align: where standards are absent or minimally addressed in national frameworks.

4.4.3. Summary of alignment and deviations

The assessment revealed that Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy demonstrates moderate alignment with international standards on sign language and Deaf inclusion. Strong areas of alignment were identified in educational access, inclusion principles, and alignment with the UNCRPD. The policy strongly promotes inclusive education across all educational levels, including basic, secondary, technical, vocational, and tertiary education. Deaf learners and learners with hearing impairment are recognised as part of the broader category of learners with special educational needs. The policy further supports the provision of assistive devices, sign language support, inclusive curricula, and teacher training to improve access and participation.Another important strength is the involvement of disability organisations in policy development. The participation of the Ghana Blind Union and the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations demonstrate stakeholder engagement and collaboration in promoting inclusive education.

Despite these strengths, several important gaps were identified. The policy does not explicitly recognise Ghanaian Sign Language as a legally recognised national language. While sign language support is mentioned, there is no direct legal guarantee for professional sign language interpreting services across all public sectors such as healthcare, justice, and public administration. Similarly, there is no clearly defined national interpreter certification or accreditation framework. Interpreter education and competency standards are not formally regulated, and the policy does not provide detailed provisions on interpreter ethics, quality assurance mechanisms, or complaint systems. Digital and remote interpreting services are also absent from the policy framework. The assessment also found that there are insufficient numbers of trained sign language professionals to meet national demand. Although the policy

recognises the need for specialised personnel and training, implementation challenges and limited resources continue to constrain service delivery.

4.4.4. Implications for VET and ethics

The findings of this assessment have important implications for vocational education and training (VET), interpreter education, and professional ethics in Ghana.

First, there is a significant need for competency-based training programmes for sign language interpreters. Existing educational structures do not yet provide comprehensive national training standards for interpreters. VET institutions and teacher education institutions therefore need to integrate specialised sign language and interpreting programmes into their curricula. Second, ethical training for interpreters remains limited. International best practice requires interpreters to adhere to professional ethical standards including confidentiality, impartiality, accuracy, and respect for Deaf culture. The absence of formal ethical codes within the national framework creates potential risks relating to professionalism and service quality. Third, there is a need for continuous professional development for teachers, interpreters, and support personnel working with Deaf learners. The Inclusive Education Policy emphasises teacher preparation and professional development, but specialised sign language competencies remain insufficiently developed.

Another implication concerns accessibility within technical and vocational education institutions. The policy encourages inclusive access across educational levels, yet many VET institutions may lack trained interpreters, assistive technologies, and accessible learning environments necessary for Deaf learners to fully participate. Finally, the lack of formal quality assurance systems for interpreter services may negatively affect service consistency and reliability. Establishing national standards, accreditation systems, and monitoring mechanisms will therefore be essential for improving professional practice and ensuring equitable access for Deaf persons.

4.4.5. Recommendations

Based on the assessment findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1) Legal Recognition of Sign Language: The Government of Ghana should formally recognise Ghanaian Sign Language in national legislation and educational policies as an official language of communication for Deaf persons.

2) Establishment of Interpreter Training and Certification Systems: National interpreter training programmes should be formalised and standardised within universities, colleges of education, and vocational training institutions. A national accreditation and certification framework should also be established.
3) Development of Professional Ethical Standards: Professional codes of ethics for sign language interpreters should be developed and enforced through recognised professional bodies and regulatory institutions.
4) Expansion of Sign Language Services: Government institutions should ensure the availability of professional sign language interpreting services across education, healthcare, legal, and public service sectors.
5) Strengthening Quality Assurance Mechanisms: Monitoring and evaluation systems should be developed to assess interpreter quality, professional conduct, and service effectiveness. Complaint and accountability mechanisms should also be introduced.
6) Capacity Building and Professional Development: Teachers, interpreters, healthcare workers, and public service providers should receive continuous professional development in inclusive education and sign language communication.
7) Promotion of Digital and Remote Interpreting: Policies should be developed to support remote and digital sign language interpreting services, particularly in rural and underserved communities.
8) Increased Deaf Community Participation: Deaf organisations and representatives should be actively involved in policy-making, interpreter education, curriculum development, and monitoring of implementation processes.
9) Increased Funding for Inclusive Education: Government and development partners should increase financial support for assistive technologies, interpreter services, and inclusive educational infrastructure.

4.4.6. Conclusion

The assessment demonstrates that Ghana's Inclusive Education Policy reflects a strong commitment to inclusive education and alignment with international disability rights principles, particularly the UNCRPD. Significant progress has been made in promoting access to education for learners with disabilities, including Deaf learners. However, important gaps remain in relation to sign language recognition, interpreter training and certification, ethical regulation,

quality assurance, and accessibility to interpreting services across sectors. These gaps limit full compliance with international standards and reduce the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation.

Addressing these challenges will require stronger legal frameworks, investment in interpreter education and professional development, enhanced quality assurance systems, and greater involvement of Deaf communities in decision-making processes. Strengthening these areas will contribute significantly to equitable access, social inclusion, and educational participation for Deaf persons in Ghana.

5. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in ETHIOPIA



5.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Ethiopia

Table 11: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Ethiopia (BA in Special Needs & Inclusive Education (SNIE) Programme

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from programme	Gaps Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics, spoken competence, interpreting theory, Deaf culture, ethics, specialised domains, digital/remote interpreting	Moderate and theoretical focus on sign language, Deaf culture, basic interpretation, ethics; limited specialization	Some contents in sign language, however, overall curriculum gaps-Lack of Sign language linguistics, spoken competence, interpreting theory, Deaf culture, ethics, specialised domains, digital/remote interpreting
Competency Development	Core competencies, bilingual fluency, interpreting accuracy, ethics, professional conduct, context competence	Moderate interpreting competencies (revealed in two courses); limited interpreter-specific skills	Weak professional interpreter competency frameworks
Training Models & Structure	Structured progression, adequate duration, theory-practice balance, internships	4-year structured progression; however, inadequate duration for practice and internships	No dedicated interpreter training pathway
Teaching Methodologies	Practice-based, simulations, case studies, Deaf trainers, digital tools	Practicum presented; limited Deaf trainer input	Insufficient Deaf-led and simulation-based professional training
Assessment & Quality Assurance	Competency-based, practical assessment, reflective practice, QA	University assessment systems used; weak interpreter-specific standards weak	No professional interpreter assessment benchmarks
Certification & Recognition	Recognised qualification, licensing, CPD, ethics	BA Degree in SNIE qualification only	No interpreter-specific certification or licensing
Accessibility & Availability	Geographic access, affordability, inclusion, intake	It is accessible to higher education students, but less focus on sign language	Limited national coverage and specialization in Sign language
Legal & Policy Alignment	National legislation, access rights, international standards	Partial inclusion policy alignment	Weak operationalization of interpreter rights
Digital & Remote Competence	Remote platforms, professionalism, ethics	Absent	Major national digital gap

Context-Specific Preparedness	Education, healthcare, legal, employment, high-stakes contexts	Merely education-focused, no medical, legal and other contexts	Limited context-specific readiness beyond educational institution settings

Table 12: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Ethiopia (Education for college of teacher education Programme

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from programme	Gaps Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics, spoken competence, interpreting theory, Deaf culture, ethics, specialised domains, digital/remote interpreting	Basic inclusive and special needs education focus; no sign language content focus	No content on sign language linguistics, spoken competence, interpreting theory, Deaf culture, ethics, specialised domains, digital/remote interpreting
Competency Development	Core competencies, bilingual fluency, interpreting accuracy, ethics, professional conduct, context competence	No interpreter competencies included	No professional interpreter competency frameworks in the programme
Training Models & Structure	Structured progression, adequate duration, theory-practice balance, internships	Structured for one semester and focused on a general view of inclusive education	No dedicated interpreter training pathway
Teaching Methodologies	Practice-based, simulations, case studies, Deaf trainers, digital tools	No practical teaching	No Deaf-led and simulation-based professional training
Assessment & Quality Assurance	Competency-based, practical assessment, reflective practice, QA	Basic college's assessment	No professional interpreter assessment benchmarks
Certification & Recognition	Recognised qualification, licensing, CPD, ethics	Diploma and BA degree (in some instances) in their respective departments only	No interpreter-specific certification or licensing
Accessibility & Availability	Geographic access, affordability, inclusion, intake	Better affordability/access for college students, but it is theoretically driven, with less focus on sign language	Limited national coverage and specialization in Sign language
Legal & Policy Alignment	National legislation, access rights, international standards	Partial focus on the legal frameworks of inclusive education	No National legislation, access rights, international standards
Digital & Remote Competence	Remote platforms, professionalism, ethics	Absent	No Remote platforms, professionalism, ethics
Context-Specific Preparedness	Education, healthcare, legal, employment, high-stakes contexts	Absent	No context-specific readiness beyond educational institution settings

Table 13: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Ethiopia (Inclusive education for TVET Programme)

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from programme	Main Gaps Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics, spoken competence, interpreting theory, Deaf culture, ethics, specialised domains, digital/remote interpreting	Very limited sign language concepts as introduction	Limited Sign language linguistics, spoken competence, interpreting theory, Deaf culture, ethics, specialised domains, digital/remote interpreting
Competency Development	Core competencies, bilingual fluency, interpreting accuracy, ethics, professional conduct, context competence	no interpreter competencies included	No professional interpreter competency frameworks
Training Models & Structure	Structured progression, adequate duration, theory-practice balance, internships	Short face-to-face training for one semester, focused on diversity, legal frameworks for people with special needs	No dedicated interpreter training pathway
Teaching Methodologies	Practice-based, simulations, case studies, Deaf trainers, digital tools	No practical exposure	Insufficient Deaf-led and simulation-based professional training
Assessment & Quality Assurance	Competency-based, practical assessment, reflective practice, QA	Basic TVET assessment	No professional interpreter assessment benchmarks
Certification & Recognition	Recognised qualification, licensing, CPD, ethics	Diploma only	No interpreter-specific certification or licensing
Accessibility & Availability	Geographic access, affordability, inclusion, intake	Better affordability/access, but it is theoretically driven and has less focus on sign language	Limited national coverage and specialization in Sign language
Legal & Policy Alignment	National legislation, access rights, international standards	Partial focus on the legal frameworks of inclusive education	Weak operationalization of interpreter rights
Digital & Remote Competence	Remote platforms, professionalism, ethics	Absent	No Digital & Remote Competence on sign language
Context-Specific Preparedness	Education, healthcare, legal, employment, high-stakes contexts	Absent	No context-specific readiness beyond educational institution settings

5.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Ethiopia with International Sign Language Standards

Table 14: Comparative assessment of educational and legal framework on sign language in Ethiopia with interanational standard

Standard Area	International Expectation/ benchmark	Fully Aligns	Partially Aligns	Does Not Align	Notes / Evidence / Gaps
Legal recognition of sign language	Sign language is legally recognised as a natural language in national law or constitution.			+	EthSL not explicitly recognized in constitution or national laws.
Right to sign language Interpreting	National laws guarantee access to professional sign language interpreters in public services.			+	No national law guarantees interpreting services in public institutions.
Education access	Deaf learners have access to sign language and/or interpreters at all education levels.		+		Sign language acknowledged in education policy but not consistently implemented as medium of instruction.
Healthcare access	Interpreting services are available in healthcare settings without discrimination or delay.			+	Interpreting services in healthcare remain limited and inconsistent.
Interpreter training standards	Interpreter education programme is formalised, structured, and competency-based.			+	Lack of formalized national competency-based interpreter education systems.
Certification and Accreditation	Interpreters are certified or accredited through recognised national systems.			+	No nationally recognized interpreter certification framework exists.
Professional ethics	National ethical codes exist and are applied in interpreter practice.			+	No legally binding interpreter code of ethics.
Quality assurance mechanisms	Systems exist to monitor interpreter quality and address complaints.			+	Weak monitoring and complaint systems.
Availability of interpreters	There are sufficient trained interpreters to meet national demand.			+	Severe shortage of trained interpreters nationwide.
Accessibility and affordability	Interpreting services are accessible geographically and financially.		+		Limited accessibility in urban areas; services remain inconsistent and financially inaccessible for many.
Deaf community involvement	Deaf organisations are involved in policy-making and interpreter education.		+		ENAD involved in advocacy but lacks institutionalized policymaking authority.
Digital and Remote Interpreting	Policies and training address remote/digital interpreting and ethics.			+	No clear national framework regulating digital interpreting systems.
Alignment with UNCRPD Obligations	National laws and practices reflect UNCRPD Articles 2, 9, 21, 24, and 30.			+	National laws and implementation remain inconsistent with Articles 2, 9, 21, 24, and 30 of the UNCRPD.

5.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Ethiopia

5.3.1. Introduction and Context

According to the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, individuals with disabilities are entitled to the same educational opportunities as other children, adolescents, and adults. Additionally, it underscores that people have the right to participate in the education system without facing prejudice or exclusion, and that all nations should have inclusive educational systems. The adoption of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education in 1994 addressed the right of deaf children to access education in a language known as Sign Language (UN, 2006). In a similar vein, Article 24.3(b) of the CRPD guarantees the deaf community's right to acquire Sign language and promotes their linguistic identity; Article 24.4 of the CRPD mandates that teachers of deaf children be competent in Sign language

Through Decree No. 676/2010, Ethiopia adopted this international agreement in 2010 (Ethiopian Ministry of Education, 2022). Further, the Ethiopian government has reinforced its commitment to ensuring that every citizen has access to basic education. Based on this, the Ministry of Education developed the first special needs education program strategy in 2006 and continued to implement it for 5 consecutive years. The strategy was updated in 2012 and again in 2022 based on feedback from various stakeholders and an appraisal of its implementation. The sole department in the nation that specializes in Ethiopian Sign Language, Deaf culture, and interpretation is Addis Ababa University's in Ethiopian Sign Language and Deaf Culture. However, domain-specific training remains scarce, and interpretation is not yet fully established as a specialty. Although it lacks a theoretical foundation and a planned curriculum design, the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD) program also places a strong emphasis on real-world exposure and practical communication by launching its branches across twenty eight towns.

Despite governmental commitments at the policy level, empirical studies across various regions of Ethiopia revealed that Ethiopia has failed in the provision of sign language services and interpreter training. For example, educational institutions lack access to trained interpreters, and teachers often do not speak sign language well, leading to poor communication and lower academic performance (Tsega & Belete, 2016; Fitzgerald et al., 2010).

Moreover, formal education institutions do not fully incorporate Ethiopian Sign Language (EthSL), and it is not properly standardized (Girmay, 2012; Malado, 2024). Despite the existence of Ethiopian finger spelling, American finger spelling, numerical signs, and signed vocabulary, the study's findings showed that the fundamental components of Sign Language were absent from the main linguistic portion of the curriculum. It was discovered that the most common teaching method was the signed Amharic signing system. Additionally, the lack of a teacher's guide and student textbook for Sign Language, the incapacity of SNE teachers to teach Sign Language as a subject and medium of instruction, and the insufficient training assistance provided by the college of teachers' education were examined as significant issues that were also validated by the quantitative analysis (Demissie & Yigezu, 2024; Tsega & Belete, 2016).

Clearly, unless they are exposed to sign language at a young age, deaf children in Ethiopia are frequently passive participants in communication. Deaf youngsters lose their ability to communicate both interpersonally and intrapersonal when their surroundings do not support the use of sign language. The delayed vocabulary and syntax development of deaf children may be one sign of this issue (Talew & Teklemariam, 2025). The findings of the existing investigation showed that the interpreters were employed by the school without formal training, sufficient knowledge of how to interpret, a monthly salary for their work, poor communication between teachers and deaf students in the absence of a sign language interpreter, and a lack of assistance from the ministry of education and other non-governmental organizations to support their interpretation work (Mamo 2014, Zerihun 2018). Additionally, Mamo (2014) discovered that there are no productive educational interpreting services or supportive classroom environments. As a result, there were communication gaps and the pupils' academic satisfaction rapidly declined.

There is no organized, competency-based interpreter education system in Ethiopia, despite sign language being recognized within inclusive education discourse. Research consistently demonstrates that curriculum constraints, inconsistent teaching methods, and a lack of qualified interpreters pose serious academic and communication challenges for deaf students (Malado, 2024). In a similar vein, research on EthSL emphasizes how the lack of standardized vocabulary and educational materials impedes efficient communication and learning (Girmay, 2012). From the legislative or policy standpoint, Ethiopian Sign Language is primarily seen as an assistive tool rather than a linguistic right and is not officially recognized as a language of instruction, despite inclusive education frameworks recommending its use (Dadi, 2021;

Kassahun, 2024). In reality, this policy gap goes beyond education into fields like justice, where establishments lack ongoing interpreter services, restricting deaf people's access to their rights (Kassahun, 2024). This creates a significant mismatch between Ethiopia's rights-based commitments, such as those under the CRPD convention, which forces member states to promote sign languages–and actual service provision. Overall, systemic gaps in professionalization, training, and recognition are revealed by the convergence of empirical and policy evidence, underscoring the pressing need for a standardized, competency-based VET curriculum for sign language interpreter education in Ethiopia.

This report assesses three national inclusive education programs or course outlines in Ethiopia: the Inclusive Education course for Technical, Vocational, Education, and Training (TVET), the Inclusive Education course for Teachers' Colleges, and the Bachelor of Arts in Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SNIE) curriculum, which was created by Bahir Dar University and implemented in all Ethiopian universities. This study is operating in East Gojjam Province, with a specific focus on Debre Markos City–the capital of the province and the location of Debre Markos University, Debre Markos College of Teacher Education, and Debre Markos TVET College. These three programmes constitute the complete set of formal, government-mandated sign-language-related and inclusive education training available within the target area. The report compares the current programs to international standards for interpretation education using all three programs as a key case study (see Appendix 1a). It provides evidence-based recommendations to guide the creation of a competency-based Vocational Education and Training (VET) curriculum for sign language interpreters and highlights important gaps and strengths in existing practices.

5.3.2. Methodology

This mapping study employed a document analysis approach using the standardized mapping framework **Tables 11, 12 and 13**, the international checklist on sign language, and existing empirical studies. We critically evaluated three distinct educational programmes in the Debre Markos City, drawing evidence from international organization reports, official curriculum documents (SNIE revised programme for undergraduate degree, inclusive education for TVET and college of teachers' education) and peer-reviewed empirical studies. The three programmes were evaluated using the standardised mapping framework such as curriculum content, competency development, training structure, teaching methodologies, alignment with

legal and policy frameworks, digital and remote interpreting competence and context-specific preparedness. To evaluate programmes, curricula, institutional documents, international legal frameworks and existing sources were used as data sources.

Methodological limitations- All three programme were not explicitly designed for interpreter training, which limits direct comparison.

5.3.3. Overview of Mapped Programme

All programmes focus on inclusive education rather than interpreter-specific training, with strong emphasis on disability awareness, inclusion principles, and social justice. The mapped programmes demonstrate three distinct but complementary approaches. Sign language is one elective component in program A-SNIE – special needs and Inclusive Education Programme in two courses (sign language I and II).

Table 15: Overview of Mapped Programme

Programme	Type	Duration	Mode of delivery	Target Group	Awarding institution
A- SNIE – Special Needs and Inclusive Education Programme	BA degree (undergraduate)	4 years	Face-to-face (theoretical + minor practicum)	University students(special needs and inclusive education department)	Almost all public and private universities in Ethiopia , including DMU
B-College of Teachers' Education- Inclusive Education	Common course for Colleges of teachers' education	Semester-based/4-5 months	Face-to-face	College of teachers' education students	Colleges of Teachers' Education (e.g. Debre Markos Teacher Education College)
C- TVET- Inclusive Education	common course for TVET students	4–5 months/semester-based	Face-to-face	TVET student	TVET (e.g. Debre Markos TVET)

Table 15 demonstrates that Debre Markos City had components of the programs that were already in place. It is evident from the above table that while interpreter specialty programme is still mostly none, inclusive education is still a strategic focus. This supports previous research by Girmay (2012), the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2022), Talew and Teklemariam (2025), and Zerihun (2018) that found insufficient programs to train educational interpreters in several regional states.

5.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes

Strong language and cultural elements were absent from all three programme curricular. A review of the three mapped programs reveals a lack of basic interpreting subjects, professional ethics, specialized domain training, and digital skills. Additionally, there is very little to no treatment of Deaf culture. Developing interpreting skills is not the goal of the inclusive education for all three programs; however, only introductory sign language training is offered in program A.

Program A (BA in SNIE): The program's Ethiopian Sign Language curriculum, which covers inclusion policy, Deaf culture, community rehabilitation, broad ethical underpinnings, and practical school placements, is one of its strengths. Additionally, Module 05: Basic Skills in SNIE and two elective courses on sign language (SNIE3054/55) are part of the curriculum or programmes. The topics covered include basic grammar, arithmetic, finger spelling, and "deaf culture." Nevertheless, the fact that these courses are titled "Elective Courses for Blind Students" (p. 290) is a serious structural fault. This forms a gatekeeping structure in which sign language serves as a substitute for braille rather than as a necessary competence for all SNIE professionals. Professional ethics, legal/medical interpretation, restricted interpreter theory, simultaneous/consecutive interpretation training, specialist legal/medical domains, and remote interpreting are all completely missing. Teachers frequently lacked advanced pedagogical and linguistic skills in sign language, which decreased instructional efficacy, according to Tsega and Belete (2016).

Programs B and C (college of teachers' education and TVET inclusive education courses) There are no sign language courses offered by TVET or Teacher Education College, and the inclusive education course syllabus has no sign language content. While useful for raising awareness, this inclusive approach falls short of the standard of sign language linguistics. It covers models of disability, legal frameworks, fostering inclusivity, diversity, resource management, and general legal framework. This is an enormous lost chance to develop practical skills. TVET and the College of Teacher Education Center lacked professional interpreter theory, deaf linguistic studies, and practical interpretation. This is consistent with Malado's (2024) finding that inadequate language support systems play a significant role in the academic and social difficulties faced by Deaf learners.

5.3.5. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies

The availability of supervised training or internships, a balance between theory and practice, and instructional techniques including role-playing, case studies, simulations, and the participation of Deaf professionals are not all features of all programs. For details, the following explanations on programme structure and teaching methodologies were provided.

Programme A: Ethiopian sign language, the evolution of sign language throughout history, Ethiopian manual alphabets, and the corresponding American manual alphabets were all covered in the sign language classes. But there is no a practicum in supervised interpretation. The structural flaw is that these classes are not mandatory.

Programme B & C: According to the inclusive education at teacher education colleges and TVET, lectures, group discussions, and reflection are sufficient for theory but completely inadequate for developing skills. Practical instruction in sign language is absent. Because it is theory-based for one semester, it does not strike a balance between theory and practice. Supervised training, internships, and instructional strategies, including role-playing, simulations, case studies, and the participation of Deaf experts, are not available. According to Basha et al. (2020), there are "absence of sign language interpretation services" for students and "limitations of sign language skills" among teachers at a College of Teacher Education. The results also showed that teachers and students with hearing impairments faced significant communication barriers, leading to poor school performance.

5.3.6. Competencies Developed

Almost all programmes are not focusing on key professional competencies, including linguistic proficiency, interpreting accuracy, ethical decision-making, professional conduct, and preparedness for different interpretation contexts. For instance, only two courses in program A (BA in SNIE) support normal teachers, teach sign language, and develop fundamental communication with deaf people. Overall, the Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education's (SNIE) undergraduate program revision is timely and a step toward the nation's transition to inclusive education given the current state of individuals with special needs and the demands for suitable services for them. It is believed that the updated undergraduate program offers a range of specialized programs along with education and training services. Many of persons with special needs throughout the nation will have greater access to and use of community and educational resources as a result of the program's assistance in improving

educational service delivery. However, the programmee is given less emphasis for sign language. According to Tsega and Belete (2016), special needs and inclusive education instructors lack the ability to teach sign language as a subject and use it as a medium of instruction. EthSL is not yet acknowledged and accepted as a full language of education, according to Demissie and Yigezu (2024), due to a structural lack of curriculum, textbooks, and trained teachers.

The intended competences of Programs B and C (Inclusive Education Course in TVET and Teachers' Education College) are to comprehend models of disability, legal frameworks, promote inclusivity, diversity, resource management, and general legal framework; nevertheless, there is no functional sign language competency. Similarly, Getachew (2016) noted insufficient training opportunities, inadequate assistance and communication, inadequate classroom preparation, and inadequate instructional methodologies were challenges people with hearing disability. Lack of planning and communication hindered the deaf pupils' learning and their relationship with their professors.

5.3.7. Availability and Accessibility of Training

In Ethiopia, access to interpretation training is still insufficient and unevenly dispersed. The majority of opportunities for interpretation education or training are found in metropolitan regions, especially in Addis Ababa, the country's capital. In contrast, rural populations have no access to official programs for interpreter education or training. The only department in the nation that concentrates on Ethiopian Sign Language, Deaf culture, and interpretation is Addis Ababa University's BA in Ethiopian Sign Language and Deaf Culture. However, there is still a lack of domain-specific training, and interpretation is not yet completely developed as a specialty. Although it lacks a theoretical foundation and an organized curriculum, the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD) program in Addis Ababa also emphasizes practical communication and exposure to the real world. There are 28 training branches of the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD) program nationwide; however, neither Debre Markos City nor its adjustment province, has a branch. Significant differences in the utilization and quality of Ethiopian Sign Language interpretation services were found across five regional states of Ethiopia, primarily due to a shortage of qualified interpreters and limited training opportunities (Girmay, 2012). In many regions of the nation, these differences continue to affect deaf people's access to inclusive education and communication.

As a result, interpreter education has limited geographic coverage. Many rural communities in the Amhara National Regional State are underserved because the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD's) professional interpretation training opportunities are mostly available in major cities like Bahir Dar and Gondar. Communication difficulties between teachers, interpreters, and deaf pupils are caused by regional differences in sign language use and interpreter proficiency, according to Girmay (2012). The results also showed that varied interpreting techniques across educational contexts are exacerbated by the lack of standardized training. The study's target areas include East Gojjam Province, Debre Markos City, and Amhara Regional State as a whole. We found that students with hearing impairments are unable to pursue higher education and that the province lacks a qualified educational interpreter.

The delivery mode of interpreter education in Ethiopia (at Addis Ababa University) is predominantly face-to-face. Rather than through fully established university degree programs, the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD) are given sign language through seminars, short-term training, or school-based practical experience. Additionally, there are still few chances for online and remote learning because of poor internet connection and technology infrastructure.

Affordability is another major challenge affecting access to interpreter education. Many trainees rely on informal training opportunities or programs supported by the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD) and NGOs due to the lack of professional interpretation instruction. Learners from low-income and rural backgrounds may not be able to participate due to the costs of transportation, lodging, and training materials. Because of this, many prospective trainees outside of large cities are still unable to access interpretation education.

The intake capacity of the existing program, Addis Ababa University's BA in Ethiopian Sign Language and Deaf Culture, is also very small. The only university in Ethiopia that offers a bachelor's degree in sign language is Addis Ababa University. Ethiopia, where there is still a dearth of certified Ethiopian Sign Language interpreters in public organizations and schools. There is a significant gap in the Amhara region: none of the Teacher Education Colleges serving large populations currently offer this SNIE degree. SNIE BA programs are offered by public universities, however they are more conceptually based than sign language-focused. There are serious problems with the training. According to Tsega and Belete (2016), the college of

teachers' education offers inadequate training support, with no instructor guides or student textbooks. This finding was also confirmed by Zerihun (2018), who found that almost all educational institutions serving deaf students have insufficient professional preparation and limited knowledge of educational interpretation practices. This shortage is particularly serious in the Debre Markos City and its adjustment province which is East Gojjam.

Inclusion measures for diverse learners are gradually improving, but important gaps remain. Previous research showed that Deaf children were either not supported by sign language interpreters or were not taught the majority of the basic school curriculum by qualified sign language teachers (Girmay, 2012; Kidanemariam, 2017; Talew & Teklemariam, 2025; Zerihun, 2018). Access to high-quality interpretation education in Ethiopia and the Amhara region, as well as in East Gojjam province and our intervention area which is Debre Markos City specifically, will continue to be restricted in the absence of increased institutional support and training opportunities.

5.3.8. Comparative Insights

All three of the mapped programs, Programme A: Bachelor of Degree in Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Programme B: Inclusive Education for College Teacher Education, and Programme C: Inclusive Education for TVET, contribute to inclusive and special need education awareness in some way, but none of them serve as comprehensive professional sign language interpreter education programs.

Similarities Across the Programmes

All three programs prioritize inclusive education over the professionalization of interpreters. Disability inclusion, educational access, and general communication support for people with impairments are all highly valued. Every program reflects the national inclusive education concepts that are promoted by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education's Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (2022–2030). The list of traits that all programs have in common as strengths is as follows: Professional teacher ethics are covered, along with basic communication and educational support skills at a broad level and disability awareness and inclusion. However, all programs share serious shortcomings as well: There are insufficient training programs for public service settings, no certification or licensing programs for professional interpreters, no formal remote or digital interpreting skills, and no specialized educational pathways for interpreters. According to earlier studies (Allen, 2008; Girmay, 2012;

Kidanemariam, 2017; Talew & Teklemariam, 2025; Zerihun, 2018), Deaf children were either not taught the majority of the basic school curriculum by teachers who are proficient in sign language or were not supported by sign language interpreters. Similarly, Dadi (2021) found that while Ethiopian Sign Language has been somewhat recognized, there are still insufficient practical implementation methods, such as interpreter preparation.

Difference across the programmes

Programme A is the most comprehensive of the three as it offers formal Ethiopian Sign Language modules, however, programme B and C provide moderate exposure to inclusion concepts and educational support strategies but contain no sign language content at all.

Table 16: Comparative matrix on similarity and difference across the Programmes

Some aspects	Programme A (Bachelor of arts in SNIE)	Programmes B & C (Inclusive education)
Sign Language Content	Basic, but **elective** for blind students	**None**
Professional Focus	SNIE university students	Generalist for college of teachers' education and TVET (awareness only)
Interpreting Skills	**Absent** (no ethics, legal, or medical)	**Absent**
Practical Training	In-class practice, but no supervised practicum	**None**
Empirical Outcome	Instructors lack sign proficiency and teaching ability	Graduates have zero functional sign skills

Table showed a fragmented system: a future SNIE teacher might get basic sign training due to program A, but every other professional does not. There is no VET path to career interpretation.

5.3.9. Identified Gaps

The main gaps identified in three programmes was summarized in Table 17.

Table 17- main gaps identified in interpreter education

Major Gap Category	Overall Finding
Curriculum Gaps	Sign language linguistics, spoken language competence, interpreting theory and techniques, deaf culture and community studies, professional ethics and specialised domains covered (education, healthcare, legal, public services, media) are insufficient
Competency Gaps	Weak bilingual fluency, absent of professional ethics
Structural Gaps	No licensing, certification, or national interpreter standards
Practice Gaps	Minimal interpreting education practice
Access Gaps	Limited specialized programmes and uneven geographic accessibility
Technology Gaps	Digital and remote interpreting are not included

1) Curriculum gaps: There is no specific VET or degree program for Professional Sign Language Interpretation in the study area, Debre Markos City. Addis Ababa University's Ethiopian Sign Language and Deaf Culture program is the only degree institution in Ethiopia, and it is 299 km from the target study area. Thus, the absence of sign language interpreters in their classes affects deaf students (Getachew, 2016; Girmay, 2012; Kidanemariam, 2017; Talew & Teklemariam, 2025; Zerihun, 2018).
2) Competency gaps: The mandatory course for the diploma students in the College of Teachers' Education and TVET (Program B and C) deals with general issues on inclusive education, general legal frameworks, and diversity, but not the way to communicate. This is supported by previous studies (Getachew, 2016; Talew & Teklemariam, 2025). None of the selected programmes prepared students for high-stakes environments.
3) Structural gaps in SNIE BA Curriculum (Programme A): Sign language is an elective for blind students, and not a core requirement in all SNIE department across universities in Ethiopia. The fallout of this policy failure is teachers' self-reported "lack of confidence" in their skills (Talew & Teklemariam, 2025).
4) Practice gaps-Lack of interpreter-focused internships and supervised practicum across three programmes. Existing practice focus on teaching and inclusion support are not connected into real-world events (Girmay, 2012)

5) Access Gaps-Limited specialized programmes and uneven geographic accessibility as most training held in the capital city, Addis Ababa
6) Lack of Digital Competency and Resources: There is no online training or programmes on interpreting education.

To sum up, the main gaps identified in interpreter education or programs include missing curriculum areas, underdeveloped competencies, structural weaknesses technology gaps, and access gaps. The results, hence, show the urgent demand for a dedicated VET interpreter education programme aligned with national policy priorities, international human rights standards, and contemporary professional interpreting practices.

5.3.10. Implications for VET Curriculum Development

The following implications for VET curriculum development were drawn from the main shortcomings identified in the current analysis. First, in order to create professional teachers or sign language interpreters who can instruct or interpret for Deaf students, Ministry of Education, the Amhara Region Education Bureau, Debre Markos University, College of Teacher Education, Debre Markos education department, TVET, international organizations, the European Commission, and non-governmental organizations should plan and allocate sufficient funds for launching sign language training centre . Second, in order to facilitate education for Deaf students, the Amhara Region Education Bureau, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders should create and supply Ethiopian sign language textbooks and standard sign language dictionaries for basic curricula. Third, create a VET program that is competency-based and incorporates pedagogical, practical, and linguistic elements. Ethiopian Sign Language linguistics, interpreter ethics, legal/judicial interpreting, healthcare interpreting, public service communication, media interpreting, and video remote interpreting (VRI) modules are all integrated into this curriculum, which can be designed for a one-to two-year diploma or advanced diploma program that focuses solely on interpreter education. By practicing in real-world situations, students can strengthen their professional competencies. Fourth, professional certification and conformity to national qualification standards should be considered in the curriculum. Fifth, digital skills like remote interpreting ought to be included.

5.3.11. Conclusion

This study clearly revealed that interpreter education in Ethiopia is fragmented and inadequate to meet current needs of people with hearing disability. The mapping clearly demonstrates that Ethiopia requires a standalone, competency-based, rights-aligned sign language interpreter VET programme to bridge longstanding national gaps. The findings of T2.2, therefore, provide a critical basis for transforming interpreter education from general inclusion support into a professionalized, specialized, and internationally aligned system capable of improving both interpreter quality and Deaf citizens' access to essential services.

5.4. Systematic report on how Ethiopia's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards

5.4.1. Introduction and Purpose

This report presents an assessment of the alignment between Ethiopia's national educational and legal frameworks and international standards relating to sign language recognition, accessibility, and the linguistic human rights of people who are Deaf. The assessment is guided primarily by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD (United Nations, 2006))) and complementary standards promoted by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD).

The report specifically examines the status of Ethiopian Sign Language (EthSL) within national policy, education, and public service systems. It evaluates whether Ethiopia's existing frameworks adequately recognize EthSL as a natural language and whether the rights of people who are Deaf protected in practice.

The relevance of this assessment stems from Ethiopia's obligations as a state party to the UNCRPD. Articles 2, 9, 21, 24, and 30 of the convention require states to recognize sign languages, ensure accessibility, protect linguistic identity, and facilitate participation in education and public life. Despite these obligations, concerns remain regarding the absence of explicit legal recognition of EthSL and the continued dominance of disability-oriented approaches in policy and practice.

This report therefore serves as a gap analysis intended to:

1) Identify areas of alignment and deviation from international standards;

2) Assess implications for education, vocational training, and interpreter services;
3) Provide evidence-based recommendations for policy reform and institutional strengthening.

Importantly, the report adopts a linguistic human rights perspective. From this standpoint, people who are Deaf recognized not merely as persons with disabilities but as members of a distinct linguistic and cultural community whose rights include access to language, identity, communication, and mother-tongue education.

5.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment

The assessment was conducted using the alignment template provided in appendix 1b: Template for alignment of national educational system with international sign language standards. The methodology employed an interpretive policy analysis approach to examine how Ethiopian legal and educational frameworks conceptualize, recognize, and operationalize EthSL. The analysis focused on both direct and indirect references to sign language rights, interpreter provision, accessibility, and participation of people who are Deaf. Direct references include policies that specifically mention EthSL, Deaf learners, or sign language interpreters, while indirect references include broader disability and inclusive education provisions that may support sign language access without naming it explicitly.

The following national legal and policy documents were reviewed were used as data sources;

- The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995);
- Regional State Constitutions;
- FDRE Education and Training Policy (1994);
- FDRE Language Policy (2020);
- Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy;
- Master Plan for Special Needs Education in Ethiopia (2016–2025);
- National Plan of Action of Persons with Disabilities (2012–2021);
- Relevant disability, education, and public service policies.

These documents were assessed against international standards derived from:

- The UNCRPD;
- WFD policy guidance;
- Internationally recognized principles of linguistic human rights.

2.2 Assessment Process

Each standard area in appendix 1b was evaluated using three categories:

- Fully Aligns,
- Partially Aligns,
- Does Not Align.

The assessment considered:

- Legal recognition,
- Implementation mechanisms,
- Institutional practice,
- Interpreter systems,
- Accessibility and participation of Deaf organizations.

The analysis also examined whether policy provisions are operational in practice or remain largely declarative.

5.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations

Overall Alignment Rating

Overall, Ethiopia's national educational and legal framework is assessed as "Does Not Align" with international sign language standards. Although some policy documents make indirect or limited reference to sign language, there is no coherent national framework that fully recognizes EthSL as a natural language or guarantees comprehensive linguistic rights for the Deaf community. The assessment reveals significant systemic gaps across legal recognition, interpreter regulation, accessibility, and educational implementation.

Areas of Partial Alignment

Some progress is evident in the following areas:

Recognition of Sign Language in Policy Discussions

The 2020 FDRE Language Policy is the first national policy document to explicitly mention sign language. Similarly, the Master Plan for Special Needs Education recognizes the need for sign language support within educational settings(FDRE Ministry of Education, 2020).

Growing Public Visibility of EthSL

EthSL is increasingly used in:

- Television interpretation,
- Educational settings (not fully implemented),
- Community advocacy and selected public awareness programmes.

This demonstrates growing societal recognition of the practical importance of sign language.

Inclusive Education Commitments

National education strategies promote inclusion for persons with disabilities and acknowledge communication barriers affecting Deaf learners. However, these measures remain insufficient because sign language is primarily framed as a support mechanism rather than a full linguistic system and medium of instruction.

Major Deviations from International Standards

A. Lack of Explicit Legal Recognition

The Constitution of the FDRE recognizes equality among Ethiopian languages under Article 5. However, EthSL is not explicitly recognized within the constitution or major national laws (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995)..

In practice, the concept of "language" continues to be interpreted primarily as spoken language. National census frameworks and language policies similarly exclude EthSL from formal linguistic classification. This creates legal ambiguity and weakens institutional accountability regarding Deaf linguistic rights.

B. Absence of Working Language Status

EthSL is not designated as a federal or regional working language. Consequently, people who are Deaf continue to experience major barriers in:

- Courts,
- Healthcare systems,
- Government offices,
- Emergency communication and administrative procedures.

Accessibility therefore depends largely on informal arrangements rather than enforceable rights.

C. Educational Misalignment

Current educational policies largely adopt a medical or deficit-oriented understanding of Deafness. Sign language is commonly treated as:

- An assistive mechanism,
- A compensatory communication tool and part of "special needs" support services.

It is rarely recognized as:

- A mother tongue,
- A language of instruction and the linguistic foundation of Deaf education.

As a result, many Deaf learners are educated in spoken-language environments that do not adequately support language acquisition or academic development. This contradicts international standards that promote the use of both sign language and spoken/written language in Deaf education and support equal access to communication.

D. Weak Interpreter Systems

The assessment found substantial gaps regarding interpreter regulation and professionalization.

There is currently:

- No national interpreter accreditation framework;
- No standardized competency-based curriculum;
- No legally binding code of ethics and limited quality assurance mechanisms.

Interpreting services therefore remain inconsistent and are often provided only when needed, without proper planning or regular availability.

E. Limited Deaf Community Participation

Policies affecting people who are Deaf often developed within disability-oriented institutional structures with limited direct participation of Deaf-led organizations. Although the Ethiopian National Association of the Deaf (ENAD) engages in advocacy activities, there is no formalized mechanism guaranteeing Deaf participation in policymaking, interpreter education, or quality assurance systems.

Recurring Structural Gaps

The assessment identified several recurring gaps across policy sectors:

- Absence of explicit recognition of EthSL as a natural language;
- Lack of professional interpreter regulation;
- Inadequate interpreter availability;
- Weak implementation and monitoring systems;
- Limited public service accessibility;
- Insufficient investment in Deaf education and linguistic development and continued reliance on medicalized understandings of Deafness.

A central pattern across the assessment is the contradiction between the growing use of EthSL in everyday practice and its lack of full legal and institutional recognition. Although EthSL is becoming more visible and widely used, it still remains marginalized in laws and formal institutions.

5.4.4. Implications for Vocational Education and Training and Ethics

The identified deviations from international standards have significant implications for vocational education, professional development, and ethical practice.

Implications for Vocational Education and Training (VET)

The absence of EthSL as a recognized language of instruction severely limits Deaf participation in vocational and technical education. Most VET programmes remain speech-dependent and inaccessible to Deaf learners. This contributes to:

- Educational exclusion,
- Low workforce participation,
- Unemployment and economic marginalization.

Without accessible vocational education, people who are Deaf face structural barriers to acquiring employable skills and participating equally in national economic development.

The lack of Deaf-centered educational models also limits the development of Deaf professionals in sectors such as:

- Teaching,
- Interpreting,
- Public administration and social services.

Competency and Training Needs

- The assessment identified urgent needs for:
- Standardized interpreter training,
- Specialized legal and medical interpreting competencies,
- Deaf education specialists and training in teaching approaches that combine sign language and cultural understanding of Deaf people.

Current interpreter preparation systems are fragmented and lack nationally recognized competency benchmarks. This affects service quality in high-risk environments such as:

- Courts,
- Hospitals,
- Police services and educational institutions.

Ethical Implications

The absence of national ethical frameworks for interpreters creates serious professional and human rights concerns. Key ethical risks include:

- Inaccurate interpretation,
- Breaches of confidentiality,
- Conflicts of interest,
- Misrepresentation of people who are Deaf and denial of informed consent.

Without clear ethical standards and accountability systems, people who are Deaf remain vulnerable to communication injustice and institutional exclusion.

5.4.5. Recommendations

To strengthen alignment with international sign language standards, the following measures are recommended:

Legal and Policy Reform

- Explicitly recognize EthSL as a natural language within national legislation and policy frameworks.
- Recognize the Deaf community not only as people with disabilities, but also as a community with its own language and culture.
- Develop a comprehensive national sign language policy with enforceable implementation mechanisms.

Educational Reform

- Adopt an educational approach in Deaf education that uses both sign language and spoken/written language while also respecting Deaf culture.
- Establish EthSL as a medium of instruction for Deaf learners.
- Prioritize early sign language acquisition to prevent language deprivation.
- Strengthen teacher education programmes in Deaf pedagogy and sign linguistics.

5.3 Interpreter Education and Certification

- Establish a nationally recognized interpreter training and accreditation framework.
- Develop competency-based curricula aligned with international standards.
- Introduce specialized training in:
- Legal interpreting,
- Medical interpreting,
- Providing sign language interpreters in schools and through online or distance communication systems.

Ethics and Quality Assurance

- Develop a legally binding national code of ethics for interpreters.
- Create independent mechanisms for:
- Certification,
- Service monitoring,
- Complaint handling and quality assurance.

Accessibility and Service Provision

- Expand interpreter availability across federal and regional institutions.
- Ensure interpreting services are geographically and financially accessible.
- Integrate digital and remote interpreting systems into public services.

Deaf community participation

- Ensure meaningful participation of ENAD and Deaf professionals in policymaking, interpreter education, and monitoring systems.
- Institutionalize consultation mechanisms that move beyond symbolic participation toward shared decision-making.

5.4.6. Conclusion

This assessment demonstrates that Ethiopia's educational and legal frameworks remain substantially misaligned with international sign language standards. Although sign language visibility has increased in some sectors, EthSL continues to lack explicit legal recognition, institutional protection, and operational authority within education and public service systems. The persistence of medicalized approaches to Deafness has contributed to systemic linguistic exclusion and limited recognition of Deaf people as a linguistic and cultural community.

Continued deviation from international standards carries significant risks, including educational inequality, restricted access to justice and healthcare services, unemployment, ethical violations, and broader social exclusion for people who are Deaf and sign language users. Addressing these gaps requires structural legal reform, educational transformation, interpreter professionalization, and stronger Deaf community participation. Ultimately, aligning Ethiopia's framework with international standards is not solely a matter of accessibility or welfare. It is fundamentally a matter of language rights, equality, dignity, and full citizenship for the Deaf community.

6. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in GERMANY



6.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Germany

Table 18: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Germany (Interpreting and Translating for German Sign Language)[8]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; spoken language competence addressed; interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; professional ethics embedded; specialised domains covered; digital and remote interpreting included.	Humboldt-Universität offers a dedicated programme titled "Interpreting and Translating for German Sign Language" as a Master of Arts. The programme is housed in the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, which confirms that it is a formal specialised university pathway in sign language interpreting and translation. https://www.hu-berlin.de/en/study/study-programme/details/interpreting-and-translating-for-german-sign-language-master-of-arts-major-field	The public programme page confirms the existence and formal status of the programme, but it does not provide enough detail on the exact curriculum content. Publicly available information does not clearly show whether Deaf Studies, ethics, specialised interpreting fields, or digital/remote interpreting are explicitly included.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; bilingual fluency developed; interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; ethical decision-making addressed; professional conduct emphasised; context-specific competence developed.	The programme is a continuing Master's programme, which suggests advanced academic and professional development in interpreting and translating for German Sign Language. It is offered as a major field of study.	The public page does not set out detailed learning outcomes or competency descriptors. It is therefore not possible from the public information alone to confirm how bilingual fluency, ethics, or context-specific competence are structured and assessed.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; defined entry requirements; adequate programme duration; balanced	The programme has a clear formal structure: it is a Master of Arts, continuing, offered in the winter semester, with unrestricted admission,	While the formal structure is clear, the public page does not show whether the programme includes supervised practice,

[8] Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. (n.d.). Interpreting and Translating for German Sign Language – Master of Arts – Major Field. https://www.hu-berlin.de/en/study/study-programme/details/interpreting-and-translating-for-german-sign-language-master-of-arts-major-field

	theory-practice integration; supervised practice or internships included.	and a standard period of study of 4 semesters. Teaching language is German, and the programme is located at Campus Mitte.	internships, practicum-based learning, or a clear theory-practice balance.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; use of simulations and role-play; case studies based on real contexts; involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; use of digital learning tools.	The programme is located within a specialised university department dedicated to rehabilitation sciences and sign-language-related studies, which indicates a focused institutional context for advanced training.	The public material does not explicitly describe teaching methods such as simulations, role-play, case studies, Deaf-led teaching, or digital learning tools.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; practical performance assessments included; portfolio or reflective practice used; clear assessment criteria; quality assurance mechanisms in place.	The programme operates under subject-specific admission and enrolment rules, and the official university page links to programme-specific regulations, which indicates a formal academic governance and quality-assurance framework.	The public page does not explain the assessment format in sufficient detail. It is not possible to confirm from the available public information whether there are practical exams, portfolio assessment, reflective practice, or explicit competency-based assessment methods.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; alignment with national qualification frameworks; pathway to professional certification or licensing; continuing professional development requirements; ethical codes linked to certification.	The programme awards a recognised Master of Arts degree at a major public university in Germany.	The public programme information does not explain whether the degree leads to a specific professional certification pathway, licensing route, or formal continuing professional development requirement.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; affordable or subsidised options; inclusive admission and learning supports; adequate intake capacity.	The programme is offered by a public university, has unrestricted admission, and is clearly listed in the official university study catalogue.	Public information does not provide enough detail on learning support measures, accessibility adaptations, or intake capacity. Geographic accessibility is also limited to Berlin, unless additional flexible arrangements exist outside the public summary.
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; alignment with right-to-access interpreting services;	The existence of a dedicated university Master's programme in interpreting and translating for German Sign Language indicates a high level of institutional recognition of the field.	The public page does not directly explain how the programme aligns with German legal frameworks, access-to-interpreting

	consistency with international standards.		obligations, or international standards.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; digital professionalism addressed; ethical remote practice included.	No explicit evidence about remote or digital interpreting training is visible on the public programme page.	This remains unclear from public sources and should be checked in the detailed study regulations or module descriptions.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; preparation for healthcare settings; preparation for legal and judicial settings; preparation for employment and public services; readiness for complex or high-stakes situations.	Because the programme is specifically focused on interpreting and translating for German Sign Language at Master's level, it can reasonably be understood as advanced professional preparation.	The public description does not name specific interpreting sectors such as healthcare, education, legal, or public services, so sector-specific preparedness cannot be confirmed from the summary alone.

Table 19: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Germany (Sign Language Interpreting programme from Landshut University of Applied Sciences)[9]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; spoken language competence addressed; interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; professional ethics embedded; specialised domains covered; digital and remote interpreting included.	The programme is described as a practice-oriented Bachelor's degree that prepares students to work independently and professionally as sign language interpreters. It states that students acquire practical and theoretical skills in three main fields: German Sign Language, Deaf Studies, and Sign Language Interpreting. https://www.haw-landshut.de/en/bachelor-studiengaenge-3/sign-language-interpreting/study-programme	The public programme page does not clearly specify whether specialised interpreting fields such as healthcare, legal, education, public services, or digital/remote interpreting are explicitly covered.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; bilingual fluency developed; interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; ethical decision-making addressed; professional conduct	The programme states that it aims to prepare students to work independently and professionally as sign language interpreters. It also highlights that students are expected to reflect on their own professional actions in relation to the life situations of deaf, deaf-blind and	Ethical decision-making and context-specific competence appear to be implied, but they are not explicitly broken down in the public description.

[9] Landshut University of Applied Sciences. (n.d.). Sign Language Interpreting. https://www.haw-landshut.de/en/bachelor-studiengaenge-3/sign-language-interpreting

Landshut University of Applied Sciences. (n.d.). Study Programme: Sign Language Interpreting. https://www.haw-landshut.de/en/bachelor-studiengaenge-3/sign-language-interpreting/study-programme

	emphasised; context-specific competence developed.	hard-of-hearing people and their diverse communities.	
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; defined entry requirements; adequate programme duration; balanced theory-practice integration; supervised practice or internships included.	The programme has a clear structure: it is a full-time, 7-semester, 210 ECTS accredited Bachelor's programme with open admission and no tuition beyond semester fees. It states that knowledge is built systematically and applied through three internship phases: orientation internship, work placement/work shadowing internship, and interpreting internship.	No major structural gap is visible from the public page. This programme shows strong evidence of theory-practice integration.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; use of simulations and role-play; case studies based on real contexts; involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; use of digital learning tools.	The programme is explicitly described as practice-oriented and based on scientific findings and methods. It also includes three internships that accompany the programme, which strongly suggests experiential and workplace-based learning.	The public page does not explicitly mention simulations, role-play, case studies, Deaf professionals as trainers, or digital learning tools.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; practical performance assessments included; portfolio or reflective practice used; clear assessment criteria; quality assurance mechanisms in place.	The programme is identified as an accredited degree programme, and the university provides access to a module handbook, which suggests a formal academic quality-assurance structure.	The public page does not clearly explain whether competency-based assessments, portfolios, reflective journals, or practical interpreting exams are formally used.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; alignment with national qualification frameworks; pathway to professional certification or licensing; continuing professional development requirements; ethical codes linked to certification.	The programme awards a recognised Bachelor of Arts degree from an accredited public university of applied sciences.	The public page does not explain whether graduation leads to any national certification, licensing route, or formal CPD requirement.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; affordable or subsidised options; inclusive admission	The programme has open admission, is offered at a public institution, and has no tuition fees apart from the semester fee, which supports financial accessibility.	Geographic accessibility may still be limited, because the programme is site-based in Landshut and no distance-

	and learning supports; adequate intake capacity.		learning option is mentioned on the public page.
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; consistency with international standards.	The existence of a dedicated accredited B.A. programme for sign language interpreting indicates institutional recognition of the profession within higher education.	Direct alignment with German legislation, interpreting-service regulations, or international standards is not explained on the public page.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; digital professionalism addressed; ethical remote practice included.	No explicit evidence is provided on the public programme page regarding remote or digital interpreting training.	This is either a gap in the programme or a gap in publicly available documentation. It needs verification through the module handbook.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; preparation for healthcare settings; preparation for legal and judicial settings; preparation for employment and public services; readiness for complex or high-stakes situations.	The three internship phases suggest preparation for real professional contexts, and the programme is clearly intended to prepare students for future work as interpreters.	The public page does not identify specific interpreting sectors such as healthcare, legal, education, or public services.

Table 20: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Germany (Gebärdensprachdolmetschen / Sign Language Interpreting)[10]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; spoken language competence addressed; interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; professional ethics embedded; specialised domains covered; digital	The programme includes German Sign Language acquisition, linguistic foundations in both German Sign Language and spoken/written German, Deaf Studies, cultural background of deaf and hard-of-hearing communities, and interpreting studies and practice. Students also take complementary subjects such as communication with	Public information does not clearly confirm whether professional ethics is taught as a separate structured component. It also does not explicitly mention digital or remote interpreting as a named curriculum area.

[10] Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences. (n.d.). Gebärdensprachdolmetschen (B.A.). https://studieren.h2.de/studiengaenge/bachelor/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen
Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences. (n.d.). Gebärdensprachdolmetschen. https://www.h2.de/no_cache/studium/bachelor/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen.html

	and remote interpreting included.	deafblind people, International Sign, foreign sign languages, and English https://studieren.h2.de/studiengaenge/bachelor/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen	
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; bilingual fluency developed; interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; ethical decision-making addressed; professional conduct emphasised; context-specific competence developed.	The programme states that it provides a scientifically grounded, practice-oriented education preparing students to interpret in a wide range of situations between hearing people and deaf or hard-of-hearing people using German Sign Language. The curriculum is aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and students develop DGS competence progressively up to B2/C1 level.	While bilingual and interpreting competence are clearly visible, the public page does not explain in detail how ethical decision-making, professional conduct, or interpreting accuracy are formally measured.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; defined entry requirements; adequate programme duration; balanced theory-practice integration; supervised practice or internships included.	The programme has a clear structure: 8 semesters, starts in the winter semester, leads to a Bachelor of Arts, and is accredited. It requires prior knowledge of German Sign Language equal to 60 teaching units. The programme includes a practical semester in the 8th semester, intended to provide realistic insight into future professional life and allow students to apply their acquired knowledge in practice.	No major structural gap is visible from the public information. This programme shows strong evidence of structured progression and theory-practice integration.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; use of simulations and role-play; case studies based on real contexts; involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; use of digital learning tools.	The programme is explicitly described as practice-oriented and includes practical interpreting exercises, project-based exploration in Deaf Studies, and a practice semester. It also mentions a video language laboratory that supports students in learning German Sign Language.	The public page does not explicitly mention simulations, role-play, case studies, or involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers. Digital support is visible through the video language lab, but broader digital learning methodology is not fully described.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; practical performance assessments included; portfolio or reflective practice used; clear assessment criteria; quality assurance mechanisms in place.	The programme is accredited and provides access to the study and examination regulations and the module handbook, indicating a formal academic quality-assurance framework.	The public page does not specify whether assessment includes practical interpreting exams, portfolios, reflective journals, or explicit competency-based assessment criteria.

Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; alignment with national qualification frameworks; pathway to professional certification or licensing; continuing professional development requirements; ethical codes linked to certification.	The programme awards a recognised Bachelor of Arts from an accredited public university of applied sciences. The degree prepares graduates for professional work as interpreters, often as freelancers, in multiple sectors.	The public information does not explain whether graduation connects to any national licensing system, certification route, or continuing professional development requirement.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; affordable or subsidised options; inclusive admission and learning supports; adequate intake capacity.	The programme is not numerus clausus restricted, is offered at a public university, and has a listed semester contribution fee rather than full tuition. It also allows individual part-time study in specific circumstances such as employment, childcare, caring responsibilities, disability, serious illness, or significant social engagement.	Geographic accessibility remains limited to Magdeburg, and no full distance-learning option is described on the public page.
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; consistency with international standards.	The programme is a formal specialised higher-education pathway preparing interpreters for communication between hearing and deaf/hard-of-hearing users of German Sign Language. It shows strong institutional recognition of the profession.	The public page does not directly explain alignment with German legal frameworks, access-to-interpreting obligations, or international standards.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; digital professionalism addressed; ethical remote practice included.	The public page mentions a video language laboratory, which supports students in learning German Sign Language.	There is no explicit public evidence that the programme includes remote interpreting training, digital professionalism, or ethical aspects of remote interpreting.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; preparation for healthcare settings; preparation for legal and judicial settings; preparation for employment and public services; readiness for	The programme explicitly states that graduates work in many professional areas, including employment, education and training, higher education, healthcare, public authorities, justice, culture, and media.	The public summary confirms sector relevance, but it does not show in detail how each of these domains is specifically taught or assessed during the programme.

	complex or high-stakes situations.		

Table 21: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Germany (M.A. Gebärdensprachdolmetschen)[11]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; spoken language competence addressed; interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; professional ethics embedded; specialised domains covered; digital and remote interpreting included.	The M.A. in Gebärdensprachdolmetschen is a part-time professional programme designed to qualify sign language interpreters specifically for court interpreting and conference interpreting. The study contents explicitly include language use in court, criminal and civil proceedings, specialist lectures in the working languages German Sign Language (DGS), German, and English, preparation strategies, and translation studies-related questions. The profile area also includes Applied Linguistics and Sign Language Communities. https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studiengaenge/ma-studiengaenge/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen.html	The public information clearly shows strong specialised legal and conference interpreting content, but it does not explicitly state whether professional ethics is taught as a separate structured component. It also does not clearly mention digital or remote interpreting.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; bilingual fluency developed; interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; ethical decision-making addressed; professional conduct emphasised; context-specific competence developed.	The programme explicitly aims to develop practical competence for use in court and conference settings, as well as the ability to address translation studies questions in these specialised areas. Students are expected to gain a solid overview of the field's content and analytical methods and to handle them confidently. Working languages explicitly include DGS, German, and English, indicating strong multilingual and bilingual competence development.	Ethical decision-making and professional conduct are likely relevant to court and conference interpreting, but they are not clearly described in the public summary as separate assessed competencies.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; defined entry requirements; adequate programme duration; balanced theory-practice integration;	The programme has a clear formal structure with defined entry requirements: applicants must hold a first degree in sign language interpreting, or have at least 60 ECTS in the field, or hold	The structure is clearly defined, but the public page does not explicitly mention internships or supervised placements. Practical

[11] University of Hamburg. (n.d.). Gebärdensprachdolmetschen (M.A.). https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studiengaenge/ma-studiengaenge/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen.html

	supervised practice or internships included.	another degree plus a passed state examination in sign language interpreting. English at minimum B2 level is also expected. The curriculum includes required modules, a profile area, and a final module with Master's thesis, colloquium, and practical examination.	assessment is present, yet the exact balance between coursework and supervised field experience is not fully explained.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; use of simulations and role-play; case studies based on real contexts; involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; use of digital learning tools.	The programme is explicitly described as application-oriented and designed to prepare interpreters for the complex professional demands of courts and conferences. Module descriptions show seminar- and project-seminar-based teaching, including modules such as conference interpreting: preparation strategies and dealing with specialist presentations and interpreting in criminal and civil proceedings.	The public page does not explicitly mention simulations, role-play, case studies, Deaf professionals as trainers, or digital learning tools, even though these may exist in teaching practice.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; practical performance assessments included; portfolio or reflective practice used; clear assessment criteria; quality assurance mechanisms in place.	The curriculum includes a practical examination in the final module, which is strong evidence of practice-based assessment. Other modules include seminar work and written assignments, and the programme operates within a formal university degree structure with defined module descriptions and study regulations.	The public summary does not provide enough detail on portfolio assessment, reflective practice, or explicit competency-based grading criteria. Formal quality assurance is implied by the university structure, but not described in detail on the page.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; alignment with national qualification frameworks; pathway to professional certification or licensing; continuing professional development requirements; ethical codes linked to certification.	The programme awards a recognised Master of Arts degree from the University of Hamburg and is explicitly positioned as an advanced professional qualification responding to the high and growing expectations of the profession, especially in legal and conference settings.	The public page does not explain whether completion leads to any formal national licensing route, nor does it specify any continuing professional development requirement or formal ethics-linked certification.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; affordable or subsidised options; inclusive admission and learning supports; adequate intake capacity.	The programme is offered by a public university and is explicitly part-time (berufsbegleitend), which increases accessibility for working professionals. This is a significant accessibility strength compared to fully campus-based full-time programmes.	Geographic accessibility remains limited to Hamburg, and public information does not provide details on learning support measures, intake capacity, or broader inclusion accommodations.

Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; consistency with international standards.	The programme directly addresses court interpreting, including criminal and civil proceedings, which shows strong relevance to legal and public-service contexts and suggests responsiveness to real institutional interpreting needs in Germany.	The public page does not directly state how the programme aligns with German disability law, interpreter access rights, or international standards.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; digital professionalism addressed; ethical remote practice included.	No explicit evidence is provided on the public page regarding remote interpreting, online interpreting platforms, or digital professionalism.	This appears to be either a gap in the programme or a gap in public documentation. It should be verified through the detailed module handbook or internal curriculum documents.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; preparation for healthcare settings; preparation for legal and judicial settings; preparation for employment and public services; readiness for complex or high-stakes situations.	This is one of the strongest areas of the programme. The curriculum explicitly prepares students for legal and judicial settings through modules on criminal law proceedings and civil law proceedings, and for high-stakes conference contexts through dedicated conference interpreting modules. The programme is specifically designed to prepare students for complex professional demands.	Public information strongly confirms preparation for legal and conference settings, but it does not show equivalent explicit preparation for healthcare, education, or general public-service interpreting.

Table 22: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Germany (B.A. Gebärdensprachdolmetschen)[12]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; spoken language competence addressed; interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; professional ethics embedded; specialised domains covered; digital and remote interpreting included.	The programme prepares students for interpreting between spoken German and German Sign Language, and also for interpreting for hard-of-hearing users who use other communication modes. The curriculum includes introductory, advanced and specialisation phases. The programme is embedded in a broader academic environment that includes sign language linguistics, Deaf-related studies, and interpreting practice.	Publicly available programme information does not clearly specify the extent to which specialised interpreting domains such as healthcare, legal, public service, or digital/remote interpreting are systematically covered. This should be verified in the module handbook.

[12] University of Hamburg. (n.d.). Gebärdensprachdolmetschen (B.A.). https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studiengaenge/ba-studiengaenge/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen.html
University of Hamburg. (n.d.). Hauptfach Gebärdensprachdolmetschen. https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studiengaenge/ba-studiengaenge/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen/hauptfach-gsd.html

		https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studiengaenge/ba-studiengaenge/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen.html	
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; bilingual fluency developed; interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; ethical decision-making addressed; professional conduct emphasised; context-specific competence developed.	The programme explicitly aims to prepare students for interpreting between spoken and signed communication and includes staged academic progression from introductory to advanced and specialised modules. It also includes sign-language-related practice and training linked to interpreting. https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studiengaenge/ba-studiengaenge/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen.html	Public summaries do not fully show how ethics, reflective practice, or context-specific competence are formally assessed.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; defined entry requirements; adequate programme duration; balanced theory-practice integration; supervised practice or internships included.	The B.A. is structured in three phases across seven semesters: introductory phase, advanced phase, and specialisation phase. The curriculum also includes practice-oriented elements such as introductory, advanced, and in-depth practice placements. https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studiengaenge/ba-studiengaenge/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen.html	Public information confirms practice elements, but the precise balance between academic coursework and supervised field practice should be confirmed through the full curriculum documentation.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; use of simulations and role-play; case studies based on real contexts; involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; use of digital learning tools.	The programme clearly includes interpreting practice and sign language practice, including options such as International Signs or another sign language, and exposure to Deaf community events and language variation. https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studiengaenge/ba-studiengaenge/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen/hauptfach-gsd.html	Public pages do not explicitly confirm the use of simulations, role-play, case studies, or digital tools.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; practical performance assessments included; portfolio or reflective practice used; clear assessment criteria; quality assurance mechanisms in place.	The programme includes a practical interpreting component and a final examination structure connected to specialised training. https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/studium/studiengaenge/ba-studiengaenge/gebaerdensprachdolmetschen/hauptfach-gsd.html	The public description does not clearly show whether portfolios, reflective journals, or formal quality assurance procedures are part of the programme.

Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; alignment with national qualification frameworks; pathway to professional certification or licensing; continuing professional development requirements; ethical codes linked to certification.	his is a recognised university B.A. programme at a major public university in Germany.	The link between graduation and any national professional certification or formal CPD requirements is not clearly described on the public page.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; affordable or subsidised options; inclusive admission and learning supports; adequate intake capacity.	The programme is offered within a public university system and follows a standard higher-education structure.	Accessibility may be geographically limited to Hamburg; no clear distance-learning route is highlighted on the public page.
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; consistency with international standards.	The existence of a dedicated academic interpreting programme indicates institutional recognition of the profession.	Direct alignment with German legislation and international standards should be analysed separately in Appendix 1b.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; digital professionalism addressed; ethical remote practice included.	Public information does not explicitly mention remote interpreting as a named curriculum strand.	Possible gap or unclear visibility in public documentation.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education, healthcare, legal and judicial settings, employment and public services, and complex situations.	The programme prepares graduates for a range of interpreting settings and user groups, including Deaf and hard-of-hearing users.	Specific named sector preparation is not sufficiently detailed on the public programme page.

6.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Germany with International Sign Language Standards

Table 23: Comparative assessment of educational and legal framework on sign language in Germany with interanational standard

Standard Area	International Expectation/ benchmark	Fully Aligns	Partially Aligns	Does Not Align	Notes / Evidence / Gaps
Legal recognition of sign language	Sign language is legally recognised as a natural	X			Germany's Federal Disability Equality Act (BGG) explicitly states in **§ 6(1)** that **German Sign Language is recognised as an independent language**. This is clear legal

	language in national law or constitution.				recognition in national law, even though it is not embedded in the constitution itself. https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bgg/BJNR146800002.html
Right to sign language Interpreting	National laws guarantee access to professional sign language interpreters in public services.		X		Germany provides a legal right to use sign language and other communication aids in dealings with **federal public authorities** under **BGG § 9**, and the **KHV** regulates provision and reimbursement in administrative procedures. However, this guarantee is strongest at federal administrative level and is not a single, uniform guarantee across all public services and all Länder. https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bgg/__9.html
Education access	Deaf learners have access to sign language and/or interpreters at all education levels.		X		Germany has a broad inclusion policy framework, and education is organised across all levels in a federal system with Länder responsibility. However, implementation is uneven, and UN disability monitoring has continued to raise concerns about Germany's progress toward a fully inclusive education system. This suggests partial rather than full alignment. https://www.kmk.org/en/bildungsministerkonferenz/bildungsthemen/inclusion.html
Healthcare access	Interpreting services are available in healthcare settings without discrimination or delay.		X		Germany's disability and health-insurance framework support access to healthcare, and statutory health insurance broadly guarantees medically necessary care. But available evidence points to an **implementation gap** for deaf people in healthcare access, rather than a clearly guaranteed, delay-free nationwide interpreter entitlement in practice. https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_sgb_5/englisch_sgb_5.html
Interpreter training standards	Interpreter education programme are formalised, structured, and competency-based.		X		Germany has several formal, accredited university-level programmes in sign language interpreting, such as at **Landshut**, **Magdeburg-Stendal**, and **Hamburg**. These are clearly structured and practice-oriented. However, the system is not a single unified national training standard, so "partially aligns" is safer than "fully aligns." https://www.haw-landshut.de/en/bachelor-studiengaenge-3/sign-language-interpreting/study-programme
Certification and Accreditation	Interpreters are certified or accredited through recognised national systems.		X		Germany has recognised academic degree routes and recognition procedures for foreign qualifications, and some Länder have state-based procedures linked to sworn interpreters/translators. But there is **no single nationwide accreditation system specifically for sign language interpreters** visible in the official sources reviewed. https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/en/index.php
Professional ethics	National ethical codes				Germany has a professional ethical code through the **BGSD** ("Berufs- und Ehrenordnung"), which is applied within the

	exist and are applied in interpreter practice.				national professional association. However, it is association-based rather than a binding statutory code for all interpreters nationwide. • https://bgsd.de/de/verband/berufs-und-ehrenordnung.html • https://bgsd.de/
Quality assurance mechanisms	Systems exist to monitor interpreter quality and address complaints.		X		There are quality-assurance mechanisms in higher education through programme accreditation, and there is also a federal **BGG arbitration service** for accessibility/discrimination disputes. However, there does not appear to be one unified national mechanism specifically dedicated to monitoring sign language interpreter quality and handling professional complaints across all settings • https://www.haw-landshut.de/en/bachelor-studiengaenge-3/sign-language-interpreting/study-programme • https://www.schlichtungsstelle-bgg.de/Webs/SchliBGG/EN/home/english-node.html
Availability of interpreters	There are sufficient trained interpreters to meet national demand.		X		Germany has established training pathways and an active national professional association, but the available official/public sources reviewed do **not** show that interpreter supply fully meets national demand. The broader human-rights and access material instead points to continuing implementation gaps in practice. This suggests partial alignment at best. https://bgsd.de/
Accessibility and affordability	Interpreting services are accessible geographically and financially.		X		Germany has legal access rights in federal administrative procedures and publicly funded education pathways, which supports accessibility and affordability in some areas. Still, access depends on sector, level of government, and implementation, and the evidence does not support a conclusion that services are uniformly accessible geographically and financially everywhere. • https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bgg/__9.html • https://www.bmas.de/DE/Service/Gesetze-und-Gesetzesvorhaben/kommunikationshilfeverordnung.html
Deaf community involvement	Deaf organisations are involved in policy-making		X		Public sources show cooperation between interpreter organisations and Deaf self-advocacy groups, and German university programmes include **Deaf Studies** as a core field. However, the reviewed sources do not prove a formal nationwide requirement for Deaf organisations to be

	and interpreter education.				involved in all policy-making and interpreter education processes. https://bgsd.de/de/verband/der-verband.html
Digital and Remote Interpreting	Policies and training address remote/digital interpreting and ethics.		X		Germany has strong federal digital accessibility rules: **BITV 2.0** requires certain federal digital information to include content in **German Sign Language**. But this is not the same as a comprehensive national policy for **remote sign language interpreting** or a national ethics framework for digital interpreting. Training programmes also do not consistently show this clearly in public summaries. • https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bitv_2_0/ • https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bitv_2_0/BJNR184300011.html
Alignment with UNCRPD Obligations	National laws and practices reflect UNCRPD Articles 2, 9, 21, 24, and 30.		X		Germany ratified the **UNCRPD** in 2009 and has an independent **National CRPD Monitoring Mechanism**. Its laws clearly reflect many CRPD principles, especially in disability equality and accessibility. However, the **2023 UN CRPD concluding observations** show that implementation concerns remain, so full alignment in practice cannot yet be claimed. • https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/en/institute/departments/national-crpd-monitoring-mechanism/about-the-national-crpd-monitoring-mechanism • https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/PDF/DB_Menschenrechtsschutz/CRPD/2._und_3._Staatenbericht/CRPD_State_Report_DEU_2_3_ConObs_2023.pdf

6.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Germany

6.3.1. Introduction and Context

Germany has one of the more developed higher-education landscapes for sign language interpreter education in Europe, with several established university-based programmes at bachelor's and master's level. These programmes reflect a significant degree of institutional recognition of sign language interpreting as a specialised academic and professional field. At the same time, the German system is not fully standardised at national level, and variations

remain in programme focus, structure, public transparency of curriculum content, and the visibility of practical and ethical components.

Within the SignUnity project, Task T2.2 aims to map existing educational programmes for sign language interpreters in participating countries in Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa. The purpose of this mapping is to identify current education models, training approaches, strengths, weaknesses, and competency gaps that affect interpreter preparation and, ultimately, the quality and accessibility of interpreting services for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. In the German context, this mapping is especially relevant because formal training opportunities do exist, but they are concentrated in a limited number of higher-education institutions, and they differ in emphasis, programme design, and degree level.

The mapping of existing programmes is important because interpreter education directly influences the quality of interpreting services in fields such as education, healthcare, public administration, employment, culture, and legal settings. High-quality education contributes to stronger linguistic competence, better interpreting performance, improved ethical decision-making, and greater readiness for work in specialised contexts. Conversely, gaps in training can lead to insufficient preparation for real-world professional demands, uneven service quality, and barriers to inclusion for Deaf and hard-of-hearing service users.

This report presents the results of the German national mapping exercise conducted under T2.2. It summarises the characteristics of the identified programmes, analyses their curriculum content and pedagogical design, compares strengths and limitations across programmes, and identifies implications for the development of the SignUnity VET curriculum.

6.3.2. Methodology

The mapping of sign language interpreter education programmes in Germany was conducted using the standardised framework provided in **Tables 18 - 22** of the SignUnity WP2 methodology. This framework includes benchmark areas covering curriculum content, competency development, programme structure, teaching methodologies, assessment and quality assurance, certification and recognition, accessibility, legal and policy alignment, digital competence, and context-specific preparedness.

The mapping process followed a desk-research approach and was based primarily on publicly available official institutional sources. These included:

- university programme pages
- official programme descriptions
- module and curriculum summaries where available
- institutional information on admission, duration, credits, and delivery mode
- public information on academic regulations and accreditation status

The following criteria were used to select programmes for inclusion:

1. the programme had to be clearly related to sign language interpreting and/or translation for German Sign Language;
2. the programme had to be offered by a recognised higher-education institution in Germany;
3. sufficient public information had to be available to allow at least a basic mapping against the Appendix 1a benchmark areas;
4. the final sample needed to include at least three programmes, in line with T2.2 requirements.

Based on these criteria, five programmes were selected for analysis (Table 24):

1) **University of Hamburg – B.A. Gebärdensprachdolmetschen**
2) **University of Hamburg – M.A. Gebärdensprachdolmetschen**
3) **Landshut University of Applied Sciences – B.A. Sign Language Interpreting**
4) **Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences – B.A. Gebärdensprachdolmetschen**
5) **Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin – M.A. Interpreting and Translating for German Sign Language**

Each programme was assessed individually using a completed Appendix 1a template. The findings were then compared across institutions in order to identify recurring patterns, strengths, and gaps.

A key methodological limitation was that the analysis relied mainly on public programme information. In some cases, official public pages provided detailed information on structure, credits, internships, and broad curriculum areas, while in other cases the public summaries were more limited. As a result, some benchmark areas, especially ethics, detailed assessment methods, digital/remote interpreting, and sector-specific training, could not always be fully confirmed from the available documentation. Therefore, where public evidence was

insufficient, this was recorded as a gap in visibility or documentation rather than automatically as a confirmed absence in the programme itself.

Another limitation is that the report focuses on formal higher-education programmes and does not fully capture shorter non-formal or continuing professional development offers that may also contribute to interpreter training in Germany.

6.3.3. Overview of Mapped Programme

Table 24: Mapped educational programme from Germany

Programme	Institution	Level	Duration	Delivery mode	Main target group	Awarding institution
Gebärdensprachdolmetschen	University of Hamburg	B.A.	7 semesters	Full-time	Students preparing for professional sign language interpreting	University of Hamburg
Gebärdensprachdolmetschen	University of Hamburg	M.A.	Master's programme	University-based, advanced study	Graduates/professionals seeking advanced interpreting qualification	University of Hamburg
Sign Language Interpreting	Landshut University of Applied Sciences	B.A.	7 semesters / 210 ECTS	Full-time	Students entering professional sign language interpreting	Landshut University of Applied Sciences
Gebärdensprachdolmetschen	Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences	B.A.	8 semesters	Full-time, with practical semester	Students with prior DGS knowledge seeking professional interpreter qualification	Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences
Interpreting and Translating for German Sign Language	Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin	M.A.	4 semesters	Continuing Master's programme	Graduates/professionals in advanced sign language interpreting and translation	Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Overall, the German mapping shows that interpreter education is concentrated in a relatively small number of specialised institutions. Bachelor's programmes provide the main entry routes into the profession, while master's programmes offer advanced academic and professional specialisation. The programmes vary in the degree of public transparency regarding curriculum details, but all are institutionally recognised within higher education.

6.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes

The mapped programmes show strong evidence that interpreter education in Germany is built around several core pillars: German Sign Language competence, interpreting and translation studies, linguistic knowledge, and Deaf-related studies. Across the programmes, there is clear

recognition that interpreter education requires more than just language acquisition; it also requires knowledge of culture, communication, professional practice, and applied interpreting skills.

The strongest curriculum coverage appears in the following areas:

German Sign Language and bilingual language development

All mapped programmes clearly place German Sign Language at the centre of interpreter education. Programmes at Magdeburg-Stendal and Landshut explicitly refer to structured development of sign language competence, while Hamburg also presents the programme as a route for interpreting between spoken German and German Sign Language. In the Magdeburg-Stendal programme, German Sign Language development is explicitly linked to CEFR-style progression up to B2/C1 level. This indicates a strong emphasis on bilingual proficiency as a core professional requirement.

Interpreting studies and practical interpreting

All five programmes are clearly dedicated to interpreting and/or translating for German Sign Language. Bachelor's programmes particularly highlight practice orientation and preparation for future professional work. Landshut and Magdeburg-Stendal provide especially strong public evidence in this area, with clear references to structured internships, practical interpreting exercises, and applied preparation for the labour market. Hamburg's bachelor's programme also includes interpreting practice and structured progression through introductory, advanced, and specialised phases.

Deaf Studies, culture, and community-related knowledge

A notable strength of the German programmes is the visible inclusion of Deaf Studies or closely related subject areas. Landshut, Magdeburg-Stendal, and Hamburg all indicate that Deaf-related studies form part of the curriculum environment. This is important because interpreter competence depends not only on language and technique, but also on cultural knowledge, community awareness, and understanding of the diverse realities of Deaf, deafblind, and hard-of-hearing people.

Specialised domains

Evidence for specialised interpreting domains is mixed. Some programmes, especially advanced/master's level pathways, appear likely to include specialised professional contexts, but public documentation does not always make this explicit. Magdeburg-Stendal provides the strongest publicly visible evidence of sector relevance by explicitly mentioning professional

fields such as healthcare, education, justice, public authorities, culture, media, and employment. In contrast, for some other programmes, the exact extent of specialist domain coverage remains less visible from the public material.

Professional ethics

Professional ethics is one of the most important areas for SignUnity, but it is not equally visible across all mapped programmes. In several cases, ethical awareness is implied through references to professional conduct, reflective practice, and responsibility toward Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. However, public programme descriptions do not always clearly show whether ethics is taught as a distinct module or strand, how it is assessed, or whether ethical case analysis is formally included. This suggests that ethics may be present, but not always clearly documented in publicly accessible sources.

Digital and remote interpreting competence

This is the weakest curriculum area in the mapping. While some programmes make use of digital tools or language laboratories, there is little explicit public evidence that remote interpreting, digital professionalism, platform-based interpreting, or the ethics of online/remote work are systematically addressed. Given the growing importance of remote service provision, this is a significant issue and an important gap for future curriculum development.

Overall, the mapped programmes demonstrate strong academic preparation in language, interpreting, and Deaf-related knowledge. However, the visibility of professional ethics, digital/remote interpreting, and detailed specialist-domain training is uneven and often limited in public-facing documentation.

6.3.5. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies

The mapped German programmes generally demonstrate strong institutional structure. They are formal degree programmes located in recognised higher-education institutions, with clearly defined study duration, degree level, and institutional ownership. This gives Germany a relatively stable interpreter education foundation compared to contexts where training is mainly ad hoc or non-formal.

Structure and progression

The bachelor's programmes in particular show clear progression. Landshut offers a 7-semester, 210 ECTS programme; Magdeburg-Stendal offers an 8-semester programme with a practical semester; Hamburg offers a bachelor's programme structured in introductory, advanced, and

specialisation phases. These models suggest that German interpreter education places importance on gradual development from language acquisition and theoretical grounding toward more applied and professional competence.

Master's programmes at Hamburg and Humboldt provide advanced study routes, presumably for students who already possess a strong foundation in sign language and interpreting. Their presence is an important strength in the German landscape because they create opportunities for academic progression and professional specialisation.

Theory-practice balance

One of the strongest features identified in the German sample is the visible integration of practice into programme structure. Landshut stands out particularly strongly, with three internship phases incorporated into the degree. Magdeburg-Stendal also demonstrates robust theory-practice integration through its practical interpreting exercises and final practical semester. Hamburg's bachelor's structure also includes practice elements, although the publicly visible detail is somewhat less specific.

This suggests that at least some German programmes aim to prepare students not only through academic coursework but also through sustained exposure to real or realistic professional contexts.

Internships and supervised practice

Internships are among the strongest publicly documented elements in the German mapping. Landshut offers an orientation internship, a work-shadowing placement, and an interpreting internship. Magdeburg-Stendal includes a practical semester intended to give students professional insight and the opportunity to apply knowledge in real settings. These are important indicators of structured, applied professional preparation.

Teaching methodologies

The public material shows that German programmes are generally practice-oriented and science-based. However, detailed evidence on specific methods such as simulations, role-play, case-based learning, or problem-based teaching is often limited. This may reflect a public documentation issue rather than a true absence, but it still makes cross-programme comparison more difficult.

Involvement of Deaf professionals

The mapped programmes show strong institutional engagement with Deaf Studies and Deaf community-related knowledge. However, the public descriptions do not consistently specify

the direct involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers, co-educators, mentors, or assessors. Since Deaf-led input is highly important in interpreter education, this area would benefit from clearer institutional documentation and, where necessary, stronger formal inclusion.

In summary, the programme structures are a major strength of the German system, particularly in bachelor's programmes. Internships and applied learning are more visible than in many other benchmark areas. The main weakness is the limited public detail on pedagogical methods and the formal role of Deaf professionals in teaching.

6.3.6 Competencies Developed

The mapped programmes in Germany appear to support development of several core professional competencies required for sign language interpreting. These competencies can be grouped into linguistic, interpretive, professional, ethical, and contextual areas.

Linguistic proficiency

Linguistic development is one of the clearest strengths. Programmes invest significantly in German Sign Language and, to varying degrees, also in the relationship between signed and spoken/written German. Magdeburg-Stendal makes this progression especially visible through B2/C1-oriented sign language development. Bilingual and bimodal communication competence is therefore a clear core outcome of the programmes.

Interpreting accuracy and clarity

The mapped programmes are explicitly designed to prepare students for interpreting and translation. Practice components, internships, and structured professional preparation strongly suggest that interpreting accuracy, clarity, and message transfer are central intended outcomes. However, public descriptions do not always explain how these competencies are formally measured or benchmarked.

Ethical decision-making

This competency is less visible. Professional conduct and reflective awareness are clearly present in some programmes, especially Landshut, but explicit ethical decision-making is not always described in enough detail to confirm strong systematic coverage. Since ethical dilemmas are central to interpreting practice, this area appears under-documented and may be under-emphasised in public-facing programme summaries.

Professional conduct

Most programmes clearly aim to prepare students for professional work. They refer to independent professional activity, practical placements, labour-market relevance, and work with Deaf, deafblind, and hard-of-hearing communities. Professional conduct is therefore present as a programme goal, even where ethics is not separately articulated.

Context-specific preparedness

Evidence for context-specific preparedness varies. Magdeburg-Stendal provides the strongest public evidence of preparation for a broad range of sectors. Other programmes likely prepare students for multiple contexts, but the public descriptions do not always list them clearly. As a result, the development of sector-specific competence appears unevenly visible across programmes.

Reflective and intercultural competence

Some programmes, especially those with Deaf Studies and strong community orientation, indicate a reflective approach to interpreter education. This is especially important for understanding communication diversity, social inclusion, and interpreter responsibility in relation to Deaf communities. However, this dimension is not equally explicit across all mapped programmes.

Overall, the strongest competency area across the German sample is linguistic and interpreting competence, followed by general professional preparedness. The weaker or less visible areas are ethical decision-making, explicit assessment of interpreting performance, and specialised context competence.

6.3.7. Availability and Accessibility of Training

The German mapping shows that sign language interpreter education is available through formal higher education, but its accessibility is shaped by several structural limitations.

Geographic coverage

Training opportunities are concentrated in a limited number of cities and institutions, including Hamburg, Landshut, Magdeburg-Stendal, and Berlin. This means that Germany does have formal training routes, but they are not evenly distributed nationally. Students from other regions may need to relocate in order to access them.

Delivery modes

The mapped programmes are primarily campus-based. Public information does not indicate broad use of fully online or blended study models for initial interpreter education. This can limit

accessibility for mature learners, working adults, or people with caring responsibilities who cannot relocate or study full-time.

Affordability

Because the programmes are offered by public higher-education institutions, they are generally more financially accessible than fully private alternatives. Semester fees are present, but they do not amount to full tuition in the usual international sense. This is a strength of the German system.

Admission and entry barriers

Some programmes have open admission, while others require prior German Sign Language knowledge. For example, Magdeburg-Stendal requires previous DGS knowledge equivalent to 60 teaching units. This is understandable from an educational perspective, but it also creates a barrier for beginners and means that access to the programme may depend on prior learning opportunities that are not equally available to all.

Inclusion measures

Public information on accessibility and support measures for diverse learners is mixed. Magdeburg-Stendal explicitly mentions part-time options under specific circumstances, which supports flexibility. However, public descriptions do not consistently provide detailed evidence of inclusion measures, disability accommodations, or specific learning support arrangements.

Overall, Germany offers recognised and affordable education routes, but access is limited by geographic concentration, campus-based delivery, and sometimes prior sign language entry requirements.

6.3.8. Comparative Insights

A comparison of the five mapped programmes reveals both strong common foundations and important differences.

Similarities

All programmes are located within recognised public higher-education institutions and represent formal academic routes into or within the profession. All focus on sign language interpreting and/or translation for German Sign Language, and all demonstrate a combination of language development and interpreting orientation. Deaf-related studies or community knowledge are also visible across the sample, indicating a broad understanding that interpreter education must include sociocultural as well as linguistic preparation.

Differences

The main differences concern:

- degree level: bachelor's versus master's
- public transparency of curriculum detail
- extent of visible practice integration
- clarity of sector-specific preparation
- explicitness of ethics and digital competence

Landshut and Magdeburg-Stendal stand out as the strongest examples of clearly documented practice-oriented bachelor's education. Both programmes provide especially clear public evidence of structured internships and labour-market preparation.

Hamburg is important because it offers both bachelor's and master's pathways, which suggests continuity and academic depth. However, some aspects of curriculum detail are less immediately visible in public summaries.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin represents an important advanced master's pathway, but its public-facing information is more concise, which limits the degree of detailed benchmark analysis possible without fuller internal documentation.

Strengths across the sample

The strongest common strengths are:

- existence of formal academic pathways
- strong emphasis on German Sign Language and interpreting
- integration of Deaf-related studies
- professional orientation
- at least in several programmes, meaningful theory-practice integration

Weaknesses across the sample

The main cross-cutting weaknesses are:

- limited visibility of ethics as a distinct curriculum area
- limited explicit coverage of digital and remote interpreting
- uneven visibility of specialist-domain training
- inconsistent public information on assessment methods
- limited geographic spread of programmes

The comparison therefore suggests that Germany has relatively strong institutional capacity in interpreter education, but still lacks a fully transparent and clearly unified national model.

6.3.9. Identified Gaps

Based on the mapping, the following major gaps were identified in German sign language interpreter education:

Limited visibility of ethics

Professional ethics is highly important in interpreter work, but in the mapped programmes it is not always clearly visible as a structured and assessable part of the curriculum. In some programmes, ethics appears implied through professional reflection rather than explicitly framed.

Weak visibility of digital and remote interpreting

This is the most consistent gap across the sample. Public programme information rarely shows formal preparation for remote interpreting platforms, digital professionalism, online interaction management, or the ethical issues specific to digital settings.

Uneven specialist-domain preparation

Although some programmes clearly connect graduates to professional sectors, explicit curriculum-level preparation for high-stakes contexts such as healthcare, legal settings, and public services is not consistently visible across all programmes.

Limited public information on assessment methods

The programmes are accredited and formally structured, but public documentation often does not clearly explain how interpreting performance, ethical competence, or reflective practice are assessed. This affects transparency and makes cross-programme comparison more difficult.

Geographic concentration of training provision

Formal programmes exist, but they are concentrated in a small number of locations. This reduces access for students outside those urban centres.

Entry barriers

Some programmes require prior sign language competence, which may restrict access for learners who have strong motivation but limited prior opportunity to study German Sign Language before entry.

These gaps do not mean that German programmes are weak overall. Rather, they indicate areas where training is either underdeveloped or insufficiently visible, and where the SignUnity VET curriculum can add value.

6.3.10. Implications for VET Curriculum Development

The findings from Germany suggest several concrete implications for the design of the SignUnity VET curriculum.

Maintain strong linguistic and interpreting foundations

German programmes confirm that high-quality interpreter training must include strong development of sign language proficiency, spoken-language competence, and interpreting theory and practice. These should remain central pillars of the SignUnity curriculum.

Strengthen ethics as an explicit curriculum strand

Because ethics is not consistently visible as a clearly structured component, the SignUnity VET curriculum should include explicit training on:

- confidentiality
- impartiality
- role boundaries
- professional responsibility
- conflicts of interest
- ethical decision-making in complex contexts

Include digital and remote interpreting explicitly

Given the weak visibility of this area in German programmes, SignUnity should make digital competence a priority. This should include:

- remote interpreting platforms
- online communication management
- digital professionalism
- accessibility in digital environments
- ethics of remote interpreting
- fatigue, privacy, and technical risk management

Expand specialised-context training

The SignUnity curriculum should include specific applied modules for:

- healthcare
- legal and judicial settings
- education
- employment

- public services
- community and media contexts

Emphasise practical and work-based learning

The strongest German programmes visibly integrate internships and practical phases. SignUnity should therefore adopt practice-oriented methods such as:

- simulations
- case studies
- role-play
- guided reflection
- practicum-style learning
- supervised applied exercises

Ensure Deaf-centred and community-informed pedagogy

Since Deaf Studies and community-related knowledge are a clear strength in German programmes, SignUnity should ensure meaningful inclusion of Deaf perspectives in content, pedagogy, and training design.

Improve flexibility and accessibility

To address geographic and structural barriers seen in Germany, the SignUnity VET model should include flexible and hybrid learning routes wherever possible, supported by accessible digital tools.

In short, Germany provides evidence of strong academic foundations, but also shows clear areas where a modern VET curriculum can innovate, especially in ethics, digital competence, and specialist professional preparation.

6.3.11. Conclusion

The mapping of sign language interpreter education programmes in Germany shows that the country has a relatively well-established formal higher-education base for interpreter training. The analysed programmes demonstrate strong institutional recognition of the field, particularly through bachelor's and master's pathways in Hamburg, Landshut, Magdeburg-Stendal, and Berlin. Across the sample, the strongest areas are sign language development, interpreting orientation, Deaf-related studies, and—in several programmes—clear theory-practice integration.

At the same time, the mapping also reveals important gaps. These include limited visibility of ethics as a distinct curriculum strand, weak public evidence of digital and remote interpreting competence, inconsistent visibility of specialist-domain preparation, and geographic concentration of training opportunities. Publicly available information on assessment methods is also often limited.

Overall, the German case shows both the value and the limitations of existing interpreter education models. The findings provide an important evidence base for T2.2 by identifying good practice elements that can be built upon, as well as gaps that should be addressed through the SignUnity VET curriculum. In this way, the German mapping contributes directly to the broader project aim of strengthening interpreter education and improving the quality and accessibility of interpreting services for Deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

6.4. Systematic report on how Germany's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards

6.4.1. Introduction and Purpose

This report presents the German national analysis of the alignment between the country's legal and educational framework on sign language and sign language interpreting and relevant international standards. Its purpose is to assess the extent to which Germany's policies, laws, and institutional arrangements reflect internationally recognised principles concerning legal recognition of sign language, access to interpreting, interpreter education, ethical practice, accessibility, and the involvement of Deaf communities.

Within the SignUnity project, this analysis is closely linked to the broader objectives of Work Package 2. WP2 aims not only to map interpreter education programmes and interpreting services, but also to examine national educational and legal frameworks and compare them with international standards and recommendations. These findings are intended to support the development of a stronger, more coherent VET curriculum for sign language interpreters and to inform future policy and quality improvements.

Germany is a relevant case for this analysis because it combines a relatively advanced legal disability-rights framework with a small but established higher-education sector for sign language interpreter training. At the same time, important questions remain regarding the consistency of implementation across sectors, the availability of interpreters, digital and remote

interpreting policy, and the extent to which legal guarantees translate into equal real-life access for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

This report therefore seeks to provide a concise but evidence-based overview of where Germany strongly aligns with international standards, where alignment is only partial, and where policy and practice gaps remain relevant for interpreter education, professional ethics, and service delivery.

6.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment

The alignment assessment for Germany was carried out using the template provided in Appendix 1b, which is designed to compare national legal and educational arrangements with a set of international benchmark areas. These benchmark areas include legal recognition of sign language, interpreting rights in public services, access to education and healthcare, interpreter training standards, certification and accreditation, ethics, quality assurance, interpreter availability, accessibility and affordability, Deaf community participation, digital and remote interpreting, and alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

The assessment followed a qualitative desk-research methodology. The main data sources used were:

- official German federal laws and regulations,
- official public policy and institutional pages,
- national disability-rights and monitoring institutions,
- public sources on education and inclusion,
- professional association documents relevant to sign language interpreting.

The core legal and policy sources consulted included:

- the Federal Disability Equality Act (BGG),
- the Communication Aid Ordinance (KHV),
- the Barrier-Free Information Technology Ordinance (BITV 2.0),
- official education and inclusion information from the KMK,
- documentation from the German Institute for Human Rights on the National CRPD Monitoring Mechanism,
- the professional code of the German Association of Sign Language Interpreters (BGSD).

Each standard area in Appendix 1b was assessed against three possible ratings:

- Fully Aligns
- Partially Aligns
- Does Not Align

The rating was based on whether the relevant international benchmark was clearly reflected in German law, policy, and institutional practice. “Fully aligns” was used where there was clear legal recognition and comparatively strong institutional support. “Partially aligns” was used where some legal or policy measures existed, but implementation appeared incomplete, sector-specific, inconsistent, or insufficiently documented. “Does not align” would have been used where the standard was largely absent, although in the German case none of the reviewed areas fell fully into that category based on the available evidence.

One methodological limitation is that Germany is a federal state, and responsibilities for education, implementation, and service organisation are often shared between the federal level and the Länder. As a result, national-level legal recognition does not always produce uniform implementation across all sectors and regions. A second limitation is that publicly accessible sources sometimes demonstrate legal entitlement more clearly than practical implementation outcomes. The assessment therefore pays close attention not only to formal law, but also to visible evidence of implementation gaps.

6.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations

The overall picture for Germany is one of moderately strong formal alignment with international standards, combined with partial and uneven implementation in practice.

Areas of strong alignment

Germany shows strongest alignment in the area of legal recognition of sign language. Under § 6(1) of the Federal Disability Equality Act (BGG), German Sign Language is recognised as an independent language. This is a clear and important form of national legal recognition.

Germany also shows comparatively strong alignment in the broader field of disability-rights monitoring and formal engagement with the UNCRPD. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been in force in Germany since 2009, and the National CRPD Monitoring Mechanism at the German Institute for Human Rights has a formal mandate to observe and promote implementation.

A further area of relative strength is the existence of formal interpreter education routes at public higher-education institutions. Germany has established specialised bachelor’s and

master's programmes in sign language interpreting and translation, which supports the benchmark expectation that interpreter education should be formalised and structured. This is also reflected in the SignUnity T2.2 mapping of German programmes.

Areas of partial alignment

Most of the benchmark areas assessed for Germany fall into the category of partial alignment. The right to sign language interpreting is supported through federal law, especially BGG § 9 and the KHV, which regulate the use of sign language and communication aids in federal administrative procedures. However, the strongest entitlement is at the level of federal administrative interaction, and implementation is not equally visible across all sectors and all regional contexts.

Education access also partially aligns. Germany has a strong official commitment to inclusive education, and the KMK provides guidance on inclusion. However, the German system remains shaped by federal diversity, and concerns have continued to be raised regarding the pace and consistency of implementation.

Healthcare access partially aligns as well. Germany has a strong health-insurance and disability-rights framework, but this does not automatically guarantee equal, delay-free interpreter provision across all healthcare contexts. The legal and institutional basis exists, yet practical access barriers remain plausible and have been discussed in disability-rights contexts.

Certification and accreditation only partially align because Germany does not appear to have a single, clearly unified national certification system specifically for sign language interpreters. Instead, recognition occurs through academic pathways, some state-based professional procedures, and other institutional mechanisms. This creates a more fragmented model than the benchmark would ideally require.

Professional ethics partially align because a professional ethical code does exist through the BGSD, but it functions primarily through a professional association rather than as a single binding legal ethical framework for all sign language interpreters nationwide.

Digital and remote interpreting also partially align. Germany has strong digital accessibility obligations at the federal level under BITV 2.0, including requirements for information in German Sign Language on certain websites. However, this is not equivalent to a comprehensive national policy for remote interpreting practice, platform-based service provision, or interpreter ethics in online settings.

Recurring gaps and systemic deviations

The most visible recurring deviations from international best practice are:

- lack of one clearly unified national certification and accreditation system for sign language interpreters,
- uneven implementation of access rights across sectors and regions,
- insufficiently visible national arrangements for monitoring interpreter quality and complaint handling,
- no clearly visible comprehensive framework for digital and remote interpreting,
- uncertainty about whether the number of trained interpreters is sufficient to meet real demand nationwide.

These issues do not suggest a lack of commitment at legal level. Rather, they indicate a gap between legal recognition and consistent nationwide implementation.

Overall alignment rating

Overall, Germany can be described as partially aligned to strongly aligned in legal foundation, but only partially aligned in implementation and system coherence. The country has a comparatively solid legal and institutional base, but the full realisation of international standards remains incomplete.

6.4.4 Implications for VET and Ethics

The deviations identified in the German alignment assessment have clear implications for vocational education and training, especially for the design of a modern interpreter curriculum.

Priority competencies

First, the findings reinforce the need for strong training in professional interpreting across public-service settings, including administrative, healthcare, educational, and legal environments. Since access rights may exist in law but be implemented unevenly in practice, interpreters must be prepared to work competently in settings where communication barriers, institutional uncertainty, and procedural complexity are common.

Second, the findings highlight the importance of digital and remote interpreting competence. Because Germany has digital accessibility requirements but no clearly unified remote-interpreting framework, interpreter training should explicitly cover:

- online interpreting platforms,
- remote communication management,
- confidentiality and privacy in digital environments,

- technical preparedness,
- ethical challenges specific to remote service delivery.

Third, the partial alignment on certification and quality assurance suggests the importance of stronger competency-based assessment and more transparent learning outcomes in training. VET programmes should therefore make explicit how students develop and demonstrate linguistic competence, interpreting performance, ethical judgement, and sector-specific readiness.

Ethical standards

The analysis also shows that ethics should be more explicitly foregrounded in interpreter training. Even where professional ethics exist through association-based codes, a project such as SignUnity has a clear opportunity to create stronger pedagogical tools for:

- impartiality,
- confidentiality,
- role boundaries,
- conflict of interest,
- accountability,
- respectful collaboration with Deaf and hard-of-hearing users,
- ethical conduct in digital and hybrid settings.

Ethics training should not be treated as a secondary issue or an implied background principle. It should be an explicit, structured, applied part of interpreter education, ideally supported by case studies, reflective exercises, and scenario-based learning.

Training needs arising from deviations

The main training needs arising from the German case are:

- better preparation for cross-sector public-service interpreting,
- clearer ethical decision-making frameworks,
- stronger digital and remote interpreting modules,
- enhanced awareness of legal rights and institutional obligations,
- greater responsiveness to Deaf community perspectives,
- stronger integration of quality assurance and reflective practice.

These findings support the SignUnity project's decision to place linguistics, interpreting techniques, work with Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, and ethics at the centre of the future VET curriculum.

6.4.5. Recommendations

Based on the German alignment assessment, the following recommendations are proposed.

Policy reform

Germany should continue strengthening the implementation of sign language rights beyond formal legal recognition by improving consistency across public sectors and between federal and Länder levels. This includes clarifying responsibilities for interpreter provision and reducing variability in practical access.

Interpreter education and certification

A more coherent national approach to certification and professional recognition for sign language interpreters would improve quality assurance and labour-market transparency. Interpreter education programmes should also be encouraged to make ethics, digital competence, and specialist-domain preparation more explicit and visible.

Service quality assurance

Germany would benefit from stronger and more transparent mechanisms for monitoring interpreter quality, handling complaints, and promoting continuous professional development. Quality assurance should not rely only on programme accreditation or association membership, but should be more systematically connected to service provision.

Deaf community participation

Deaf organisations and Deaf professionals should be systematically involved in interpreter education, curriculum design, policy dialogue, and quality assurance processes. While Deaf community involvement exists in Germany, stronger formalisation would help ensure that training and policy better reflect lived experience and communication rights.

Digital and remote interpreting

Germany should further develop policy guidance and training standards for remote and digital sign language interpreting. This should include ethical guidelines, technical minimum standards, and training requirements for interpreters working in hybrid and online environments.

Implications for SignUnity

For the SignUnity project, these findings support the inclusion of:

- explicit legal-rights awareness,
- structured ethics modules,
- digital and remote interpreting training,
- stronger public-service and sector-specific interpreting preparation,
- Deaf-centred pedagogical approaches.

6.4.6 Conclusion

Germany demonstrates a relatively strong legal and institutional basis for recognising sign language and supporting disability rights. It has clear legal recognition of German Sign Language, formal interpreter education routes, and a visible national framework for disability monitoring under the UNCRPD. In this sense, Germany performs comparatively well in relation to many international benchmark areas.

At the same time, the analysis shows that full alignment has not yet been achieved in practice. The main risks of continued deviation are uneven service access, insufficient interpreter supply, fragmented certification and accreditation structures, limited visibility of digital and remote interpreting standards, and an absence of unified quality-assurance mechanisms specifically tailored to sign language interpreting.

Addressing these gaps requires both policy attention and educational innovation. From the perspective of SignUnity, Germany offers both useful examples of good practice and clear evidence of areas where a more targeted VET approach can add value. A future-oriented curriculum that combines linguistic competence, public-service readiness, ethical professionalism, and digital competence can contribute meaningfully to reducing the gap between formal rights and real-life accessibility.

7. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in CROATIA



7.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Croatia

Table 25: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Croatia (Non-formal Education Programme – Provision of Personal Assistance Services / Communication Mediator)

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; Spoken language competence addressed; Interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; Professional ethics embedded; Specialised domains covered (education, healthcare, legal, public services, media); Digital and remote interpreting included	The programme is structured around three core themes, each accompanied by learning outcomes that describe the content of the respective theme in greater detail. Based on the theme titles and their associated learning outcomes, it is evident that the programme covers knowledge of the rights of persons with hearing impairments and/or deafblind persons, the ethical principles of communication intermediary work and documentation management, the fundamentals of communication with persons with hearing impairments and/or deafblind persons (with learning outcomes indicating a focus on raising awareness of the importance of providing support through appropriate communication systems, as well as demonstrating various communication techniques and strategies), and the basics of guiding deafblind persons.	The programme content does not explicitly address sign language linguistics, the processing of spoken language in relation to sign language as a language of a different modality, Deaf culture and community studies, or specialised interpreting domains. Remote interpreting is likewise not explicitly mentioned as part of the programme. It should be noted, however, that the full programme is not publicly available – only the themes and learning outcomes are accessible. Each organisation develops its own programme in accordance with the prescribed themes and learning outcomes and submits it to the Ministry for review and approval prior to implementation.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; Bilingual fluency developed; Interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; Ethical decision-making addressed; Professional	The programme specifies a set of competencies that participants are expected to acquire upon completion, including fluency in Croatian Sign Language, the ability to ensure appropriate information	There is a noticeable inconsistency between the learning outcomes across the three themes and the competencies listed as being acquired upon

	conduct emphasised; Context-specific competence developed	transfer in accordance with prevailing communication conditions, the capacity to adapt to the communication preferences and skills of the student or individual, knowledge of the fundamental characteristics of Deaf culture, the ability to apply core ethical principles of professional communication intermediary practice, and knowledge of the basics of guiding a deafblind student or individual.	programme completion. Information on how the themes are developed in relation to their learning outcomes – and how those learning outcomes align with and give rise to the stated competencies – is not publicly available.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; Defined entry requirements; Adequate programme duration; Balanced theory–practice integration; Supervised practice or internships included	The programme has a partially clear structure: each theme has a defined number of teaching hours, divided between lectures and practical work, as well as independent study time allocated to participants. The total duration of the programme is stated as 150 hours, and hybrid delivery is listed as an option. Entry requirements are also specified.	While a delivery structure exists, how the programme is actually carried out in practice – including the pace of instruction – remains unclear. Although entry requirements are defined and verified through the submission of relevant certificates and/or confirmations, there is no form of prior knowledge assessment, such as an entrance examination. The programme timetable does allocate hours for independent study, but there is no explicit description of how practical training or placement is structured.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches; Use of simulations and role-play; Case studies based on real contexts; Involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; Use of digital learning tools	/	No publicly available information exists regarding teaching and learning methods. This aspect of the programme is described independently by each organisation when applying for authorisation to deliver it, suggesting that approved providers may differ

			considerably in their pedagogical approaches.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; Practical performance assessments included; Portfolio or reflective practice used; Clear assessment criteria; Quality assurance mechanisms in place	/	No publicly available information exists regarding assessment methods – that is, the procedures used to verify whether learning outcomes have been achieved. As with teaching methods, this is determined by each organisation individually during the application process, implying that assessment practices and quality assurance mechanisms may vary significantly across providers.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; Alignment with national qualification frameworks; Pathway to professional certification or licensing; Continuing professional development requirements; Ethical codes linked to certification	Participants who complete the programme receive a certificate at the non-formal education level, and the programme is currently aligned with the applicable Personal Assistance Act.	No publicly available information exists regarding pathways to professional certification or licensure, nor are there any stated requirements for continuing professional development.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; Affordable or subsidised options; Inclusive admission and learning supports; Adequate intake capacity	The programme offers broad accessibility, as any organisation in Croatia that meets the required conditions may apply for authorisation to deliver it. Additionally, hybrid delivery is available, and financial support is accessible through vouchers issued by the Croatian Employment Service, which currently allow both employed and unemployed individuals to fully or partially fund their participation in a chosen educational programme, subject to eligibility criteria.	No information is publicly available regarding enrolment capacity, inclusive admissions practices, or learning support provisions. It is assumed that each organisation determines its own enrolment capacity, as well as the format and pace of programme delivery, based on its individual resources and circumstances.

Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; Alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; Consistency with international standards	The programme is aligned with national sign language legislation and with the applicable Personal Assistance Act.	The programme is not aligned with international standards.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; Digital professionalism addressed; Ethical remote practice included	/	The programme does not explicitly state that participants acquire competencies for remote interpreting work.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; Preparation for healthcare settings; Preparation for legal and judicial settings; Preparation for employment and public services; Readiness for complex or high-stakes situations	/	The programme does not explicitly state that participants acquire competencies for working across a range of professional settings.

7.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Croatia with International Sign Language Standards

Table 26: Comparative assessment of educational and legal framework on sign language in Croatia with interanational standard

Standard Area	International Expectation/ benchmark	Fully Aligns	Partially Aligns	Does Not Align	Notes / Evidence / Gaps
Legal recognition of sign language	Sign language is legally recognised as a natural language in national law or constitution.	+			The Act on Croatian Sign Language and Other Communication Systems of Deaf and Deafblind Persons in the Republic of Croatia (82/15) states in Article 5, paragraph 1, that "Croatian Sign Language is the native language of the deaf and deafblind community in the Republic of Croatia; it is a distinct linguistic system with its own grammatical rules, entirely independent of the language used by hearing persons." https://www.zakon.hr/z/815/zakon-o-hrvatskom-znakovnom-jeziku-i-ostalim-sustavima-komunikacije-gluhih-i-gluhoslijepih-osoba-u-republici-hrvatskoj

Right to sign language Interpreting	National laws guarantee access to professional sign language interpreters in public services.	+			The right to communication intermediary services in a communication system of one's own choosing is established by the Act on Croatian Sign Language and Other Communication Systems of Deaf and Deafblind Persons in the Republic of Croatia, the Personal Assistance Act, and the Ordinance on Teaching Assistants and Professional Communication Intermediaries.
Education access	Deaf learners have access to sign language and/or interpreters at all education levels.		+		The Ordinance on Teaching Assistants and Professional Communication Intermediaries establishes the right of deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deafblind pupils to professional communication intermediary services throughout compulsory education (primary and secondary school), while the Personal Assistance Act governs this right at the higher education level (universities and polytechnics). In practice, this means that a child in primary or secondary school is assigned a dedicated interpreter who accompanies them consistently and serves as their personal interpreter, whereas a deaf university student must submit a request to an organisation that employs interpreters in order to be assigned one a request that may be denied if no interpreter is available at that time. Furthermore, students are not assigned a consistent interpreter for their lectures but rather whoever happens to be available. There is also a notable overall shortage of interpreters, particularly within the education sector. No systematic or standardised training exists for those who choose to work as interpreters in educational settings, nor is there any provision for continuing professional development or mentorship. As a result, individuals with widely varying competencies and professional backgrounds are being hired. Poor working conditions are common, leading to high interpreter turnover. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2024_07_85_1482.html
Healthcare access	Interpreting services are available in healthcare settings without discrimination or delay.		+		Although the Act on Croatian Sign Language and Other Communication Systems of Deaf and Deafblind Persons in the Republic of Croatia and the Personal Assistance Act both establish the right to interpreter services within the healthcare sector, these services are not always accessible in practice due to the shortage of interpreters, meaning a user's request may be denied. The quality of services provided is also

					questionable, given that interpreters' competencies are difficult to assess in the absence of systematic and standardised training, continuing professional development, and mentorship structures.
Interpreter training standards	Interpreter education programme are formalised, structured, and competency-based.			+	Programmes currently being delivered operate at the level of non-formal education, and no nationally structured or standardised curriculum exists. In practice, significant disparities are evident in how these programmes are implemented, in terms of frequency, delivery format (in-person only, online only, or hybrid), and the competencies of those delivering them, among other factors.
Certification and Accreditation	Interpreters are certified or accredited through recognised national systems.			+	A certificate of non-formal education is awarded upon completion, issued by the organisation that delivered the programme - provided that organisation has received approval to do so from the Ministry of Labour, Pension System and Social Policy.
Professional ethics	National ethical codes exist and are applied in interpreter practice.			+	Each organisation providing interpreter services operates under its own code of ethics, resulting in considerable variation in ethical standards across organisations. No unified national code of ethics exists.
Quality assurance mechanisms	Systems exist to monitor interpreter quality and address complaints.			+	There are no national systems in place for monitoring translation quality or handling complaints. Each organisation manages its own quality assurance and complaint resolution mechanisms according to its available resources, which means that both the standards applied and the approaches taken differ significantly from one organisation to another.
Availability of interpreters	There are sufficient trained interpreters to meet national demand.		+		Numerous organisations across Croatia employ interpreters, yet all of them face the same challenge, too few interpreters and an inability to meet the full range of their users' needs. The situation is most critical in smaller towns and rural areas.
Accessibility and affordability	Interpreting services are accessible geographically and financially.		+		The shortage of interpreters is felt throughout Croatia, but is most acute in smaller communities. The service is accessed by submitting a formal request, after which an assessment and evaluation process takes place to determine and allocate the number of hours a user is entitled to, based on their functional capacity. The maximum allocation for a deaf user is 40 hours per month. Should a user exhaust all 40 hours within

					a given month and require additional support, they must cover the cost themselves. Furthermore, depending on their income, the service may be provided free of charge or the user may be required to contribute a percentage of the cost, with the amount determined by their level of income. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2023_06_71_1175.html
Deaf community involvement	Deaf organisations are involved in policy-making and interpreter education.		+		Collaboration exists between deaf organisations and public policy representatives and decision-makers, and representatives of deaf organisations are involved in policy development and consultations. However, in practice, the actual needs and recommendations put forward by the deaf community are frequently disregarded.
Digital and Remote Interpreting	Policies and training address remote/digital interpreting and ethics.			+	Neither the existing educational programmes nor the legislative framework make any reference to remote or digital interpreting, or to the ethical considerations specific to working in digital environments. While not directly related, it is worth noting that interpreter representation in the media is extremely limited - interpreters are available only on national television and only for select programmes and the main news bulletin. Although subtitles are increasingly being integrated into television programmes and other broadcast content, they cannot be considered a standalone solution, given that people with hearing impairments rely on a range of different communication methods.
Alignment with UNCRPD Obligations	National laws and practices reflect UNCRPD Articles 2, 9, 21, 24, and 30.		+		The Republic of Croatia has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has thereby become part of the Croatian legal system and obliges the state to align its legislation and practice with the Convention's provisions. In reality, however, significant shortcomings remain in its implementation. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/medunarodni/2007_06_6_80.html

7.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Croatia

7.3.1. Introduction and Context

Croatia has a long-standing tradition of providing communication mediation services for deaf and deafblind individuals. Despite this tradition, the service operated for many years without an adequate legal framework. Formal regulation is relatively recent, yet sufficiently established to serve as a solid foundation for the profession's continued development. Among the relevant legislative documents, two stand out as key reference points: *the Act on Croatian Sign Language and Other Communication Systems Used by Deaf and Deafblind Persons in the Republic of Croatia* (82/15), which in 2015 granted Croatian Sign Language official recognition as the native language of the deaf and deafblind community, and the *Personal Assistance Act* (71/23, 154/25, 157/25), which currently governs the provision of communication mediation services. Additionally, the educational pathway for acquiring the competencies required to work as a communication mediator is still taking shape and continues to evolve. Against this backdrop, Croatia is joining as a partner in the project "*SignUnity – Inter-Continental Collaboration in Sign Language Interpreter VET Education*," whose primary goal is to improve sign language interpreter services across Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.

One of the project's first and most critical tasks is mapping existing sign language interpreter training programmes in each partner country. The mapping covers three European countries (Croatia, Germany, and Estonia) and three African countries (Ghana, Kenya, and Ethiopia). Its purpose is to identify current educational models for developing the competencies needed to work as a sign language interpreter, analyse their strengths and weaknesses, and pinpoint competency gaps that affect the quality and accessibility of interpreter services for deaf and hard-of-hearing users.

Building on this mapping exercise is a second study, conducted through semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires, which gathers the experiences and views of sign language interpreters (professional communication mediators) as well as deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who rely on these services in their daily lives. The study is designed to capture both sides of the equation: the perspective of service providers (interpreters) and the perspective of service recipients (deaf and hard-of-hearing users), with the aim of understanding how each group perceives the sign language interpreting profession and the

broader service landscape in their respective countries. Both data collection methods (semi-structured interviews and questionnaires) seek to assess participants' satisfaction with the current situation, shed light on needs that are only partially met or entirely unaddressed, identify the factors shaping the current quality and availability of services, and determine what changes are needed and how they should be implemented. Together, the two studies (the mapping of existing interpreter training programmes and the assessment of attitudes toward service quality and accessibility) form a unified comparative analysis of the current state of affairs in each partner country, with particular emphasis on contrasting the European and Sub-Saharan African contexts.

Mapping existing training programmes is critically important for identifying the elements that influence the quality of sign language interpreters' work and for determining which competencies are essential to a professional and high-quality interpreting practice. Analysing the curricula of existing programmes is a necessary step toward understanding not only where the gaps lie, but also which aspects are already functioning at a satisfactory level.

As noted above, Croatia participated in this research by conducting an analysis of the current state of training programmes designed to build competencies for communication mediation roles, following the prescribed methodological framework for analytical research (*Appendix 1a*). The findings of this analysis are organised around the following areas:

- methodology (selection and application of research methods)
- programme content and structure
- learning outcomes and competencies acquired upon completion
- teaching and learning methods
- methods for assessing learning outcomes
- national availability of programmes
- recommendations for VET curriculum development within the framework of the aforementioned project.

A detailed overview of each of these areas follows in the sections below.

7.3.2. Methodology

The mapping of existing training programmes for acquiring the competencies required to work as a communication mediator (sign language interpreter) in Croatia was carried out using a standardised methodological framework developed specifically for the purposes of this research, referenced as *Appendix 1a* of the "SignUnity" project documentation. Completed appendix can be found in **Table 26**. This framework is applied consistently across all project partners, ensuring that the same data on training programmes is collected and examined at the project level. It systematically analyses various aspects of programme content and structure, as well as the competencies relevant both to the education of sign language interpreters and to their professional practice. The framework requires analysis of the following areas: curriculum content and structure, learning outcomes and competencies acquired, teaching and learning methodology, assessment and quality assurance, certification framework, programme availability, and alignment with relevant legislative, regulatory, and policy frameworks.

The mapping was conducted using several research approaches. Conversations were held with individuals currently delivering the relevant programme within their organisations, as part of the parallel research strand examining service quality from the perspectives of both users and interpreters. In addition, publicly available online sources were consulted in order to identify any other existing programmes and to understand how they are delivered, thereby enabling a comparative analysis.

The following criteria were applied when selecting programmes for inclusion in the mapping analysis:

- the programme had to be clearly linked to the role of communication mediator (sign language interpreter)
- sufficient information had to be available to allow at least a basic mapping against the reference areas outlined in the standardised framework (**Table 26**)
- the final sample had to include a minimum of three programmes, in line with the project's T2.2 requirements, and cover at least three distinct educational systems.

Based on these criteria and the standardised analytical framework, it was established that Croatia currently has no formal programme at either secondary or higher education level for

developing the competencies required to work as a sign language interpreter.[13] Furthermore, at the time the research was conducted, no publicly available information was found to suggest the existence of any relevant programmes within formal education in this field. The only programme to which the defined criteria could be applied and which could be analysed using the standardised framework is the "**Non-formal Education Programme – Provision of Personal Assistance Services / Communication Mediator**". This programme currently operates exclusively within the non-formal adult education sector. Each organisation wishing to deliver it must obtain approval from the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, a requirement that confers a degree of institutional recognition and serves as a mandatory prerequisite for delivery. At the time of the research, four identical programmes delivered by four different organisations were identified.[14]

It should be noted that other training and/or professional development programmes for sign language interpreters have undoubtedly been delivered in the past; however, insufficient information was found to enable their analysis, and they have therefore not been included in this mapping exercise.

In itself, this analysis represents a significant indicator of a structural gap in Croatia's sign language interpreter education system, and at the same time serves as a starting point for understanding the current state of the field and the direction in which it needs to develop.

7.3.3. Overview of Mapped Programme

In light of the findings presented above, this document analyses the only available training programme that meets the previously defined criteria: the "**Non-formal Education Programme: Provision of Personal Assistance Services / Communication Mediator**". Summary of the programme is presented in **Table 27**. The programme is delivered by organisations that have obtained official approval from the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy of the Republic of Croatia to provide adult education, and it operates exclusively within the non-formal education sector. In terms of content, the programme is primarily focused on: developing foundational communication mediation skills, understanding

[13] At both secondary and higher education level, courses in Croatian Sign Language do exist; however, these focus on developing basic communicative competence in the language rather than on building the professional competencies required for sign language interpreting.

[14] Information on all four programmes is available in the Skills and Programmes Catalogue of the Croatian Employment Service at the following link: https://vauceri.hzz.hr/katalog-programa/?keyword=komunikacijski+posrednik

the rights of persons with hearing impairments and deafblind persons, and applying ethical principles in the provision of communication support. It combines theoretical and practical instruction and can be delivered in a hybrid format.

It is known that four organisations currently deliver this programme in Croatia, with the majority of available information accessible through the website of the Croatian Employment Service. Relatively little public information exists about the programme itself, and for the purposes of this research, additional details were gathered through conversations with one of the delivering organisations.

A review of available sources makes it possible to partially establish the content and structure of the programme, along with its competencies and learning outcomes. However, the breakdown of instructional content, teaching approaches, and assessment procedures are not publicly available. Since these elements are not defined at the programme level but are instead determined independently by each delivering organisation and submitted for approval to the competent ministry, this opens the possibility of considerable variation in how they are conceived from one organisation to the next, suggesting a potential disparity in programme delivery.

Table 27: Basic information on the Non-formal Education Programme – Provision of Personal Assistance Services / Communication Mediator

Programme Title	Programme Type	Education Level	Programme Duration	Mode of Delivery	Target Group
Non-formal Education Programme – Provision of Personal Assistance Services / Communication Mediator	Adult Education Programme	Non-formal Education	150 hours	Hybrid	Individuals interested in working as communication mediators for deaf and deafblind persons, subject to meeting the prerequisite enrolment requirements

7.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes

The programme under analysis is structured around three thematic units, each with defined learning outcomes that specify the knowledge and skills participants are expected to acquire.

The first thematic unit, entitled "Rights of Persons with Hearing Impairments and/or Deafblind Persons, Ethical Principles of the Communication Mediator, and Record-Keeping," introduces participants to the legal, ethical, and administrative dimensions of the communication mediator's role. The learning outcomes include: understanding the rights and responsibilities of deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deafblind persons; explaining the ethical principles that govern professional communication mediators, as well as those applicable within the field of education; describing the process of preparing for instructional sessions; identifying types of records; and explaining the methods and importance of proper documentation.

The second thematic unit, entitled "Fundamentals of Communication with Persons with Hearing Impairments and/or Deafblind Persons," focuses on developing the foundational communication skills needed to provide communication support. The learning outcomes include: explaining the importance of providing support through an appropriate communication system; demonstrating various forms of communication support for deafblind persons; demonstrating interpreting, transliteration, lip-reading, and note-taking techniques and strategies; and describing techniques for providing additional clarification of concepts. Participants are also expected to identify the main types of assistive technology and augmentative and alternative communication, and to demonstrate basic techniques for providing other forms of support.

The third thematic unit, entitled "Fundamentals of Guiding Deafblind Persons," focuses on developing the practical skills required to guide and support deafblind individuals across a range of situations. The learning outcome for this unit concerns the demonstration of various techniques for guiding deafblind persons.

The very title and content of the first thematic unit make it clear that this section is primarily oriented toward the work of a professional communication mediator within the education system, specifically, the provision of communication support for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and/or deafblind pupils. This is particularly evident in the learning outcomes, which explicitly reference lesson preparation and the maintenance of pedagogical records, with documentation addressed exclusively in a school context and without any consideration of the specific

circumstances faced by communication mediators working outside the education system. The programme does not address the broader ethical framework of the communication mediator's role, nor the particularities of working with adult users – individuals for whom communication mediation takes place across the widest possible range of life contexts (healthcare, social work, the legal system, public services, and so on), meaning that work in education represents just one of many potential areas of practice.

Given that the programme is oriented toward an educational context, it would be reasonable to expect it to cover the biopsychosocial characteristics of deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deafblind pupils as foundational knowledge necessary for understanding users' capabilities and needs. However, this content is not reflected in the learning outcomes either. More broadly, the programme does not address hearing impairment as such, nor its implications for speech and language development, communication, or socialisation. Furthermore, deafblindness, as a distinct and simultaneous dual impairment of both hearing and vision, with all its attendant specificities, is not indicated as a topic covered with programme participants. Although the programme includes a unit on guiding deafblind persons, it omits environmental description, which is equally essential to supporting deafblind individuals, as well as the communication approaches used with this population, which differ considerably from those used with persons who have hearing impairments alone. Finally, despite the fact that communication mediation is at its core a linguistic and interpreting activity, the programme, beyond listing a number of techniques, does not address sign language as an independent linguistic system, nor interpreting between languages of different modalities, which constitutes one of the most fundamental content-level shortcomings of the programme as a whole. In addition, neither the programme content nor its learning outcomes make any reference to Deaf culture.

The examples cited above represent only some of the key deficiencies identified in the programme, and were recognised primarily through conversations with the education provider, as well as through interviews and survey responses collected from interpreters who had completed the programme.

7.3.5. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies

The programme has a partially defined structure. Its total duration is 150 hours, distributed across three thematic units. The first unit is allocated 10 hours (6 hours of lectures, 2 hours of practical work, and 2 hours of independent study). The second unit accounts for 72 hours (4

hours of lectures, 20 hours of practical work, and 48 hours of independent study). The third unit is allocated 68 hours (2 hours of lectures, 10 hours of practical work, and 56 hours of independent study). This distribution reveals that the programme relies predominantly on independent study, which accounts for more than two thirds of the total contact hours, while the proportion of lectures is relatively modest and practical work falls somewhere in between. The programme also allows for hybrid delivery – that is, a combination of in-person and online instruction. However, neither the pace nor the timeframe for delivery is prescribed; each education provider independently determines the schedule for the 150 hours. In practice, this means that the duration of the programme is left entirely to the discretion of the individual provider, opening the door to considerable variation in the intensity and pace of delivery across organisations.

The programme's structure indicates that learning takes place through three primary modes: theoretical instruction, practical work, and independent study. However, teaching methods are neither defined nor prescribed for any of these components. Each organisation applying for approval to deliver the programme is required to independently describe the teaching methods it intends to use, but these descriptions are not publicly available, making it impossible to assess either how they are conceived or how they are implemented in practice. There is also a notable absence of information regarding how participants' practical work is organised. Although independent study constitutes the largest share of the programme's hours, there is no explicit definition of what this work actually entails, nor is there any indication of how it is monitored or assessed.

Since teaching methods are not prescribed at the programme level, delivery may vary considerably across providers, further deepening the already noted disparity in the quality of training at the national level.

7.3.6. Competencies Developed

Chapter 4 described and analysed the learning outcomes of the individual thematic units; this chapter considers them alongside the competencies participants are expected to have acquired upon completing the programme. The competencies are formally defined and listed in the programme documentation. They include:

- fluency in Croatian Sign Language

- the ability to ensure appropriate transfer of information in accordance with prevailing communication conditions
- adaptation to the communication preferences and skills of the pupil (person)
- knowledge of the fundamental characteristics of Deaf culture
- application of the core ethical principles of professional communication mediation
- knowledge of the fundamentals of guiding a deafblind pupil (person).

A comparison of the defined competencies and the learning outcomes of the individual thematic units reveals a certain disproportion between the competencies stated as end goals and the content operationalised through the learning outcomes. (**Table 28**)

The most clearly developed competency is knowledge of the fundamentals of guiding deafblind persons, which is directly and consistently supported by the learning outcomes of the third thematic unit.

Based on the information currently available regarding programme content and learning outcomes, there is no indication that Croatian Sign Language is addressed as an independent linguistic system – a language of a different modality from spoken language, independent of it and governed by its own specific linguistic rules. Although fluency in Croatian Sign Language is listed as one of the key competencies participants are expected to acquire upon completion, fluency as a concept implies a high level of linguistic proficiency that presupposes a range of knowledge and skills which should be clearly elaborated through the learning outcomes and programme content. The current learning outcomes and available programme content, however, do not adequately reflect this competency. Alongside linguistic competence, interpreting competence is equally important, that is, knowledge of interpreting techniques between languages of different modalities, yet this too is not evident in the available programme description. A similar observation applies to the competency relating to knowledge of Deaf culture, which is not developed through any thematic unit or learning outcome, at least from what is publicly available. The competency of applying the core ethical principles of professional communication mediation is addressed only within an educational setting, without extension to other professional contexts. The competencies of ensuring appropriate transfer of information in accordance with communication conditions and of adapting to users' communication preferences and skills are partially covered, though here too there is room for deeper and more systematic development.

In line with the standardised analytical framework, which among other things examines the existence of learning outcomes and competencies related to online interpreting and specialised interpreting domains, neither of these elements was identified in the programme under analysis. This suggests that, in its current form, the programme does not prepare participants for all the contexts and modes of work that communication mediators genuinely encounter in practice – as evidenced by the research conducted among interpreters.

Finally, only the titles of the thematic units and their associated learning outcomes are publicly available; the more detailed content of individual units has not been published. Each organisation applying to deliver the programme is required to independently develop the content and submit it to the competent ministry for approval, meaning it cannot be ruled out that some providers, within their own content development, do cover certain areas that are not visible from publicly available information.

Table 28: Comparison of learning outcomes and anticipated programme competencies

Anticipated Competency	Related Learning Outcomes in the Programme	Alignment Assessment	Note
Fluency in Croatian Sign Language	No directly defined learning outcome that develops linguistic competence in Croatian Sign Language; outcomes focus on the demonstration of communication strategies.	Low alignment	The competency is declared but not clearly operationalised through learning outcomes or a dedicated thematic unit.
Ability to ensure appropriate transfer of information in accordance with prevailing communication conditions	Demonstration of interpreting, transliteration, lip-reading, and note-taking techniques.	Partial alignment	Learning outcomes support basic communication strategies but do not cover broader interpretive processes.
Adaptation to the communication preferences and skills of the pupil (person)	Explanation of the importance of providing support through an appropriate	Good alignment	Learning outcomes relatively clearly support the development of this competency.

	communication system; demonstration of various forms of communication support.		
Knowledge of the fundamental characteristics of Deaf culture	No directly defined learning outcome relating to Deaf culture and community.	Low alignment	The competency is listed but not clearly developed through the programme content.
Application of the core ethical principles of professional communication mediation	Explaining the ethical principles of professional communication mediators and ethical principles in education.	Partial alignment	Learning outcomes relate primarily to ethical principles in an educational context and to the work of professional communication mediators in schools. However, the competency of communication mediation in practice also encompasses work with adult users across a range of social contexts (e.g. healthcare institutions, public services, everyday situations), for which the ethical dimensions are not clearly elaborated in the learning outcomes.
Knowledge of the fundamentals of guiding a deafblind pupil (person)	Demonstration of various techniques for guiding deafblind persons.	High alignment	The competency is clearly linked to the thematic unit and its associated learning outcome.

7.3.7. Availability and Accessibility of Training

The programme is formally available throughout the entire territory of the Republic of Croatia, in the sense that any organisation meeting the prescribed requirements may apply for approval to deliver it and thereby become an education provider. As already noted, four organisations are currently registered as providers and, according to available data, all four are headquartered in Zagreb – meaning that direct access to the programme is largely concentrated in the capital. A degree of compensation for this geographical limitation is offered by the possibility of hybrid delivery, which allows participants from smaller and more remote areas to access the training without the need to relocate or commute on a daily basis. The availability of hybrid delivery, however, depends on the individual provider's decision and is therefore not consistent across all cases.

To enrol in the programme, candidates must meet the requirements of legal adulthood and medical fitness, and must hold a qualification at level 4.1 or 4.2 of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CQF). A third requirement – demonstrating basic knowledge of Croatian Sign Language, supported by an appropriate certificate has in practice proved contentious and warrants particular attention. Specifically, this requirement presupposes prior attendance at a sign language course; however, the sign language courses available in Croatia are neither mutually regulated nor standardised, and differ considerably in terms of duration, content, and teaching approach. As a result, participants enter the programme holding certificates from courses of widely varying levels and scope, which can lead to significant inconsistency in their starting linguistic competencies.

In conversation with one of the education providers, it was highlighted that no formal education in Croatian Sign Language currently exists in Croatia and that the entire offering is based on non-formal courses. The same provider noted that there is no prior assessment of applicants' actual sign language knowledge at the point of enrolment – a course attendance certificate is accepted as sufficient proof. This practice further compounds the already described inconsistency in participants' prior knowledge and points to clear room for improvement in the way access to this type of education is managed.

7.3.8. Comparative Insights

Given that the mapping process in Croatia identified only one programme for acquiring the competencies required to work as a communication mediator, a comparative analysis within the Croatian context is not possible in the same way it has been conducted in other partner countries, where multiple distinct institutional programmes exist. This fact in itself constitutes a comparative finding that speaks to the level of development of the sign language interpreter education system in Croatia.

While countries such as Germany have several formal higher education programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, Croatia currently has only one programme, and one that operates at a non-formal level. The programme itself is relatively new, having come about as a result of the Personal Assistance Act (71/23, 154/25, 157/25), which entered into force only recently and within whose framework the programme is currently being delivered.

For the purposes of mapping training programmes for acquiring the competencies required to work as a sign language interpreter across all partner countries, a dedicated standardised

framework was developed (*Appendix 1a*), enabling a methodologically consistent and systematic analysis of content-related and other relevant programme elements, and thereby providing a basis for international comparative analysis as well. A review of the collected data shows that programmes in certain partner countries (Germany, for example) incorporate ethics as a distinct content element within their structure, along with elaborately developed mentorship or professional placement components and preparation for work in specialised fields such as healthcare and the legal system. Based on publicly available information, the programme analysed in Croatia does not include or develop these elements. It is also evident that in the German programmes, these elements are delivered over a considerably greater number of hours.

Finally, any comparison with German or other well-developed programmes should be viewed with an important caveat in mind: Croatia is still at the very beginning of this journey. The programme under analysis is relatively new, and the experiences of partner countries show that even the well-established systems that today serve as reference points once went through similar early stages. In this sense, the comparative insights drawn from this mapping exercise serve not only as a snapshot of current differences, but also as a roadmap for possible future development.

7.3.9. Identified Gaps

The programme under analysis presents several structural and content-related shortcomings, which are outlined below.

Non-formal education level and programme duration

The most fundamental shortcoming is that the only existing form of training for communication mediators remains at the non-formal education level. The work of a communication mediator is a complex professional activity carried out with deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals as users, and it demands a high level of linguistic, interpreting, communicative, and ethical competencies. A programme of 150 hours is structurally insufficient for the systematic acquisition of these competencies. By way of comparison, formal sign language interpreter education programmes last several years and carry academic status recognised within the higher education system.

Conflation of two distinct professional profiles

In Croatian practice, two functionally distinct roles can be identified: the professional communication mediator working within the education system with deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deafblind pupils, and the communication mediator providing services to adult users across a range of social contexts. Although these two roles do not always differ drastically in everyday practice, the programme under analysis (in its current content and learning outcomes) neither distinguishes between nor separately addresses these two roles, leaving the specific demands of neither profile sufficiently covered.

Absence of standardisation at the national level

As highlighted in previous chapters, the decentralised delivery model, whereby each organisation independently determines the pace, mode of delivery, and teaching methods, opens the door to significant disparity in the quality of training across different education providers. There are no unified guidelines for teaching methods, no standardised assessment instruments, and no quality assurance mechanisms at the national level. This is particularly important given that the certificate obtained, regardless of which provider delivered the programme, carries equal formal weight, while the actual level of competencies acquired may vary considerably.

Insufficiently defined enrolment requirements

The requirement relating to basic knowledge of Croatian Sign Language has proved contentious in practice. Since no formalised education in Croatian Sign Language exists in Croatia, the entire offering is based on non-formal courses that are neither mutually regulated nor standardised, and that differ in terms of duration, content, and teaching approach. Furthermore, there is no prior assessment of applicants' actual linguistic knowledge at the point of enrolment – a course attendance certificate is accepted as sufficient proof. The consequence is that participants enter the same programme with markedly uneven prior knowledge, which affects the group dynamic as a whole and the extent to which the stated learning outcomes can be achieved.

Insufficient coverage of key content areas

As elaborated in the chapters on programme content and developed competencies, the programme does not include or does not adequately develop a number of content areas relevant to the professional work of a (professional) communication mediator. Among these, the following stand out in particular: the systematic development of linguistic competencies in Croatian Sign Language as an independent linguistic system; interpreting competencies

between languages of different modalities; Deaf culture and community; ethics as a distinct and substantively developed thematic unit applicable across all professional contexts; preparation for work in specialised fields; and digital competencies and competencies for working in online environments. It should be noted that the absence of certain content from publicly available documentation does not necessarily mean that this content is absent from the internal curricula of individual providers, yet this very invisibility itself constitutes one of the identified shortcomings of the system.

7.3.10. Implications for VET Curriculum Development

The VET curriculum to be developed within the framework of the "SignUnity" project is intended for all participating countries, but is of particular value to those that either have no training programme for acquiring the competencies required to work as a sign language interpreter or are only in the early stages of developing one. For countries with well-established training programmes, it can serve as a basis for analysing and improving what already exists. In this regard, it is important to take into account the contextual differences between countries with a long tradition of formal sign language interpreter education and those in which such a system does not yet exist or is still taking shape – as is the case with Croatia.

Three sources form the essential foundation for shaping the VET curriculum: the standardised framework (*Appendix 1a*) used for mapping training programmes, the findings of the research conducted among interpreters, and the findings of the research conducted among service users. Together, these sources enable the curriculum to address, in a systematic and coherent manner, the competencies essential for professional sign language interpreting practice, with the shortcomings identified in existing programmes serving as a concrete starting point. Ultimately, the VET curriculum must contain content and learning outcomes that consistently reflect the competencies required to work as a sign language interpreter.

In the Croatian context, the VET curriculum produced by this project represents a valuable reference framework and an impetus for the future development of formal education programmes. The curriculum must be sufficiently flexible to respect local contexts, while at the same time sufficiently standardised to ensure consistency in the acquisition of core competencies. It is precisely this balance between standardisation and adaptability that represents the added value the "SignUnity" project can offer to all participating countries, with

the ultimate goal of making sign language interpreter services higher in quality and more accessible to the deaf and hard-of-hearing users who rely on them every day.

7.3.11. Conclusion

The mapping of training programmes for acquiring the competencies required to work as a sign language interpreter in Croatia has shown that the education system in this field is still in an early stage of development. The only programme meeting the defined analytical criteria is a non-formal education programme of relatively short duration, while no formal programmes at secondary or higher education level were identified at the time the research was conducted. The analysis identified a number of structural and content-related shortcomings affecting the consistency and quality of training at the national level. At the same time, the mapping process itself, together with the research conducted among interpreters and service users, has provided a more complete picture of the current state of the profession and the needs that arise from it.

Within the broader context of the "SignUnity" project, Croatia's experiences constitute a valuable contribution to the comparative analysis across partner countries and at the same time confirm the relevance of the project for countries that are at the beginning of building a sign language interpreter education system. The findings of this research are therefore not merely a diagnosis of the current situation, but also a foundation for thinking about the further development of the profession – in Croatia and beyond.

7.4. Systematic report on how Croatia's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards

7.4.1. Introduction and Purpose

The following report presents a national analysis of the alignment between Croatia's legislative and educational framework in the area of Croatian Sign Language and the profession of (specialist) communication intermediaries (sign language interpreters). The purpose of the analysis is to assess the extent to which Croatian legislation and institutional mechanisms reflect internationally recognised principles in the following key areas: the recognition of sign language as a distinct and independent linguistic system, the quality and availability of sign language interpreter services in the country, educational programmes for acquiring the

competencies required to work in the profession, the standardisation of the profession, and the position of persons with hearing impairments in society.

This report is part of a systematic research study conducted within the framework of the SignUnity project. The research is conceived as a multi-segment and comprehensive study encompassing the mapping of existing educational programmes in Croatia designed for acquiring competencies to work as a sign language interpreter, an analysis of the alignment of the legislative framework with international standards for the interpreting profession and for the provision of interpreting services to deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, and the conduct of interviews and surveys with service providers (sign language interpreters) and service users (deaf and hard-of-hearing persons). The research is being carried out in three European countries (Croatia, Germany, Estonia) and three African countries (Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia), with the ultimate goal of deriving concrete implications for the development of a VET curriculum for sign language interpreter education. In addition, the findings may indirectly contribute to informing and improving national policies in this area.

Croatia participates in this research as one of the project partners. The analysis conducted shows that Croatia is an example of a country in which a legislative framework exists and is regulated through several laws and ordinances, yet the systematic implementation of that framework and the provision of the necessary resources for its application in practice are significantly lacking. The remainder of this document presents a detailed analysis and an overview of the areas in which Croatia demonstrates strong alignment with international standards, as well as those in which alignment is only partially achieved or is absent altogether.

7.4.2. Methodology of the Alignment Assessment

The assessment of the alignment between national legislation and international standards and guidelines for sign language and the sign language interpreting profession was conducted using a standardised form (**Table 26**), developed specifically for the purposes of this analysis. The form is designed as an instrument for the systematic comparison of national legal and educational mechanisms against a set of international reference areas. These areas include:

- legal recognition of sign language
- the right to sign language interpreter services across all public services
- access to education and healthcare for persons with hearing impairments
- standards for sign language interpreter training

- certification and accreditation of the profession
- ethical standards and guidelines for professional conduct
- quality assurance mechanisms
- the availability of sign language interpreters
- the accessibility and affordability of services
- the active participation of deaf and hard-of-hearing persons in policy-making
- the availability and quality of services in digital environments
- alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Each reference area was assessed using one of three possible ratings: "Fully Aligns", "Partially Aligns", or "Does Not Align". The rating was based on the extent to which the relevant international reference finds clear and consistent grounding in the Croatian legal system, policy, and institutional practice. The rating "Fully Aligns" was assigned where unambiguous legal recognition and visible institutional support exist. "Partially Aligns" was applied in cases where certain legal or policy measures are in place, but their implementation proves incomplete, inconsistent, or insufficiently supported in practice. "Does Not Align" was used where the relevant standard is largely absent, even in a marginal or indirect form.

The assessment was conducted using a qualitative methodology based on the analysis of available documentation and conversations with relevant stakeholders, namely organisations providing sign language interpreting services and interpreters themselves. The primary sources of data were therefore Croatian legislation (laws, ordinances, and regulations) and information gathered directly from representatives of organisations providing interpreting services and from sign language interpreters.

The review of the legislative framework was based on the analysis of the following regulations and documents:

- Act on Croatian Sign Language and Other Communication Systems of Deaf and Deafblind Persons in the Republic of Croatia (NN 82/15)
- Personal Assistance Act (NN 71/23, 154/25, 157/25)
- Ordinance on Teaching Assistants and Specialist Communication Intermediaries (NN 85/24)
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The fundamental methodological principle was that the analysis should not be limited solely to a review of legislative texts, but that through direct conversations with those who apply the law in practice (whether as service providers or as individuals working daily with deaf and hard-of-hearing persons) it should establish how functional the legislative framework truly is in everyday application and what its key limitations and shortcomings are.

7.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations

Although Croatia has a relatively well-structured formal framework in terms of the legal recognition of sign language and the regulation of rights and services for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deafblind persons, the analysis has identified significant shortcomings in the implementation of that framework, particularly in the context of the training and professional development of (specialist) communication intermediaries (sign language interpreters), the certification and accreditation of the profession, ethical standards for professional conduct, and the actual availability of services to users.

Areas of Strong Alignment

The strongest alignment with international standards is evident in the area of the legal recognition of Croatian Sign Language. Under the Act on Croatian Sign Language and Other Communication Systems of Deaf and Deafblind Persons in the Republic of Croatia (OG 82/15), Croatian Sign Language is recognised as a distinct linguistic system with its own grammatical rules, entirely independent of the language used by hearing persons. The Act also acknowledges the diversity of communication systems within the population of persons with hearing impairments, explicitly stating that not all deaf and hard-of-hearing persons use Croatian Sign Language. Particularly noteworthy is the provision that extends the legislative framework to deafblind persons and the communication systems specific to that group. The Act further defines the competencies of a communication intermediary as a person who possesses the appropriate skills, knowledge, and abilities in the use of Croatian Sign Language or other communication systems of deaf and deafblind persons based on the Croatian language, and guarantees the right of users to access communication intermediary services in the communication system of their own choosing, in all situations in life. The right to communication intermediary services is further elaborated in the Personal Assistance Act, which prescribes the conditions for communication intermediaries and specialist communication intermediaries, the scope of personal assistance services expressed in hours,

the cost of the service, and the user's contribution to costs. The work of specialist communication intermediaries in the educational process, as well as the content and manner of their training, are governed by the Ordinance on Teaching Assistants and Specialist Communication Intermediaries (OG 85/24). It is clear from the above that the legislative framework has formally regulated the key aspects of the profession, namely the role of specialist communication intermediaries, the conditions for carrying out their work, and the foundations of training. However, as will be shown in the sections that follow, this legal regulation has not been operationalised to the same degree in practice.

Areas of Partial Alignment

Access to education for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons is partially aligned. The Ordinance on Teaching Assistants and Specialist Communication Intermediaries governs the right of deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deafblind pupils to specialist communication intermediary services in primary and secondary education, while at the level of higher education this right is regulated by the Personal Assistance Act. In practice, this legislative division results in significantly different experiences depending on the level of education. A deaf or hard-of-hearing pupil in primary or secondary school is assigned a specialist communication intermediary who consistently accompanies them throughout the educational process; substitutions are arranged only in cases of sick leave, annual leave, or termination of employment, but as a rule the same person works continuously with one child. This model of continuity is not guaranteed for deaf and hard-of-hearing university students. A student submits a request to the organisation providing personal assistance services, specifying the times at which an interpreter is needed, but the outcome of that request is uncertain and dependent on interpreter availability. The request may be denied if no interpreter is available at the requested times, and the student is not assigned the same person for all lecture sessions, meaning that instead of a consistent and familiar interpreter, whichever interpreter happens to be available at any given time is assigned.

A further structural problem is the acute shortage of specialist communication intermediaries in the education sector, which is present even in larger cities and is even more pronounced in smaller communities. This is compounded by the absence of a systematic and standardised training programme for this profile, as well as the lack of mechanisms for continuous professional development and mentorship, resulting in the employment of individuals with

widely varying competencies and professional backgrounds. Poor working conditions frequently lead to high turnover among specialist communication intermediaries.

Access to healthcare is also partially aligned. Although both key pieces of legislation (the Act on Croatian Sign Language and the Personal Assistance Act) guarantee the right to communication intermediary services across all areas of life, including healthcare, these rights are not always realisable in practice. The reason, as in other sectors, is the shortage of available interpreters, which means that a user's request may go unmet. The quality of the services provided is further called into question given that, in the absence of systematic training, competency standards, and professional development mechanisms, it is not possible to adequately assess or verify the level of expertise of interpreters.

The availability of interpreters is partially aligned. Sign language interpreter services are provided by numerous organisations across Croatia, yet all of them face the same fundamental challenge, namely an insufficient number of interpreters and an inability to meet the full range of users' needs. This problem is most pronounced in smaller towns and rural areas, where service availability is particularly limited or entirely absent.

The accessibility and affordability of services are partially aligned. The service is accessed by submitting a formal request to the Croatian Institute for Social Work, after which an assessment procedure is carried out to determine, in accordance with the user's functional capacities, the number of hours to which they are entitled. The legally prescribed maximum is 40 hours per month for a deaf person. If a user exhausts all 40 hours within a given month and requires additional support, they must cover the resulting costs personally. Furthermore, depending on their level of income, the service may be entirely free of charge or the user may be required to contribute a percentage of the costs, meaning that the affordability of the service also becomes a matter of the user's socioeconomic status.

The involvement of the Deaf community in policy-making is partially aligned. A certain level of cooperation between Deaf organisations and representatives of public policy and decision-makers exists, and representatives of those organisations formally participate in consultative processes and policy development. In practice, however, the actual needs and concrete recommendations of the Deaf community are frequently not taken into account in a manner that would reflect the principle of meaningful and equal participation in decision-making.

Alignment with the obligations arising from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is partial. The Republic of Croatia has signed and ratified the

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has thereby become an integral part of the Croatian legal system and obliges the state to align its legislation and practice with the Convention's provisions. Despite this obligation, serious and documented shortcomings in the implementation of the Convention remain, preventing its full application in the everyday lives of persons with hearing impairments.

Areas of Non-Alignment

Interpreter training standards are not aligned. The programmes currently being delivered operate exclusively at the level of non-formal education, and a nationally structured and standardised curriculum does not exist.[15] In practice, significant differences are evident among individual programmes, in terms of the pace and frequency of delivery, the format of implementation (in-person only, online only, or hybrid), and the competencies of those delivering them. The programmes themselves also have structural shortcomings relating to content, learning outcomes, and the level of competencies participants acquire upon completion. An important contextual note is that prior to the introduction of the current programme, there was no formalised pathway for acquiring competencies in this field; individuals were employed solely on the basis of certificates confirming the completion of a Croatian Sign Language course, which likewise exist exclusively in non-formal educational form and vary in programme content and structure. The current training programme came about as a direct consequence of the adoption of the Personal Assistance Act and, despite its shortcomings, represents the first concrete and more systematic step towards structured training for (specialist) communication intermediaries.

Certification and accreditation are also not aligned. Upon completion of the aforementioned programme, participants are issued a certificate of non-formal education by the organisation that delivered the programme, provided that organisation has previously obtained approval for its delivery from the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. A unified national system of certification or accreditation for sign language interpreters does not exist. Non-formal level certificates continue to prevail in the profession, without standardised criteria by which the expertise and competence of their holders could be verified.

[15] For further details, see the Report on the Mapping of Existing Educational Programmes for Acquiring Competencies to Work as a Sign Language Interpreter in Croatia.

Ethical standards for professional conduct are not aligned. Each organisation providing communication intermediary services operates according to its own internal code of ethics, resulting in significant differences in ethical standards among individual service providers. A unified national code of ethics for sign language interpreters does not exist, meaning that ethical and professional conduct depends largely on the policy of a specific organisation rather than on established and applicable professional norms. Closely related to this are the quality assurance mechanisms, which are equally not aligned. National systems for monitoring the quality of interpreting services or for handling user complaints do not exist. Each organisation establishes its own quality assurance and complaint resolution mechanisms in accordance with its available resources and internal policy, meaning that both the standards applied and the approaches taken differ significantly from one organisation to another.

The work of sign language interpreters in digital environments is not aligned. Neither the existing educational programmes nor the legislative framework address work in digital environments or the ethical considerations specific to providing services in such conditions. In the broader context of digital accessibility, it is worth noting that the representation of sign language interpreters in the media is extremely limited; interpreters are available only on national television and only for selected programmes and the main news bulletin. Other television content is increasingly being subtitled, though subtitling alone is not a sufficient solution, given that persons with hearing impairments rely on a variety of different communication methods. Only the main news bulletin provides simultaneous access to both subtitles and an on-screen interpreter, while other persons with hearing impairments who do not communicate through the written form of language remain excluded from the media space.

7.4.4. Implications for VET and Ethics

The deviations identified in the assessment of the alignment between the legislative and educational framework and practice in Croatia have clear implications for the development of vocational education for sign language interpreters. The absence of a standardised national curriculum, the inconsistency in the competencies of those entering the profession, the lack of a unified code of ethics, the shortage of interpreters, and the complete absence of any attention to work in digital environments are shortcomings that directly affect the availability and quality of services and, ultimately, the position of deaf and hard-of-hearing service users.

There is a significant need for a curriculum that will, first and foremost, have clearly defined learning outcomes directly aligned with the competencies participants acquire upon completing the programme. The learning outcomes must be measurable, applicable, and relevant to all contexts in which a sign language interpreter works. Furthermore, the curriculum should be comprehensive and cover every key segment of sign language interpreter work, from an understanding of hearing impairments, linguistic and interpreting competencies, and work in specific settings, to ethical and professional conduct. In addition to all of the above, the curriculum must also incorporate mechanisms for continuous professional development, ensuring that the acquisition of competencies does not end with formal training but is systematically built upon throughout the entire professional career.

7.4.5. Recommendations

Based on the alignment analysis conducted for Croatia, three key areas requiring systematic action have been identified. The priority is the development of a standardised educational programme for acquiring the competencies needed to work as a communication intermediary, one that would replace the existing system of non-formal education of heterogeneous quality. Such a programme should be consistent at the national level and ensure that all participants cover the same content and acquire the same, clearly defined competencies upon completion of the training. This would eliminate the current inconsistency that arises as a consequence of differences among individual programmes and the organisations that deliver them. Alongside the standardised educational programme, it is essential to establish a unified national certification system for communication intermediaries. Certification should be consistent, transparent, and applicable across the entire country, thereby ensuring the verification of the expertise of all persons carrying out communication intermediary work. Finally, it would be desirable to establish a unified national code of ethics with guidelines for the professional conduct of communication intermediaries, which would become a binding ethical framework applicable to all interpreters, in all organisations and all work contexts.

7.4.6. Conclusion

Croatia has a relatively solid legislative framework in the area of the recognition of Croatian Sign Language and the rights of persons with hearing impairments. The relevant laws and ordinances formally regulate the key aspects of the profession and guarantee the right to communication intermediary services in education, healthcare, and other areas of life. Despite

this, the analysis has shown that a significant and systemic gap exists between these legal guarantees and their actual implementation. The most pronounced shortcomings relate to the absence of a standardised national training programme, the lack of a unified certification system and a national code of ethics, and the incomplete availability of services, particularly in smaller communities. Added to this is the complete absence of any attention to work in digital environments, both in the legislative and educational context. Bridging these gaps requires systematic and coordinated action at the level of educational and public policy. The development of a standardised curriculum with clearly defined learning outcomes, the establishment of a national certification system, and the adoption of a unified code of ethics are fundamental prerequisites for improving the quality and availability of communication intermediary services and for strengthening the profession at the national level. In this context, the SignUnity project offers a concrete opportunity to contribute to these processes through the development of a modern and comprehensive vocational curriculum grounded in the real needs of both service users and interpreters.

8. Mapping existing educational practices for sign language interpreters in ESTONIA



8.1. Assessment of Existing Sign Language Programme in Estonia

Table 29: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Estonia (Estonian Sign Language Research Lab / EVKUR)[16]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; Spoken language competence addressed; Interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; Professional ethics embedded; Specialised domains covered (education, healthcare, legal, public services, media); Digital and remote interpreting included	Tallinn University's Estonian Sign Language Research Lab, EVKUR, focuses on the linguistic structure and use of Estonian Sign Language, Estonian Deaf sign language communities, learning and teaching of Estonian Sign Language, and development of sign language resources. This is highly relevant to the knowledge base needed for interpreter education, especially sign language linguistics, Deaf community studies, and teaching resources	EVKUR is not presented as a full interpreter education programme. It does not publicly provide a complete curriculum for interpreter training, and there is no visible full pathway covering interpreting techniques, supervised practice, assessment, specialised domains, and certification.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; Bilingual fluency developed; Interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; Ethical decision-making addressed; Professional conduct emphasised; Context-specific competence developed	EVKUR contributes to the development of professional knowledge around Estonian Sign Language, including teaching, learning and assessment practices. Tallinn University's information on EVKUR members shows work connected to sign language education and assessment practices in Estonia.	EVKUR does not publicly define interpreter competencies or provide a complete competence-development pathway for future interpreters. Its role is more research and system-development oriented than qualification-based.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; Defined entry	EVKUR provides a research and development structure	There is no clear evidence of a structured interpreter

[16] Tallinn University. Estonian Sign Language Research Lab / EVKUR. https://www.tlu.ee/en/evkur
Tallinn University. Members of EVKUR. https://www.tlu.ee/en/members-lab

	requirements; Adequate programme duration; Balanced theory–practice integration; Supervised practice or internships included	within Tallinn University. It supports work on Estonian Sign Language resources, teaching and research, and therefore can be an important foundation for future interpreter education	education programme with admission requirements, duration, credits, internships, or final qualification.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches ; Use of simulations and role-play; Case studies based on real contexts; Involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; Use of digital learning tools	EVKUR's work includes the learning and teaching of Estonian Sign Language and development of sign language resources. This can support evidence-based teaching, language assessment and professional learning in the field.	Public information does not confirm interpreter-specific methodologies such as interpreting simulations, role-play, case studies, supervised interpreting practice, or systematic involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers in an interpreter programme.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; Practical performance assessments included; Portfolio or reflective practice used; Clear assessment criteria; Quality assurance mechanisms in place	EVKUR contributes to research-based development of sign language teaching and assessment practices. This is important for future quality assurance in sign language education.	There is no visible interpreter training assessment system connected to EVKUR, such as practical interpreting exams, competency-based assessment, portfolios, or formal qualification criteria.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; Alignment with national qualification frameworks; Pathway to professional certification or licensing; Continuing professional development requirements; Ethical codes linked to certification	EVKUR can contribute knowledge and research to professionalisation. Estonia also has a national professional qualification system for sign language interpreters, including the "Viipekeeletõlk, tase 6" professional standard	EVKUR itself does not appear to award professional interpreter certification or a recognised interpreter qualification. The connection between research activity and formal certification remains indirect.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; Affordable or subsidised options; Inclusive admission and learning supports; Adequate intake capacity	Tallinn University provides a national academic base for Estonian Sign Language research and development. EVKUR also raises awareness of Estonian Sign Language in Estonia and abroad and promotes application of research	Since EVKUR is not a full training programme, it does not directly solve access to interpreter education. Availability of actual interpreter training remains limited.

		results in teaching and interpreting/translation.	
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; Alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; Consistency with international standards	EVKUR's work supports the broader implementation of Estonia's legal recognition of Estonian Sign Language as an independent language. Its focus on language use, Deaf communities, and teaching resources is consistent with the need to strengthen sign language access and professionalisation.	Public information does not show a direct formal link between EVKUR and national interpreter training obligations, service access rights, or a national interpreter education strategy.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; Digital professionalism addressed; Ethical remote practice included	EVKUR works on the development of sign language resources, which may support digital language documentation and learning	There is no clear public evidence that EVKUR provides training in remote interpreting platforms, digital professionalism, or ethical remote interpreting practice.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; Preparation for healthcare settings; Preparation for legal and judicial settings; Preparation for employment and public services; Readiness for complex or high-stakes situations	EVKUR's research into Estonian Sign Language and Deaf sign language communities can support better contextual understanding for future interpreters and educators.	It does not publicly provide interpreter preparation for specific contexts such as education, healthcare, legal/judicial interpreting, employment, public services, media, or high-stakes interpreting.

Table 30: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Estonia (Professional certification and continuing professionalisation system)[17]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; Spoken language competence addressed; Interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; Professional ethics	Estonia has a national professional standard for "Viipekeeletõlk, tase 6", valid from 11.10.2023 to 10.10.2028. The standard describes the work and the competences	This is a professional standard, not a curriculum. It defines expected competences but does not itself provide a structured education programme, modules, teaching hours,

[17] Kutsekoda. Professional standard: Viipekeeletõlk, tase 6. https://www.kutseregister.ee/ctrl/et/Standardid/vaata/11200505
Kutsekoda. Earlier professional standard: Viipekeeletõlk. https://www.kutseregister.ee/ctrl/et/Standardid/vaata/10690414
Estonian Association of Sign Language Interpreters. Kutse omistamine. https://evkty.ee/kutse-omistamine/

	embedded; Specialised domains covered (education, healthcare, legal, public services, media); Digital and remote interpreting included	required for successful professional practice.	internships, or learning materials.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; Bilingual fluency developed; Interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; Ethical decision-making addressed; Professional conduct emphasised; Context-specific competence developed	The professional standard provides an official competence framework for sign language interpreters in Estonia. Earlier public information on the profession describes sign language interpreting as mediation of language and culture, where one working language is sign language and one culture is Deaf culture.	Competencies are defined at professional level, but the standard does not show how learners are trained to reach them. There is a gap between professional expectations and visible education provision.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; Defined entry requirements; Adequate programme duration; Balanced theory–practice integration; Supervised practice or internships included	The professional qualification system provides a national structure for recognising interpreter competence. The Estonian Association of Sign Language Interpreters also provides information on the awarding of the sign language interpreter profession.	It does not constitute a training model. Entry routes, preparatory training, supervised practice and progression into certification are not clearly visible as one coherent national education pathway.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches ; Use of simulations and role-play; Case studies based on real contexts; Involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; Use of digital learning tools	Not applicable as a direct education programme. The standard can guide teaching methodologies if used by training providers.	No teaching methodology is provided within the standard itself.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; Practical performance assessments included; Portfolio or reflective practice used; Clear assessment criteria; Quality assurance mechanisms in place	The professional qualification system provides a mechanism for assessing and recognising professional competence	Public information does not provide enough detail here to analyse assessment methods in the same way as an education programme.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; Alignment with	This is the strongest area. The Kutsekoda standard	Certification exists, but the current education route

	national qualification frameworks; Pathway to professional certification or licensing; Continuing professional development requirements; Ethical codes linked to certification	confirms formal recognition of the profession at national qualifications level.	toward certification is not clearly visible. This creates a risk that professional standards exist without enough structured training opportunities to help new interpreters meet them.
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; Affordable or subsidised options; Inclusive admission and learning supports; Adequate intake capacity	The professional standard is publicly available and provides transparent expectations for the profession.	Certification does not guarantee accessible training. Estonia still appears to lack a full current interpreter education programme that would prepare enough new professionals.
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; Alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; Consistency with international standards	The standard supports the professionalisation of interpreting in a country where Estonian Sign Language is legally recognised as an independent language.	A stronger link is needed between legal recognition, service rights, interpreter training, and professional certification.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; Digital professionalism addressed; Ethical remote practice included	The 2023 update of the standard mentions updated competence wording and future skills.	Public summary information does not make it sufficiently clear how remote interpreting, digital professionalism, and ethical online practice are covered in certification or training.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; Preparation for healthcare settings; Preparation for legal and judicial settings; Preparation for employment and public services; Readiness for complex or high-stakes situations	Professional standards can support readiness for different interpreting contexts because they define the work and expected competences of interpreters.	The standard is not a substitute for applied training in education, healthcare, legal, employment, public service, and media settings.

Table 31: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Estonia (Estonian Sign Language Interpreter programme)[18]

[18] Tallinn University. Estonian Sign Language Research Laboratory news / research information. https://www.tlu.ee/en/taxonomy/term/1791/news/estonian-sign-language-research-laboratory-tallinn-university
Tallinn City. Sign language interpreter service. https://www.tallinn.ee/en/sign-language-interpreter

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; Spoken language competence addressed; Interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; Professional ethics embedded; Specialised domains covered (education, healthcare, legal, public services, media); Digital and remote interpreting included	The University of Tartu previously provided formal training for sign language interpreters in Estonia. A published academic source notes that since 2006 the University of Tartu had provided training of sign language interpreters. Another source on Deaf folklore confirms that Deaf folklore was first taught at the University of Tartu in the 2007/2008 academic year under the curriculum "Estonian Sign Language interpreter", showing that the curriculum included at least some Deaf culture/community-related content.	The main gap is that this programme is no longer clearly visible as an active current study pathway. Publicly available sources do not provide a full current curriculum, module list, learning outcomes, or detailed confirmation of all benchmark areas such as professional ethics, specialised domains, and digital/remote interpreting.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; Bilingual fluency developed; Interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; Ethical decision-making addressed; Professional conduct emphasised; Context-specific competence developed	The existence of a dedicated interpreter curriculum indicates that the programme was designed to develop Estonian Sign Language interpreting competence and prepare students for communication between Deaf and hearing people. The professional context in Estonia confirms that sign language interpreting developed as a response to the need to improve communication between Deaf and hearing people.	Public sources do not provide enough detail to confirm how competencies were structured, assessed, or benchmarked. It is unclear from public information how bilingual fluency, interpreting accuracy, professional ethics, or context-specific competence were formally measured.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; Defined entry requirements; Adequate programme duration; Balanced theory–practice integration;	The programme was located within the University of Tartu, which indicates a formal higher-education setting rather than only ad	The programme structure, duration, credits, entry requirements, internship arrangements, and theory-practice balance cannot be

	Supervised practice or internships included	hoc training. Public sources identify it as a curriculum connected to Estonian Sign Language interpreter preparation.	fully confirmed from currently accessible public information. The biggest structural gap is the apparent discontinuation or absence of active current admissions.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches ; Use of simulations and role-play; Case studies based on real contexts; Involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; Use of digital learning tools	The Deaf folklore course connected to the curriculum included work with video files and folklore texts, and terminology in Estonian and Estonian Sign Language was developed in cooperation with Deaf people. This suggests that at least some teaching was connected to authentic Deaf community knowledge and visual-language materials.	There is no clear public evidence on the use of simulations, role-play, supervised interpreting practice, case studies, or systematic involvement of Deaf professionals across the whole curriculum. Digital tools were used in some language/community-related work, but digital or remote interpreting methodology is not documented.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; Practical performance assessments included; Portfolio or reflective practice used; Clear assessment criteria; Quality assurance mechanisms in place	As a University of Tartu programme, it was part of a recognised higher-education institution and therefore likely operated under formal academic rules. However, only limited public information is available about the actual assessment system.	Public sources do not provide details on competency-based assessment, practical interpreting examinations, portfolios, reflective practice, or quality-assurance procedures specific to interpreter competence.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; Alignment with national qualification frameworks; Pathway to professional certification or licensing; Continuing professional development requirements; Ethical codes linked to certification	The programme represented a formal education pathway into the interpreting field in Estonia. Estonia also has a national professional qualification system for sign language interpreters, with the current "Viipekeeletõlk, tase 6" professional standard valid from 2023 to 2028.	A direct link between completion of the University of Tartu programme and the current professional certification pathway is not clearly documented in the public sources reviewed. Since the programme is not currently visible as active, its present role in certification is unclear.

Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; Affordable or subsidised options; Inclusive admission and learning supports; Adequate intake capacity	The programme was historically important because it provided a national formal training route within Estonia, reducing dependence on informal or foreign training opportunities.	Current availability is the major gap. The programme does not appear to be available as an active full interpreter education pathway today. This creates a significant accessibility issue for people in Estonia who want to become qualified sign language interpreters.
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; Alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; Consistency with international standards	Estonia legally recognises Estonian Sign Language as an independent language under the Language Act. This provides a national legal basis for the development of sign language-related education and services.	Although the legal recognition of Estonian Sign Language is clear, public information does not show a current structured education pathway that fully matches the legal and service need for trained interpreters.
Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; Digital professionalism addressed; Ethical remote practice included	No explicit public evidence was found that the historical programme included training on remote interpreting platforms, digital professionalism, or ethical remote practice.	Digital and remote interpreting competence remains unconfirmed. This is a significant gap, especially because Estonia has developed remote interpreting services for people with hearing loss, and national sources note that remote interpreting began in Estonia in 2018.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; Preparation for healthcare settings; Preparation for legal and judicial settings; Preparation for employment and public services; Readiness for complex or high-stakes situations	The programme was intended to prepare interpreters for communication between Deaf and hearing people, which is relevant to public services, education, employment, and community life.	Public information does not clearly show whether students were prepared for specific sectors such as healthcare, education, legal/judicial settings, employment, media, or high-stakes interpreting situations.

Table 32: Assessment of existing sign language programme in Estonia (Estonian Sign Language C1-level course)[19]

Area of Assessment	Benchmark Expectation	Evidence from Programme	Gap Identified
Curriculum Content	Sign language linguistics included; Spoken language competence addressed; Interpreting theory and techniques covered; Deaf culture and community studies included; Professional ethics embedded; Specialised domains covered (education, healthcare, legal, public services, media); Digital and remote interpreting included	The University of Tartu announced an Estonian Sign Language C1-level course aimed at increasing advanced Estonian Sign Language competence. The course was presented as relevant for people already connected to sign language work, including interpreters, teachers and specialists. It therefore supports an important part of interpreter preparation: advanced language proficiency.	The course is focused on language competence and does not appear to be a complete interpreter education programme. Public information does not confirm coverage of interpreting theory, interpreting techniques, professional ethics, specialised domains, or digital/remote interpreting.
Competency Development	Core competencies clearly defined; Bilingual fluency developed; Interpreting accuracy and clarity assessed; Ethical decision-making addressed; Professional conduct emphasised; Context-specific competence developed	The course contributes to the development of advanced Estonian Sign Language proficiency, which is a core prerequisite for interpreter competence. In the Estonian context, this is particularly relevant because the shortage of highly competent sign-language professionals affects the quality and availability of interpreting services.	Competency development is limited mainly to language competence. The course does not publicly present a full interpreter competency framework covering interpreting accuracy, ethical decision-making, professional conduct, or context-specific interpreting skills.
Training Models and Structure	Clear programme structure and progression; Defined entry requirements; Adequate programme duration; Balanced theory–practice integration; Supervised practice or internships included	The course is offered by the University of Tartu as a structured continuing education opportunity. It responds to a clear national need for higher-level Estonian Sign Language competence	The available public information does not provide enough detail about duration, assessment format, progression routes, or whether it can be combined with other training toward a professional interpreter qualification.
Teaching and Learning Methodologies	Practice-oriented teaching approaches ; Use of simulations	Since the course focuses on advanced Estonian Sign	Public information does not clearly describe teaching

[19] University of Tartu. Estonian Sign Language C1-level course information. https://ut.ee/et/uudis/tartu-ulikool-pakub-eesti-viipekeele-c1-taseme-kursust

	and role-play; Case studies based on real contexts; Involvement of Deaf professionals as trainers; Use of digital learning tools	Language development, it can be understood as language-learning training with practical communication relevance.	methodologies such as role-play, simulations, interpreting practice, Deaf-led teaching, or the use of digital learning tools.
Assessment and Quality Assurance	Competency-based assessment methods; Practical performance assessments included; Portfolio or reflective practice used; Clear assessment criteria; Quality assurance mechanisms in place	As a University of Tartu course, it is delivered by a recognised higher-education institution, which gives it institutional credibility.	Public sources do not clearly explain whether the course includes formal C1-level assessment, practical language-performance assessment, portfolio tasks, or external quality assurance.
Certification and Professional Recognition	Recognised qualification awarded; Alignment with national qualification frameworks; Pathway to professional certification or licensing; Continuing professional development requirements; Ethical codes linked to certification	The course can support the professional development of interpreters and sign-language specialists by strengthening advanced language competence. Estonia's professional standard for "Viipekeeletõlk, tase 6" is part of the national professional qualifications system and includes updated competence wording and future skills.	The course itself does not appear to award a professional interpreter qualification. Its relationship to the national sign language interpreter certification system is not clearly described in the public information
Accessibility and Availability of Training	Geographic accessibility; Affordable or subsidised options; Inclusive admission and learning supports; Adequate intake capacity	The course is offered in Estonia by a national university and therefore provides an important domestic opportunity for advanced sign-language learning.	Availability may be limited by course timing, intake capacity, location, language requirements, and the fact that it is not a full training pathway. It cannot by itself solve the shortage of interpreter education opportunities.
Alignment with Legal and Policy Frameworks	Alignment with national sign language legislation; Alignment with right-to-access interpreting services; Consistency with international standards	The course supports the practical implementation of Estonia's legal recognition of Estonian Sign Language as an independent language under the Language Act.	Although the course contributes to language competence, it does not represent a comprehensive interpreter education pathway aligned with all rights-to-access interpreting needs.

Digital and Remote Interpreting Competence	Training on remote interpreting platforms; Digital professionalism addressed; Ethical remote practice included	No explicit public evidence was found that the C1 course includes remote interpreting, online interpreting platforms, or digital interpreting ethics.	Digital and remote interpreting are not visibly included. This is relevant because Estonia has remote sign language interpreting services, and training should ideally prepare professionals for this mode of work.
Context-Specific Preparedness	Preparation for education settings; Preparation for healthcare settings; Preparation for legal and judicial settings; Preparation for employment and public services; Readiness for complex or high-stakes situations	The course may indirectly support interpreting in different contexts by strengthening advanced language competence.	It does not publicly show sector-specific preparation for education, healthcare, legal settings, employment, public services, or other high-stakes contexts.

8.2. Alignment of National Educational System and Legal Framework in Estonia with International Sign Language Standards

Table 33: Comparative assessment of educational and legal framework on sign language in Estonia with interanational standard

Standard Area	International Expectation/ benchmark	Fully Aligns	Partially Aligns	Does Not Align	Notes / Evidence / Gaps
Legal recognition of sign language	Sign language is legally recognised as a natural language in national law or constitution.	X			Estonia fully aligns in this area. The Estonian Language Act explicitly states that Estonian Sign Language is an independent language and that signed Estonian is a mode of the Estonian language. This provides clear legal recognition in national legislation, even though recognition is not located in the Constitution itself.
Right to sign language Interpreting	National laws guarantee access to professional sign language interpreters in public services.		X		Estonia partially aligns. The Language Act states that the right of deaf and hearing-impaired persons to communicate in Estonian Sign Language and signed Estonian at specified agencies must be ensured by providing translation services according to legislation. However, the practical availability of interpreting depends on service arrangements and sector-specific implementation. Tallinn's public service information, for example, describes sign language interpreting as

					support for everyday communication, administrative agencies and service institutions, but this does not prove uniform access across the whole country and all public-service areas.
Education access	Deaf learners have access to sign language and/or interpreters at all education levels.		X		Estonia partially aligns. The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act states that when teaching a student who is deaf or has reduced hearing ability, Estonian Sign Language and signed Estonian may be used in addition to Estonian as the language of instruction. Estonia also has an inclusive education policy framework. However, the law uses "may be used", and the available evidence does not confirm equal, consistent access to sign-language-based education or interpreting support at all education levels and in all regions
Healthcare access	Interpreting services are available in healthcare settings without discrimination or delay.		X		Estonia partially aligns. Interpreting services exist and can support communication in necessary service institutions, and remote interpretation services are intended to help hearing-impaired people communicate through a sign language interpreter. However, public sources do not show a clear, delay-free nationwide entitlement specifically guaranteeing professional sign language interpreting in all healthcare settings. Therefore, access appears possible but not fully guaranteed in practice across the whole healthcare system.
Interpreter training standards	Interpreter education programme is formalised, structured, and competency-based.		X		Estonia partially aligns, but with important gaps. Estonia has professional standards for sign language interpreters, and previous interpreter education existed at the University of Tartu. However, current public information points to a shortage of sign language translators/interpreters and gaps in Estonian Sign Language research and training capacity. Tallinn University has also highlighted the need to strengthen the field through research and development. This suggests that standards exist, but a current full formal education pathway is not sufficiently visible or available
Certification and Accreditation	Interpreters are certified or accredited through recognised national systems.	X			Estonia fully aligns in terms of professional certification. The national professional standard "Viipekeeletõlk, tase 6" exists in the Estonian qualifications system and requires proof of all compulsory competences. The standard also sets education and work-experience requirements, including higher education or, in some cases, secondary education combined with at least ten years of professional interpreter experience and specialised preparation.

Professional ethics	National ethical codes exist and are applied in interpreter practice.		X		Estonia partially aligns. The professional standard system refers to the professional competences expected of interpreters, and the earlier professional standard describes sign language interpreting as mediation of language and culture, including Deaf culture. It also states that the interpreter follows professional ethics requirements. However, the reviewed public evidence does not prove that one binding statutory ethical code applies to all sign language interpreters in all settings, nor does it show how ethical compliance is monitored in practice.
Quality assurance mechanisms	Systems exist to monitor interpreter quality and address complaints.		X		Estonia partially aligns. The existence of professional standards and a professional qualification-awarding system provides a quality framework for assessing interpreter competence. However, public sources do not show one comprehensive national mechanism specifically dedicated to ongoing monitoring of interpreter quality, handling professional complaints, and ensuring consistent service quality across all sectors.
Availability of interpreters	There are sufficient trained interpreters to meet national demand.			X	Estonia does not fully align in practice. Tallinn University has publicly stated that there is a shortage of sign language translators/interpreters in Estonia and that there are major gaps in Estonian Sign Language research. This shortage is one of the most important national gaps, because legal recognition and professional standards cannot be fully effective if there are not enough trained interpreters available to meet demand.
Accessibility and affordability	Interpreting services are accessible geographically and financially.		X		Estonia partially aligns. Some public services are available free of charge, including the national remote interpretation service for hearing-impaired people who need help from a sign language interpreter. Tallinn also provides municipal sign language interpreting support, but its public information indicates limited monthly provision in some cases, such as 3-4 hours per month for specific municipal services. This suggests that services exist and can be financially accessible, but access may vary by location, eligibility, service type and available interpreter capacity
Deaf community involvement	Deaf organisations are involved in policy-making and interpreter education.		X		Estonia partially aligns. Estonia has Deaf community and interpreter-sector structures, including the Estonian Association of Sign Language Interpreters and professional qualification processes. Tallinn University's Estonian Sign Language research work also focuses on Deaf communities, language use, and sign language education. However, available public

					sources do not prove that Deaf organisations are systematically or formally required to be involved in all national policy-making, interpreter education, curriculum design, or quality assurance.
Digital and Remote Interpreting	Policies and training address remote/digital interpreting and ethics.		X		Estonia partially aligns. Estonia has a developed remote sign language interpretation service. The Social Insurance Board describes the service as free and intended for hearing-impaired, mainly Deaf, people who need help from a sign language interpreter through an application designed for the sign language community. Remote interpreting was already being used in Estonia in 2019, when the service was reported to have been used more than 800 times in four months. However, public evidence does not show a comprehensive national training framework covering remote interpreting platforms, digital professionalism and ethical remote practice for interpreters.
Alignment with UNCRPD Obligations	National laws and practices reflect UNCRPD Articles 2, 9, 21, 24, and 30.		X		Estonia partially aligns. Estonia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 30 May 2012, and national law recognises Estonian Sign Language as an independent language. National education legislation also allows the use of Estonian Sign Language and signed Estonian for deaf learners. However, the 2021 CRPD concluding observations for Estonia still point to accessibility and implementation issues, and the shortage of trained interpreters indicates that full practical implementation of CRPD standards remains incomplete.

8.3. Systematic report on existing programme for sign language interpreters in Estonia

8.3.1. Introduction and Context

Estonia presents a specific and important case for mapping sign language interpreter education. On one hand, Estonian Sign Language has clear legal recognition, and the country has developed formal professional standards for sign language interpreters. On the other hand, the mapping shows that Estonia currently lacks a clearly visible, active and comprehensive higher-education pathway for training new Estonian Sign Language interpreters. This makes the Estonian context different from countries where several formal university programmes in sign language interpreting are currently available.

Estonian Sign Language is legally recognised as an independent language under the Estonian Language Act[20]. This provides an important foundation for language rights, public service access and the professionalisation of interpreting. The national policy mapping also shows that Estonia has partial or full alignment with several international sign language standards, especially in relation to legal recognition, professional certification and remote interpreting services. However, the same mapping identifies important gaps in implementation, especially the shortage of trained interpreters, uneven availability of services, and the limited visibility of current formal interpreter education pathways.

The Estonian mapping therefore focuses on both formal and supporting structures. These include the historical University of Tartu Estonian Sign Language Interpreter programme, the University of Tartu Estonian Sign Language C1-level course, Tallinn University's Estonian Sign Language Research Lab / EVKUR, and the professional certification and continuing professionalisation system connected to the Estonian Association of Sign Language Interpreters and Kutsekoda. This approach allows the report to reflect the real Estonian situation without presenting research or certification structures as full interpreter education programmes.

Mapping these structures is important because the quality of interpreter education has direct consequences for Deaf and hard-of-hearing people's access to education, healthcare, public administration, employment, legal services, culture and everyday communication. Where interpreter education is limited, even strong legal recognition may not translate into practical access. The Estonian case therefore demonstrates why a modern, accessible and practice-oriented VET curriculum could add significant value.

8.3.2. Methodology

The mapping was conducted using the standardised framework of the SignUnity WP2 methodology. Comepleted trmplates are found in **Tables 29 -32** This framework assesses each programme or relevant structure against agreed benchmark areas, including curriculum content, competency development, training models, teaching methodologies, assessment and quality assurance, certification, accessibility, legal alignment, digital and remote interpreting, and context-specific preparedness. The structure of this report follows analysis of programme

[20] Estonian Language Act. https://deafhistory.eu/index.php/component/zoo/item/2007-estonia-legal-recognition-of-estonian-sign-language

context, methodology, curriculum content, structure, competencies, availability, comparative insights, gaps and implications for VET curriculum development.

The Estonian mapping was based on desk research and review of publicly available information, as well as the completed templates (**Tables 29 -32**) prepared for Estonia. The sources consulted included national legislation, professional standards, information on the Estonian Sign Language interpreter profession, institutional information from the University of Tartu and Tallinn University, and information on remote interpreting and sign language support services.

The following criteria were used to select the mapped examples:

- The example had to be directly related to Estonian Sign Language, sign language interpreting, interpreter competence, or the professionalisation of interpreting in Estonia.
- The example had to have public or documented evidence that could be assessed against the Appendix 1a benchmark framework.
- The mapping had to include at least three relevant structures, while clearly distinguishing between full education programmes, continuing education, research support and professional certification.
- The analysis had to avoid presenting non-programme structures as if they were complete interpreter education programmes.

Based on these criteria, four examples were mapped:

- **University of Tartu - Estonian Sign Language Interpreter programme**
- **University of Tartu - Estonian Sign Language C1-level course**
- **Tallinn University - Estonian Sign Language Research Lab / EVKUR**
- **Estonian Association of Sign Language Interpreters / Kutsekoda professional qualification system**

A key methodological limitation is that Estonia does not currently appear to have several active full interpreter education programmes that can be compared in the same way as larger countries with established university pathways. The University of Tartu interpreter programme is treated as a historical formal programme, while the C1-level course is treated as continuing language education, EVKUR as a research and professionalisation ecosystem, and Kutsekoda as a certification framework rather than a curriculum. This distinction is important for the accuracy of the report.

Another limitation is that publicly available information does not always provide detailed module descriptions, assessment methods, internship requirements, teaching methodologies or learning outcomes. Where evidence was missing, the report treats this as a gap in public visibility or system structure rather than assuming that the element is completely absent.

8.3.3. Overview of Mapped Programme

Table 34 presents the mapped programmes from Estonia. The Estonian mapping shows a fragmented but meaningful ecosystem. It includes one historical formal interpreter education programme, one current advanced language-development course, one university-based research and resource-development structure, and one national professional certification framework.

Table 34: Summary of mapped programmes from Estonia

Programme / Structure	Institution / Body	Type / Level	Duration / Structure	Main Target Group	Awarding / Responsible Institution
Estonian Sign Language Interpreter programme	University of Tartu	Applied higher education / historical formal interpreter education programme	Not clearly available as current active admission pathway	Future Estonian Sign Language interpreters	University of Tartu
Estonian Sign Language C1-level course	University of Tartu	Continuing education / advanced language development	Course-based continuing education	Interpreters, teachers and sign language specialists needing advanced Estonian Sign Language competence	University of Tartu
Estonian Sign Language Research Lab / EVKUR	Tallinn University	Research, teaching and professionalisation ecosystem	Research and development structure, not a full programme	Researchers, educators, sign language specialists, wider professional community	Tallinn University
Professional certification and continuing professionalisation system	Estonian Association of Sign Language Interpreters / Kutsekoda	Professional standard and certification framework	National professional qualification system	Practising or aspiring sign language interpreters seeking professional recognition	Kutsekoda / professional qualification-awarding structures

The most important finding is that Estonia has elements of a professional system, but these elements do not currently form one clear and complete interpreter education pathway. The University of Tartu programme shows that formal interpreter education existed in Estonia, but it is no longer clearly visible as an active route. The University of Tartu C1-level course supports advanced language competence, but it is not a complete interpreter training programme. EVKUR strengthens the knowledge base around Estonian Sign Language, Deaf communities, teaching and resources, but it does not award interpreter qualifications. The Kutsekoda system defines professional standards and certification, but it does not itself provide education or training.

8.3.4. Curriculum Content and Learning Outcomes

The mapped Estonian examples show that several important curriculum elements exist in the wider system, but they are not brought together in one active full interpreter education programme.

The historical University of Tartu Estonian Sign Language Interpreter programme is the strongest example of formal interpreter education. It provided a structured national route for training sign language interpreters and included at least some Deaf culture and community-related content. Evidence from the completed mapping notes that Deaf folklore was taught under the curriculum "Estonian Sign Language interpreter", showing that the programme included cultural and community knowledge alongside language and interpreting-related preparation. However, because the programme is no longer clearly visible as an active current study pathway, its curriculum cannot be fully assessed against all benchmark expectations. Public information does not provide sufficient detail on whether professional ethics, specialised interpreting domains, digital interpreting, legal or medical interpreting, or supervised practical training were systematically included.

The University of Tartu Estonian Sign Language C1-level course contributes to curriculum content in a narrower but still important way. It focuses on advanced Estonian Sign Language competence and is relevant for people already connected to sign language work, including interpreters, teachers and specialists. This supports one of the most important foundations of interpreter education: high-level language proficiency. However, it does not provide a full interpreter curriculum. It does not publicly confirm coverage of interpreting theory, professional ethics, specialised domains, or digital/remote interpreting.

Tallinn University's EVKUR contributes to curriculum development indirectly. Its focus on the linguistic structure and use of Estonian Sign Language, Deaf sign language communities, teaching and learning of Estonian Sign Language, and development of sign language resources is highly relevant to future interpreter education. EVKUR can strengthen sign language linguistics, Deaf community studies, resource development and evidence-based teaching. However, it is not presented as a full interpreter education programme and does not provide a visible curriculum covering interpreting techniques, supervised practice, specialised interpreting domains or certification.

The Kutsekoda professional standard provides a strong competence reference point. The professional standard "Viipekeeletõlk, tase 6" describes the work and competences required for successful professional practice. This is important because it defines what interpreters should be able to do. However, it is not a curriculum. It does not include modules, teaching hours, learning activities, internships or learning materials.

Overall, Estonia has strong fragments of curriculum relevance: advanced sign language competence, Deaf community knowledge, research-based sign language resources and professional competence standards. The main weakness is that these elements are not currently integrated into a clearly visible complete interpreter education pathway.

8.3.5. Programme Structure and Teaching Methodologies

The Estonian examples differ significantly in structure.

The University of Tartu interpreter programme was historically the closest to a complete formal education structure. As a university-based programme, it represented a more systematic route into interpreter preparation than short-term or informal training. However, currently available public information does not provide enough detail on its exact structure, duration, credits, progression, entry requirements, internships or assessment. The key structural gap is that the programme does not appear to be available today as an active route for new students.

The University of Tartu C1-level course is structured as continuing education. Its strength is that it responds to the need for higher-level Estonian Sign Language competence among interpreters, teachers and specialists. It is therefore useful for professional development, especially in a context where language competence and interpreter availability are major concerns. However, because it is course-based and language-focused, it does not provide the broader structure expected from an interpreter education programme. There is no clear public

evidence of supervised interpreting practice, field placements, progression toward certification or a complete theory-practice model.

EVKUR provides a research and development structure rather than a teaching programme for interpreters. Its role is important because interpreter education needs a strong academic and linguistic foundation. Research into Estonian Sign Language, Deaf communities, teaching and resources can support future curriculum design, assessment practices and teaching materials. However, EVKUR does not offer a visible structured interpreter training pathway with admission, modules, credits, internships or qualification.

The Kutsekoda professional certification system provides a national structure for recognising interpreter competence. This is important because it gives the profession a formal framework. However, it does not provide teaching methodologies. It does not describe how learners should be taught, how supervised practice should be organised, or how future interpreters should move from beginner level to professional competence.

In terms of teaching methodologies, the available evidence is limited. The historical University of Tartu programme appears to have included work with authentic Deaf community materials, such as video files, folklore texts and terminology development in cooperation with Deaf people. This suggests some use of visual, community-based and culturally grounded learning. However, there is little public evidence on interpreter-specific methods such as simulations, role-play, case studies, supervised interpreting exercises, reflective portfolios, or practice in real service settings.

The overall conclusion is that Estonia has knowledge structures, language training and certification structures, but there is no clearly visible integrated training model that combines theory, practice, supervised interpreting, assessment and professional certification.

8.3.6. Competencies Developed

The mapped Estonian examples support several important interpreter-related competencies, but not all of them are developed through one coherent pathway.

The strongest competence area is Estonian Sign Language proficiency. The University of Tartu C1-level course directly supports advanced language competence, while EVKUR contributes to the broader understanding of Estonian Sign Language structure, use, teaching and learning. These are essential foundations because interpreters need strong command of both the signed and spoken/written language systems involved in their work.

The historical University of Tartu interpreter programme was designed to prepare people for interpreting between Deaf and hearing people. This suggests that it supported core interpreting competence, including bilingual communication and mediation between languages and cultures. However, because detailed curriculum and assessment information is not publicly visible, it is not possible to confirm how interpreting accuracy, clarity, ethical decision-making or context-specific interpreting were formally developed and assessed.

The Kutsekoda professional standard is the clearest source for defining expected professional competencies. It provides an official competence framework for sign language interpreters in Estonia and describes professional practice as mediation of language and culture. This is a strong national foundation because it defines what the profession expects from interpreters. However, it does not explain how learners develop these competencies through education or practical training.

Ethical competence is partially visible through the professional standard and the wider understanding of interpreting as language and cultural mediation. However, ethics does not appear as a clearly documented training strand across the mapped structures. There is no strong public evidence of structured ethical case analysis, professional dilemmas, confidentiality training, impartiality training, role-boundary exercises or assessment of ethical decision-making.

Context-specific preparedness is also limited. The mapped structures do not show a complete training pathway for education, healthcare, legal, public service, employment, media or emergency interpreting. This is a major gap because interpreters often work in complex and high-stakes environments where general language competence is not enough.

Digital and remote interpreting competence is another partial area. Estonia has remote interpreting services, which shows that digital interpreting exists in practice. However, the mapped education and professionalisation structures do not clearly show systematic training on remote platforms, online interaction management, data protection, confidentiality, digital fatigue, visual framing, turn-taking in online settings or ethics of remote interpreting.

In summary, Estonia has foundations for linguistic, cultural and professional competence, but the route for developing full interpreter competence is fragmented. The strongest areas are language competence, professional standards and research support. The weakest areas are applied interpreting practice, ethics, sector-specific preparedness and digital/remote interpreting training.

8.3.7. Availability and Accessibility of Training

Availability is one of the central issues in the Estonian mapping.

The historical University of Tartu interpreter programme was important because it provided a domestic formal education route for future Estonian Sign Language interpreters. Its apparent discontinuation or lack of current visibility creates a major gap. Without an active full training programme, people who want to become interpreters may have limited pathways into the profession.

The University of Tartu C1-level course increases access to advanced sign language learning, but it cannot replace full interpreter education. It may support existing interpreters, teachers or specialists, but it does not provide a complete route for new interpreters. Access may also depend on course availability, timing, entry level, location and capacity.

EVKUR increases the academic and research visibility of Estonian Sign Language and supports the development of resources, teaching and knowledge. This contributes to long-term system development, but it does not directly provide access to interpreter qualification.

The Kutsekoda professional standard is publicly available and creates transparency about expected professional competence. However, certification accessibility depends on whether people can access the training and practical experience needed to meet the standard. If there is no full current education pathway, the certification system may be difficult for new candidates to enter.

In service provision, Estonia has important accessibility measures, including remote interpreting services and municipal interpreting support. However, the national policy mapping identifies that access can vary by location, service type, eligibility and interpreter availability. It also notes that Estonia does not fully align in practice regarding the availability of interpreters, because there is a shortage of trained professionals.

Therefore, the main accessibility issue is not only financial or geographic. It is structural: Estonia has legal recognition and professional standards, but limited visible educational capacity to produce enough new interpreters. This affects the long-term sustainability of interpreting services.

8.3.8. Comparative Insights

A comparison of the mapped Estonian examples shows that each structure plays a different role in the ecosystem.

The University of Tartu historical interpreter programme represents the strongest evidence that Estonia once had a formal interpreter education route. Its strength was that it was linked to a recognised higher-education institution and aimed at preparing interpreters for communication between Deaf and hearing people. Its weakness is that it is no longer clearly available as an active current pathway, and public information about its full curriculum is limited.

The University of Tartu C1-level course is strong in advanced language development. It is relevant for interpreters and specialists because high-level Estonian Sign Language competence is essential for interpreting quality. However, it does not include enough visible evidence of interpreting theory, practice, professional ethics, specialised domains or certification to be treated as a full interpreter education programme.

EVKUR is strong in research, linguistic knowledge, Deaf community knowledge, teaching and resource development. It can support the future development of interpreter education by strengthening the academic foundation of Estonian Sign Language. Its weakness is that it is not a qualification pathway and does not provide interpreter-specific curriculum, practice or assessment.

The Kutsekoda professional qualification system is strong in professional recognition and competence definition. It gives Estonia a formal standard for what a sign language interpreter should know and be able to do. However, it does not provide training, and the route from education to certification is not clearly visible.

The common strength across all examples is that Estonia has serious institutional recognition of Estonian Sign Language and sign language interpreting. The common weakness is fragmentation. There is no clearly visible current pathway that connects language learning, interpreting theory, supervised practice, ethics, specialised domains, assessment and certification into one coherent system.

Compared to countries with several active university programmes, Estonia's main issue is not the absence of legal or professional recognition, but the limited capacity of the education system to train new interpreters at scale. This makes the Estonian case especially relevant for the SignUnity VET curriculum.

8.3.9. Identified Gaps

The mapping identified several major gaps in Estonia.

Absence of a clearly visible current full interpreter education programme

The most important gap is that Estonia does not appear to have a current full formal interpreter education programme that is publicly visible and available for new students. The University of Tartu programme shows that such education existed historically, but its current availability is unclear.

Fragmentation between training, research and certification

Estonia has language courses, research structures and professional standards, but these are not clearly integrated into one coherent pathway. This creates a gap between what the profession requires and how new interpreters are trained to meet those requirements.

Shortage of trained interpreters

The national policy mapping identifies interpreter availability as a major weakness. Estonia does not fully align with the benchmark that there should be sufficient trained interpreters to meet national demand. This shortage limits the practical implementation of language rights and service access.

Limited visibility of supervised practice and internships

The mapped structures do not clearly show systematic supervised practice, internships, work placements or practicum-based training. This is a significant gap because interpreting is a practical profession that requires guided performance development.

Limited evidence of specialised-domain training

There is no clear evidence of structured training for healthcare, legal and judicial settings, education, employment, public services, media, emergency contexts or other high-stakes situations. General language competence alone is not enough for these contexts.

Limited explicit ethics training

Professional ethics is visible in the professional standard system, but there is limited evidence of ethics as a structured training and assessment component. This is a concern because interpreters often face complex role, confidentiality and impartiality dilemmas.

Digital and remote interpreting training gap

Estonia has remote interpreting services, but the mapped education structures do not clearly show training on remote interpreting platforms, digital professionalism, online ethics or technical risk management. This creates a mismatch between service delivery innovation and interpreter training.

Limited public transparency

Some information is available, but detailed curricula, module descriptions, assessment methods, learning outcomes and progression routes are not always easy to find. This makes system-level planning and comparison more difficult.

8.3.10. Implications for VET Curriculum Development

The Estonian findings provide clear implications for the SignUnity VET curriculum.

Create a bridge between professional standards and training

Because Estonia has professional standards but limited visible training pathways, the VET curriculum should translate professional competence requirements into teachable modules, practical activities and assessment tasks. This would help bridge the gap between certification expectations and actual learner preparation.

Strengthen advanced sign language and bilingual competence

The curriculum should include strong development of Estonian Sign Language competence, spoken/written language competence, bilingual mediation and language awareness. The University of Tartu C1-level course shows that advanced language competence is already recognised as a priority, and the VET curriculum should build on this need.

Include Deaf culture and Deaf community knowledge

EVKUR's focus on Deaf sign language communities and Estonian Sign Language resources shows the importance of cultural and community knowledge. The VET curriculum should include Deaf history, Deaf culture, community diversity, rights-based approaches and cooperation with Deaf professionals.

Make professional ethics explicit

Ethics should not be treated only as an implied professional value. The curriculum should include clear modules on confidentiality, impartiality, role boundaries, power dynamics, conflicts of interest, professional responsibility and ethical decision-making in real cases.

Add specialised-domain modules

The curriculum should prepare learners for interpreting in education, healthcare, legal and judicial settings, employment, public administration, social services, culture and media. Each domain should include vocabulary, role expectations, ethical risks, communication dynamics and case-based exercises.

Prioritise digital and remote interpreting

Because Estonia already uses remote interpreting services, the VET curriculum should include digital and remote interpreting as a core strand. This should cover platforms, visual framing, turn-taking, confidentiality, data protection, online professionalism, technical troubleshooting and remote interpreting fatigue.

Include supervised practice and simulation

The curriculum should include simulations, role-play, interpreting labs, peer feedback, case studies, reflective journals and supervised practical exercises. Where possible, it should also include practicum placements or observation of professional interpreters.

Ensure flexibility and accessibility

Since Estonia's interpreter training capacity is limited, the VET curriculum should be flexible and accessible. Hybrid or blended delivery could help reach learners outside major urban centres. Digital learning tools could also support learners who cannot access full-time campus-based education.

Involve Deaf professionals and interpreter associations

The curriculum should be developed with Deaf community representatives, practising interpreters, interpreter associations, universities and certification bodies. This would help ensure that the programme is realistic, culturally grounded and aligned with professional expectations.

8.3.11. Conclusion

The Estonian mapping shows a system with strong legal and professional foundations but significant training-capacity gaps. Estonian Sign Language is legally recognised, and Estonia has a national professional qualification standard for sign language interpreters. The country also has important supporting structures, including Tallinn University's EVKUR research lab, the University of Tartu's advanced Estonian Sign Language learning opportunities, and professional certification through the national qualification system.

At the same time, Estonia does not currently appear to have a clearly visible active full formal interpreter education programme. This is the central finding of the report. The historical University of Tartu interpreter programme shows that such training existed, but current provision is fragmented across language learning, research, professional standards and service delivery. The shortage of trained interpreters further shows that existing structures are not sufficient to meet national demand.

The mapping therefore confirms the relevance of the SignUnity VET curriculum. For Estonia, such a curriculum could help connect existing strengths into a more coherent training pathway. It could translate professional standards into practical learning outcomes, strengthen language and interpreting competence, introduce explicit ethics and specialised-domain training, and respond to the growing importance of digital and remote interpreting.

Overall, Estonia's case demonstrates that legal recognition and professional standards are essential but not enough on their own. To improve the quality and accessibility of interpreting services for Deaf and hard-of-hearing people, these foundations need to be supported by structured, accessible, practice-oriented and Deaf-centred interpreter education.

8.4. Systematic report on how Estonia's national education and legal framework aligns with international standards

8.4.1 Introduction and Purpose

This report presents the national analysis of Estonia's legal and educational framework concerning Estonian Sign Language, sign language interpreting, and the accessibility of services for Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. The purpose of the report is to assess the extent to which Estonia's national legislation, educational policy, interpreter qualification system, and service provision correspond to international standards on sign language and sign language interpreting.

The analysis is conducted within the framework of the SignUnity project and is closely connected to the wider objectives of Work Package 2. The aim of this work package is not only to map existing interpreter education and training opportunities, but also to analyse national legal and policy systems and identify how they align with international expectations, particularly those derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and complementary guidance from the World Federation of the Deaf.

Estonia is a relevant case for this analysis because it combines strong legal recognition of Estonian Sign Language with a highly digital public-service environment and an established national professional qualification framework. At the same time, the Estonian case also shows important practical challenges, especially regarding the shortage of qualified sign language interpreters, the visibility of current interpreter education pathways, and the consistency of access to interpreting services across sectors and regions.

The purpose of this report is therefore to provide a concise but evidence-based overview of Estonia's areas of strong alignment, partial alignment, and remaining gaps. The findings are intended to support the development of a stronger and more coherent VET curriculum for sign language interpreters and to inform future improvements in policy, training, quality assurance, and service provision.

8.4.2. Methodology for Alignment Assessment

The assessment for Estonia was carried out using the template provided in Appendix 1b of the signunity progect documents, completed appendix is presented in **Table 33** which compares national legal and educational arrangements with international benchmark areas. These benchmark areas include legal recognition of sign language, the right to interpreting in public services, education access, healthcare access, interpreter training standards, certification and accreditation, professional ethics, quality assurance, availability of interpreters, accessibility and affordability, Deaf community involvement, digital and remote interpreting, and alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [21].

The assessment followed a qualitative desk-research approach. The main sources used included national legal documents, official public-service information, qualification standards, information on remote interpreting services, educational legislation, and publicly available information from relevant Estonian institutions and organisations.

Each standard area was assessed using one of three possible ratings:

Fully Aligns. Partially Aligns, Does Not Align

"Fully Aligns" was used where the international benchmark is clearly reflected in national law, policy, and institutional practice. "Partially Aligns" was used where some legal, institutional, or policy measures exist, but where implementation is incomplete, inconsistent, sector-specific, or insufficiently documented. "Does Not Align" was used where the benchmark is largely absent or where available evidence shows that the system does not meet the expected standard in practice.

One limitation of the analysis is that public sources often provide stronger evidence of legal recognition and service existence than of actual everyday implementation. Therefore, the

[21] UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd

assessment pays attention not only to whether rights and services formally exist, but also to whether there is evidence of their consistent availability in practice.

8.4.3. Summary of Alignment and Deviations

Overall, Estonia demonstrates a relatively strong formal foundation in the area of sign language recognition and interpreter qualification. Estonian Sign Language is legally recognised, and the professional qualification system includes a national standard for sign language interpreters. Estonia also has experience with digital and remote sign language interpreting services.

However, most benchmark areas fall into partial alignment because the practical availability of services is not consistently proven across sectors, regions, and education levels. The most serious structural challenge is the shortage of qualified sign language interpreters and the limited visibility of current formal interpreter education pathways.

3.1 Areas of strong alignment

Estonia shows strongest alignment in the legal recognition of Estonian Sign Language. The Estonian Language Act explicitly recognises Estonian Sign Language as an independent language and signed Estonian as a mode of the Estonian language. This provides a clear national legal basis for the linguistic rights of Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons.

A second area of strong alignment is certification and accreditation. Estonia has a national professional standard for sign language interpreters, "Viipekeeletõlk, tase 6", within the Estonian qualifications system. This standard sets out compulsory competences and professional requirements, including education and work-experience conditions. This gives Estonia a structured national mechanism for recognising interpreter competence.

These two areas show that Estonia has important formal foundations in place: legal recognition of the language and a national qualification framework for the interpreting profession.

3.2 Areas of partial alignment

Most other areas show partial alignment.

The right to sign language interpreting is partially aligned. Estonian legislation recognises the right of Deaf and hearing-impaired persons to communicate in Estonian Sign Language and signed Estonian in certain public contexts, and this right must be supported through translation services according to relevant legislation. However, the practical availability of interpreting depends on service arrangements and sector-specific implementation. Available public

information does not prove equal and uniform access across all public services and all parts of the country.

Education access is also partially aligned. Estonian education legislation allows Estonian Sign Language and signed Estonian to be used in addition to Estonian when teaching learners who are deaf or have reduced hearing ability. Estonia also has a general inclusive education framework. However, the legislation uses flexible wording, and available evidence does not confirm that all Deaf learners have consistent access to sign-language-based education or interpreting support at all education levels and in all regions.

Healthcare access partially aligns. Interpreting services can support communication in service institutions, and Estonia has remote interpreting options that may help Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons communicate with service providers. However, the evidence does not show a clear, delay-free, nationwide entitlement to professional sign language interpreting in all healthcare settings.

Interpreter training standards also partially align. Estonia has professional standards and previous interpreter education existed at higher education level, including at the University of Tartu. However, current public information indicates a shortage of interpreters and gaps in Estonian Sign Language research and training capacity. This suggests that although standards exist, a current full formal education pathway is not sufficiently visible or available.

Professional ethics partially align because the professional standard refers to professional competences and ethical expectations. However, there is no clear public evidence of one binding national ethical code applying to all sign language interpreters in all settings, nor of a systematic mechanism for monitoring ethical compliance.

Quality assurance partially aligns. The qualification system provides a framework for assessing interpreter competence, but available information does not show one comprehensive national mechanism for ongoing monitoring of interpreter quality, handling complaints, and ensuring consistent quality across sectors.

Accessibility and affordability also partially align. Some interpreting services are available free of charge, including remote interpreting services. Tallinn also provides municipal interpreting support. However, the availability of services may vary according to location, eligibility, service type, and interpreter capacity. In some cases, municipal support appears to be limited in monthly hours, which suggests that accessibility is not fully guaranteed in practice.

Deaf community involvement partially aligns. Estonia has relevant Deaf community and interpreter-sector structures, including professional associations and research activities connected to Estonian Sign Language. However, available sources do not prove that Deaf organisations are systematically and formally involved in all national policy-making, interpreter education, curriculum design, and quality assurance processes.

Digital and remote interpreting partially aligns. Estonia has a developed remote sign language interpretation service, which reflects the country's broader digitalisation and provides an important accessibility tool. However, public evidence does not show a comprehensive national training framework covering remote interpreting platforms, digital professionalism, confidentiality, and ethical remote practice.

Alignment with UNCRPD obligations is partial. Estonia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012, and national legislation recognises Estonian Sign Language. However, accessibility and implementation issues remain, and the shortage of trained interpreters indicates that full practical implementation of UNCRPD standards has not yet been achieved.

3.3 Areas of non-alignment

The main area where Estonia does not align in practice is the availability of interpreters. Available information points to a shortage of sign language translators and interpreters in Estonia, as well as broader gaps in Estonian Sign Language research and training capacity. This shortage is a central systemic problem because legal recognition, professional standards, and service rights cannot be fully effective if there are not enough trained interpreters to meet demand.

This gap affects several sectors at once, including education, healthcare, public administration, social services, and digital service provision. It also creates pressure on existing interpreters and may limit the ability of Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons to access services equally and without delay.

3.4 Overall alignment rating

Overall, Estonia can be described as strongly aligned in legal recognition and professional certification, but only partially aligned in implementation, service availability, training capacity, ethics, and quality assurance. The country has a strong formal foundation, but the gap between legal and institutional frameworks and everyday accessibility remains significant.

8.4.4. Implications for VET and Ethics

The findings from Estonia have important implications for vocational education and training, especially for the future development of a modern curriculum for sign language interpreters.

First, the shortage of interpreters shows the need for accessible, structured, and competency-based interpreter education pathways. Estonia already has a professional qualification standard, but the current training pipeline appears insufficient to meet national demand. A VET curriculum should therefore help create a clearer and more practical route into the profession.

Second, interpreter training should include strong preparation for public-service interpreting. Since access to interpreting is needed across education, healthcare, administrative services, social services, and other public contexts, interpreters must be prepared to work in complex institutional environments. This includes understanding users' rights, institutional procedures, role boundaries, and communication needs in different settings.

Third, ethics should be treated as a core component of interpreter education. Training should cover confidentiality, impartiality, accuracy, professional boundaries, respect for Deaf culture, conflict of interest, and accountability. Since Estonia does not appear to have one clearly visible binding national ethical framework applying to all interpreters in all settings, a VET curriculum can contribute by making ethical competence explicit and practically applicable.

Fourth, digital and remote interpreting should be included as a key training area. Estonia already uses remote interpreting services, which makes digital competence especially relevant. Training should include platform use, managing remote communication, privacy and data protection, preparation for online assignments, technical problem-solving, and ethical issues specific to digital interpreting.

Fifth, the curriculum should include continuous professional development and reflective practice. Given the small size of the interpreter community and the shortage of professionals, interpreters need opportunities to maintain and improve their competencies throughout their careers.

8.4.5. Recommendations

Based on the Estonian alignment assessment, the following recommendations are proposed.

Strengthen interpreter education pathways

Estonia should strengthen structured education and training opportunities for sign language interpreters. A clear, accessible, and competency-based training pathway would help address the national shortage of qualified interpreters and support the sustainability of the profession.

Expand interpreter availability

Policy and institutional measures should focus on increasing the number of trained interpreters available across the country. This is especially important for education, healthcare, public administration, and social services. Interpreter availability should not depend only on location, local service capacity, or individual arrangements.

Improve service consistency across sectors

Estonia should further clarify and strengthen the practical implementation of the right to sign language interpreting in different public-service areas. Clearer national guidance would help reduce inconsistencies between sectors and regions.

Develop stronger quality assurance mechanisms

A more comprehensive system for monitoring interpreter quality, managing complaints, supporting professional development, and ensuring consistent service standards would strengthen trust in interpreting services and improve user protection.

Formalise ethical standards

Estonia would benefit from clearer and more visible ethical guidelines for sign language interpreters, applicable across all interpreting settings. These should cover confidentiality, impartiality, role boundaries, professional responsibility, and digital interpreting ethics.

Strengthen deaf community participation

Deaf organisations, Deaf professionals, and service users should be systematically involved in interpreter education, curriculum design, service evaluation, and policy development. This would strengthen the relevance and legitimacy of future reforms.

Develop digital and remote interpreting standards

Since Estonia already uses remote interpreting services, it should further develop standards and training guidance for digital interpreting. This should include technical, ethical, privacy, and quality requirements for remote service delivery.

Implications for SignUnity

For the SignUnity project, the Estonian case confirms the need to include the following elements in the future VET curriculum:

- legal-rights awareness,

- Estonian Sign Language and Deaf culture,
- public-service interpreting,
- education and healthcare interpreting,
- professional ethics,
- digital and remote interpreting,
- quality assurance and reflective practice,
- cooperation with Deaf communities.

8.4.6. Conclusion

Estonia has a strong and important foundation for the recognition of Estonian Sign Language and the professionalisation of sign language interpreting. The legal recognition of Estonian Sign Language as an independent language and the existence of a national professional qualification standard for interpreters represent major strengths. Estonia's digital development and remote interpreting services also offer valuable examples of accessibility innovation.

At the same time, the analysis shows that full alignment with international standards has not yet been achieved in practice. The most significant challenge is the shortage of qualified interpreters, which directly affects access to education, healthcare, public services, and everyday communication. Additional gaps remain in the visibility of current interpreter education pathways, quality assurance, ethics, service consistency, and systematic Deaf community participation.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action in policy, education, and service delivery. A stronger VET curriculum for sign language interpreters can contribute to this process by offering structured training, clear learning outcomes, ethical preparation, digital competence, and stronger links with Deaf community needs. In this sense, the SignUnity project has a concrete opportunity to support Estonia in moving from a strong legal foundation toward more consistent and accessible real-life implementation.

9. Conclusion

This report has provided a comprehensive mapping of existing educational practices, training pathways, policy frameworks and legal conditions related to sign language interpreter education across six partner countries: Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia, Germany, Croatia and Estonia. The analysis confirms that sign language interpreting is not only a technical communication service, but a key condition for the practical realisation of accessibility, equal participation, educational inclusion, access to justice, healthcare communication, employment opportunities and civic engagement for Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. In this sense, the professionalisation of sign language interpreter education must be understood as both an educational priority and a human rights obligation.

The overall findings demonstrate that all participating countries recognise, to different degrees, the importance of sign language, interpreter services and inclusive communication. However, the research also shows a clear gap between policy recognition and practical implementation. In several contexts, national legislation, disability policies or inclusive education strategies acknowledge the need for accessibility, but this recognition is not always followed by structured interpreter education pathways, transparent certification systems, sufficient numbers of trained professionals, or consistent quality assurance mechanisms. This creates a situation in which the right to communication access exists in principle, but is not always fully realised in everyday life.

One of the central conclusions of the mapping is that sign language education and sign language interpreter education must not be treated as the same thing. Across several countries, existing programmes provide valuable opportunities for learning sign language or developing communication skills, but they do not always prepare learners for the complex professional role of an interpreter. Professional interpreting requires a broader set of competencies, including advanced bilingual and bicultural competence, interpreting theory, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting techniques, ethical decision-making, professional conduct, confidentiality, impartiality, domain-specific knowledge, digital competence, and the ability to work in complex and high-stakes environments. A future VET curriculum must therefore move beyond basic language acquisition and define clear occupational competencies for professional interpreting practice.

The country findings reveal different levels of system maturity. Germany offers an example of a comparatively developed interpreter education environment, with established higher education programmes, legal backing and professional structures. Its experience demonstrates the value of rigorous academic preparation, practical training and professional recognition, while also showing that even more mature systems need continued development in areas such as digital interpreting, ethics visibility, specialist-domain preparation and lifelong professional development. Estonia has a strong legal and professional foundation, including recognition of Estonian Sign Language and existing professional qualification structures, but the mapping shows that education pathways, practical training and service provision remain insufficiently integrated into a clearly visible and accessible system.

Croatia represents an evolving context where legal recognition and institutional awareness exist, but formal interpreter education remains limited. The Croatian case highlights the risks of relying mainly on short non-formal programmes when the profession requires complex linguistic, communicative, ethical and practical competencies. Kenya and Ghana show important progress through expanding sign language education, institutional initiatives and inclusive policy environments, yet both contexts require stronger standardisation, clearer progression pathways, enhanced supervised practice and more robust certification mechanisms. Ethiopia reflects a context where policy recognition and educational awareness are growing, but interpreter education remains underdeveloped, geographically limited and insufficiently supported by specialised training structures and legal recognition.

Despite the diversity of national contexts, several common challenges emerge across the report. The first is the fragmentation of training provision, where programmes differ significantly in duration, content, quality, accessibility and professional orientation. The second is the limited visibility of competency-based learning outcomes and assessment methods, making it difficult to determine whether learners are actually prepared for professional interpreting work. The third is the insufficient integration of supervised practice, internships, mentoring and real-life interpreting experience, even though interpreting is a performance-based profession that cannot be learned only through theoretical instruction. The fourth is the lack of consistent certification, licensing or accreditation systems that would protect service users, support professional recognition and ensure quality.

The mapping also confirms that interpreter education must better prepare learners for specialised domains. Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons require interpreting support not only in

general communication, but also in education, healthcare, legal and judicial settings, employment services, public administration, emergency contexts, media and digital environments. These settings require not only language competence, but also knowledge of procedures, terminology, ethical risks, role boundaries and institutional communication patterns. Therefore, a future curriculum should include specific modules or learning units dedicated to high-stakes and sector-specific interpreting.

A further cross-cutting finding is the increasing relevance of digital and remote interpreting. In several countries, digital tools, video resources or remote services are mentioned, but digital interpreting is rarely addressed as a full professional competency. This is a significant gap, especially considering the growing use of online services, remote consultations, digital education, virtual public services and hybrid events. Interpreter education must therefore include training in remote interpreting platforms, online communication management, data protection, confidentiality, technical preparedness, digital fatigue, professional boundaries and ethical decision-making in virtual environments.

The findings also underline the importance of Deaf community participation. High-quality interpreter education cannot be designed only by institutions, policymakers or training providers. Deaf organisations, Deaf professionals, service users and sign language communities must be meaningfully involved in curriculum design, teaching, assessment, service evaluation and policy development. Their participation ensures that interpreter education reflects real communication needs, respects Deaf culture and strengthens the legitimacy of training programmes. This is particularly important in countries where Deaf communities have historically been underrepresented in decision-making processes affecting their own language rights and access to services.

For the **SignUnity** project, the conclusions of this report provide a strong and practical foundation for the next phase of curriculum development. The future VET curriculum should be harmonised, but not rigidly uniform. It should define a shared core of professional competencies that all sign language interpreters need, while allowing adaptation to national sign languages, legal systems, qualification frameworks and local service realities. This balance between common standards and contextual flexibility is essential for a transnational project that connects European and Sub-Saharan African partners with different levels of institutional development and different educational traditions.

Based on the mapping, the future SignUnity VET curriculum should include several essential components: sign language proficiency, spoken/written language competence, Deaf culture and community studies, sign linguistics, interpreting theory and techniques, professional ethics, public-service interpreting, education interpreting, healthcare interpreting, legal and administrative interpreting, digital and remote interpreting, supervised practice, reflective learning, assessment of interpreting performance, quality assurance, and continuous professional development. These elements should be translated into measurable learning outcomes and practical assessment methods, ensuring that learners are not only exposed to content, but are able to demonstrate professional competence.

The added value of the SignUnity project lies precisely in its ability to transform fragmented evidence into a coherent educational response. By bringing together experiences from countries with more developed systems and countries where interpreter education is still emerging, the project can support mutual learning, capacity building and the creation of a curriculum that is both ambitious and realistic. The project can contribute to raising professional standards, improving the quality and consistency of interpreter training, supporting the recognition of interpreter competencies, and strengthening the connection between education providers, Deaf communities, professional associations and public institutions.

Ultimately, this report confirms that investment in sign language interpreter education is an investment in accessibility, equality and social justice. Without qualified interpreters, many rights remain difficult to exercise in practice. Without structured training, interpreters may enter complex professional situations without sufficient preparation. Without certification and quality assurance, service users cannot be fully protected. Without Deaf community participation, educational programmes risk becoming disconnected from the people they are meant to serve. The SignUnity project therefore responds to a clear and shared need: to support the development of competent, ethical, practice-oriented and socially responsive sign language interpreters who can contribute to more inclusive societies across Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The findings of this mapping should therefore be used not as an endpoint, but as a foundation for action. The next steps should focus on developing a competency-based VET curriculum, defining practical learning outcomes, designing assessment tools, integrating supervised practice, embedding ethical and digital competencies, and ensuring that Deaf communities

remain active partners throughout the process. In doing so, SignUnity can make a concrete contribution to the professionalisation of sign language interpreting and to the broader goal of ensuring that Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons have equal access to communication, services, rights and participation in all areas of life.

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