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Mapping Policy and Practice to an analytical framework.

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DOI

Publication date

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Management der Sprachenvielfalt im Hochschulwesen = Language diversity management in higher education = La gestion de la diversité linguistique dans l'enseignement supérieur

License

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

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(What we don't know about) Sign Languages in Higher Education in Europe: Mapping Policy and Practice to an analytical framework

Abstract: This paper focuses on issues related to sign language policies in Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs) in Europe. Drawing on the analytical framework proposed by Darquennes/Du Plessis/Soler (2020, i. e. this volume), which serves to address HEI language planning issues at macro, meso and micro levels, we carry out an inventory of how these issues play out for sign languages across Europe. Our investigation reveals the scarcity of information about sign language policies in HEIs, relating to both sign language as a language of instruction and as a subject of study. What becomes clear is that language planning activities (sign language acquisition, sign language status and corpus planning) are taking place in many countries but tend to go undocumented and unresearched. Given the increase in formal recognition of sign languages across Europe, coupled with the ratification of the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) by all EU member states, it would seem logical to expect that the status and prestige of sign languages would rise, with greater visibility of, and planning for, incorporation of sign languages in HEIs. However, the reality of the situation is unclear, suggesting the need for coordinated effort, supported by key pan-European bodies like the Council of Europe, the European Centre for Modern Languages and the European Commission, to ensure that sign language policy is on the agenda as parts of a rights-based response to deaf communities and the sign languages of Europe. Equally important is the need for European HEIs to embrace sign languages and ensure that they are part of the linguistic landscape. This will support and promote the status planning of sign languages and open up access to HEIs for deaf communities, a group that remains under-represented in academia.

Keywords: sign language planning, M2L2 sign language teaching, M2L2 sign language learning, status and prestige of sign languages

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1 Introduction

The development of policies to support teaching and learning of/in sign languages in higher education is a relatively new phenomenon. However, "knowledge in the sphere of sign language teaching remains scarcely documented" (McKee/Rosen/McKee 2014: 1). The territory with the most experience in this regard is the United States of America (USA), where, since the mid-1980s, activists and scholars have reflected on the situation of American Sign Language (ASL) in higher education settings (Wilcox 1988; Wilcox/Wilcox 1997). The USA is home to two federally funded higher education institutes that provide education in a range of subjects through ASL (Gallaudet University in Washington DC[1] and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology in New York[2]), but has also seen significant growth of provision of ASL classes across the country over the past five decades. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (the co-called ADA) was passed, which set in motion significant changes that impacted on ASL users in all areas of life and supported the groundswell. Wilcox (2019) lists 197 universities who accept ASL in fulfilment of foreign language requirements. He reports that all of California's twenty-three State University campuses accept ASL in fulfilment of the foreign language requirement. Further, in Kentucky, any state college or university that offers ASL must accept it as a modern language credit. Indeed, if a high school student takes ASL at high school level, it can satisfy their modern language entrance requirement for any state third level school. In Washington, legislation mandates that ASL as a subject meets the high school foreign language requirements for graduation from high school and admission to four-year undergraduate programmes.

In Europe, we have less clarity regarding the position of sign languages in higher education across the continent though there has been increased recognition of sign languages across both European Union (EU) and Council of Europe (COE) territories (Timmermans 2005; Tupi 2019; Wheatley/Pabsch 2012). Such recognition has occurred at pan-European level, with several non-binding resolutions emanating from the European Parliament (European Parliament 1988, 2016) and the COE (Council of Europe 2003; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2018). Sign languages are also explicitly referenced in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, United Nations 2006), a binding treaty that all European nations have now ratified. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML, Council of Europe 1992) is a key treaty, but it has not been extended to sign languages. Deaf community leaders have repeatedly called for this to be considered but there appears to be resistance to doing this. At the same time, there has been discussion of the potential for a parallel charter for sign languages across the decades (Napier/Leeson 2016; COE symposium December 2019).

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1 https://www.gallaudet.edu (Last accessed 1 February 2020)
2 https://www.rit.edu/ntid/ (Last accessed 1 February 2020)

In this chapter, we wish to present an overview of what we know (and don't know) about the positionality of sign languages in higher education in Europe. While extensive literature exists for many of these domains as they relate to spoken languages, there are many gaps in both official governmental and institutional datasets, and in the empirical literature when it comes to sign languages and communities of signers. For example, one major challenge for all work concerned with the situation of deaf sign language users is the fact that no disaggregated figures exist for deaf versus hard of hearing people in Europe, and no clear data is evident around the numbers of deaf and hearing sign language users across the continent (Napier et al. 2020). Darquennes/Du Plessis/Soler (2020, i. e. this volume) present a provisional matrix that seeks to take account of the transversal, multilayered, multiple goal-oriented and multidimensional nature of language policy at university level.
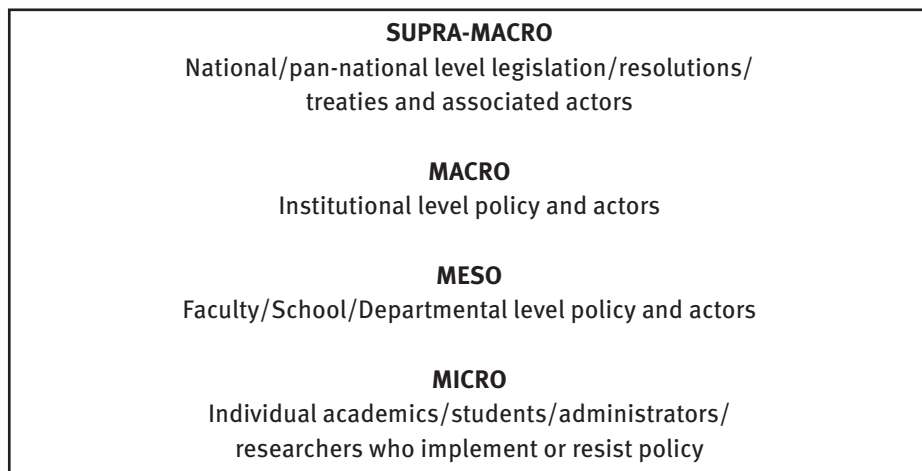
Against this backdrop, we set out to consider how sign languages fare with respect to the key thematic areas that Darquennes/Du Plessis/Soler (this volume) outline, providing examples from institutions we know, and in particular, Trinity College Dublin (TCD). We begin by considering language policy activities.

2 Language Policy Activities

In this section we address sign language policy activities in higher education from a range of perspectives. We think of language policy as having supra-macro, macro, meso, and micro level actors who respond to policy and practices at these levels, often influenced by what is happening within local/national/international deaf communities and the wider political sphere. These policies and the actors who, collectively and/or individually promote, implement or resist them, are responsible for the guiding principles and the effectiveness of operationalization that arises. Figure 1 attempts to capture this schematically.

To provide a backdrop to our discussion of language policy as it relates to sign languages in higher education, we first consider the wider scope of language policy activities on a pan-European basis.

The EU is home to an estimated one million deaf sign language users and fifty-one million hard-of-hearing citizens, many of whom are also sign language users (European Parliament 2016). Despite this, significant struggle has been required to bring about legal, constitutional or *de facto* (i. e. implicit) recognition of sign languages across the EU's Member States (Cokart/Schermer/Tijsseling/Westerhoff 2019; De Meulder 2015; De Meulder/Murray/McKee 2019; Krausneker 2001; Leeson 2004; Wheatley/Pabsch 2012). Legal recognition may include recognition of a sign language by means of general language legislation, a sign language law or act, or a sign language law or act that includes another means of communication (De Meulder 2015). Constitutional Recognition refers to the inclusion of reference to a sign language in a

SUPRA-MACRO
National/pan-national level legislation/resolutions/
treaties and associated actors

MACRO
Institutional level policy and actors

MESO
Faculty/School/Departmental level policy and actors

MICRO
Individual academics/students/administrators/
researchers who implement or resist policy

Fig. 1: Schematic overview of key actors in framing and operationalizing sign language policies in higher education

state's constitution, as is the case for Finland and Portugal[3], for example (De Meulder 2015), while *de facto* recognition of regional or national sign languages can exist in the form of policy statements or reference to sign languages (and/or deaf signers) in relevant legislation such as language policies or disability discrimination legislation (Krausnecker 2001; Wheatley/Pabsch 2012). As De Meulder (2015: 499) notes:

> "These do not constitute a hierarchy; in other words, a certain type of legal recognition does not necessarily correspond to a particular level of benefits. The differences in types of recognition can be explained by various factors determined by national contexts, including legislative issues (e.g., some countries do not have a constitution or language legislation), a country's attitudes toward linguistic and cultural diversity, already existing implicit recognition legislation, and the Deaf association and other parties involved."

Alongside community-led campaigns to foster recognition of sign languages runs the story of sign language teaching and learning in higher education in Europe. Indeed, sign language teaching and learning has been a totem of visibility in the broader educational landscape which was often hostile to deaf sign language users. For over a hundred years, sign languages were suppressed in deaf education (Ladd 2003; Lane 1988). Following from the second International Congress of Educators of the Deaf (ICED) Congress of Milan in 1880, sign languages were banned in deaf educational settings (primary, secondary school). Children were forbidden from signing, and punished when caught (Fischer/Lane 1993; McDonnell/Saunders 1993). Deaf teachers

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3 Portuguese Constitutional Assembly. 1997. *Fourth Constitutional Revision – Constitutional Law.* https://dre.pt/application/file/653464.

were removed from their posts following from implementation of strict oralist policies and those who "needed" sign language were considered to be "oral failures", (incorrectly) labelled as intellectually less capable than those who could speak (so called "oral successes") (Fischer/Lane 1993; Sacks 1989). In 2010, the ICED conference issued a declaration that rejected the 1880 resolution, acknowledged the errors of the 1880 Milan Congress and the harmful consequences that resulted. ICED 2010 also "called upon all Nations to adhere to the principles of the United Nations emphasising especially those outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [...] In addition, the declaration includes a call for a commitment by the Congress to devote itself for working in partnership with Deaf people in order to ensure the educational rights of Deaf globally."[4] The suppression of sign languages in primary and secondary education impacted on the potential for deaf students to achieve the entry level requirements for tertiary level education (Leeson 2012; McGrotty/Sheridan 2019). Additionally, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were not typically ready to receive students who were sign language users in many countries in Europe until the 1990s and, in many countries, much later again (Leeson/Sheikh 2010). Even where deaf students do access HEIs and sign language interpreters or live captioning of lectures is provided, the playing field is not even (Marschark/Spencer 2009). Indeed, the suppression of sign languages has been examined as an instance of linguicism (Phillipson 1997; Rose/Conama 2017).

Against this backdrop, we note that while sign languages have been taught in some European countries as extra-mural courses in higher educational institutes (HEIs) since the 1960s (e. g. Sweden), in others, the move towards providing sign language teaching and learning sign languages in HEIs came much later, often as part of or in parallel with the development of interpreter education (Napier 2009). Events like the European Year of Languages in 2001 put a spotlight on sign language related policy, opening up discussion about their position in EU and COE policy vis-à-vis other autochthonous languages of Europe. The year offered space for organisations like the 'European Union of the Deaf' (EUD) to ask why, for example, the ECRML did not extend to sign languages.

At national and regional level, Europe's Deaf communities worked to secure recognition of their languages with remarkable success, especially since the turn of the millennium. Tupi (2019: 45–46) presents an overview for COE territories, to which we have added information (insofar as could be determined) as to whether a sign language is taught in HEIs in these countries (see Appendix). This overview suggests that older members of the EU (in grey) are most likely to have moved towards introducing sign languages in HEIs. One thing we notice is that in many of the original EU member states, sign language teaching and learning in HEIs preceded legal recognition of

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4 http://wfdeaf.org/news/21st-international-congress-on-the-education-of-the-deaf-iced-in-july-2010-in-vancouver-canada/ (Last accessed 1 February 2020).

the national/regional sign language (see e. g. Kyle/Allsop 1998). In contrast, in many eastern European states, legal recognition of sign languages *appears* to be a precursor to the delivery of sign language classes in HE settings. We add that there is little or no information on the teaching and learning of sign languages in HE in many states, most notably in COE countries that are not members of the EU. This is clearly an issue that needs to be addressed.

In 1988, the European Parliament passed its first resolution on sign languages. This called for recognition of sign languages by Member States. Article 10 "Calls upon Member States, in cooperation with the Commission, to support pilot projects aimed at teaching sign language to hearing children and adults, using deaf people trained for the purpose and to back research in this area", the first time that a call for the teaching and learning of sign languages was made by a pan-European body (European Parliament 1988). Ten years later, the European Parliament passed a second resolution on sign languages (European Parliament 1998). Art. 6 calls on the Commission to ensure all EU programmes are accessible to deaf people and recognition is given to the need for sign language interpretation (European Parliament 1998), precursors for sign language users to access tertiary level education. A third resolution was passed in 2016. Here, three articles (22–24) make reference to sign language teaching and learning that have relevance for tertiary education settings:

> Art. 22 emphasises that sign language[5] should be included in educational curricula in order to raise awareness and increase the use of sign language;
> Art. 23 underlines that measures must be taken to recognise and promote the linguistic identity of deaf communities;
> Art. 24 calls on the Member States to encourage the learning of sign language in the same way as foreign languages.

This in many ways mirrors and supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD 2006) which includes an article that focuses on sign languages in education. Par. 24.3(b) of the UNCRPD states that State parties shall engage in facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the Deaf community. Sadly, this is not the reality in the majority of countries of the world with the World Federation of the Deaf estimating that only 17 % of the world's 72 million deaf people have access to education, and of these, just 3 % access to sign bilingual education (Allen 2013). We have no reliable figures for how many deaf sign language users gain access to HEIs in Europe, but we estimate the number to be as low as 10 % (Napier et al. 2020; Leeson 2012).

Indeed, the complete lack of consistency in responding to the need for education in or through a sign language for deaf children in primary or secondary school is what

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5 We note that the text makes use of the term 'sign language' in singular form, but the intention is that sign languages (plural) are considered.

prompted the European Centre for Modern Languages' (ECML) ProSign Project team[6] to focus their attentions on the teaching, learning and assessment of sign languages in HEIs: there simply was a more widespread practice in place in HEIs across more COE countries which we could build on.

2.1 Sign Languages and Transversal Policy Issues

Darquennes/Du Plessis/Soler (this volume) tell us that languages are used essentially in five ways in universities:
(i)   they are taught as subjects;
(ii) they are the language or languages of instruction used in the teaching of other, non-linguistic subjects;
(iii) they are used by academic staff in research;
(iv) they are used by the university in its administrative operations;
(v)   and they are used by the university in its external communication.

But what of sign languages? Here, we outline what is known and identify gaps in knowledge that have yet to be documented and interrogated.

2.1.1 Sign languages as subjects

There is a paucity of information available around how sign languages are taught, where they are taught, how curricula in sign languages are presented across Europe and to what level. What we can say is that the position of sign languages in HEIs is a relatively recent phenomenon (implemented at various points across the past fifty years, with significant growth in the past twenty-five years). Following from this, applied linguistics research on sign languages is very much in its infancy. There are, accordingly, huge gaps in our knowledge.

HEIs in many countries in Europe offer sign language instruction primarily as part of sign language interpreter education pathways, and at a range of levels (Leeson/Calles 2013; De Wit 2016). In 2016, there were more than 87 sign language interpreter training programmes across the continent of Europe (De Wit 2016), but these curricula are quite varied ranging from part-time vocational educational courses to (increasingly the norm) the so-called BA-MA[7] programmes. There are also many deaf studies

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6 https://www.ecml.at/Thematicareas/SignedLanguages/ProSign/EuropeanLanguagePortfolio/tabid/4277/language/en-GB/Default.aspx (Last accessed 25 May 2020).
7 Bachelor and master programmes in Europe as described in the Bolognia Process. https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en (Last accessed 15th June 2020).

related programmes (but we do not know how many), along with some teacher education programmes that specifically target sign language teachers- we estimate five in HEIs (ECML Network Meeting [2018]), and for teachers of the deaf where sign languages are on the curriculum in some way (but we do not know how many do this, to what level, or how much of the curriculum is devoted to sign language teaching and learning). Finally, there are many sign language courses offered as elective modules to the wider student body across HEIs in Europe.

Thus, there is no data available on how many people are learning a sign language in Europe. However, as a rough estimate, if we were to anticipate that there exist ten non-deaf sign language users for every deaf sign language user, from the European Parliament's figures mentioned earlier, we can extrapolate that there would be an estimated ten million sign language users across the EU and eighty two million across the COE territories. This figure would include family members, friends, work colleagues, service providers (healthcare providers, interpreters, teachers, etc.) who want to communicate in a sign language. A significant proportion of these would want to learn a sign language via a language course. As we have seen, this has become the case in the USA where ASL has become a language that is widely available and students select this as their "foreign language" graduation requirement. At present, we have no data providing a clear picture in this regard (Pyfers 2017), but as the 2016 European Parliament resolution advises, this is required.

In our experience, at least 90 % of M2L2[8] learners in HEI's are hearing people with no family members who are deaf (see Leeson/Venturi 2017 for illustrative figures of the Irish context in this regard). The motivations for learning a sign language as a second, additional or foreign language (L2/Ln) vary, with few empirical studies documenting the reasons why M2L2 learners seek to acquire a sign language, or how they progress. Exceptions include Peterson's (2009) study of ASL students which demonstrated that learners held some highly unrealistic expectations. Peterson (2009) reports that 77 % of his 1,115 respondents thought that ASL was a language that anyone could learn. In a replication of this study in Europe (n=241), 53 % of respondents agreed that "anyone can learn a sign language" (Ploss 2016). Nearly 40 % of students thought they would learn to sign better than they spoke English, while some two out of three thought they would attain fluency in two years or less. Moreover, perceptions of ability and disability also cloud the picture of motivation, with over 60 % of respondents saying that "Part of my reason for taking this class is a desire to help deaf people." It is hard to imagine students of a modern spoken language giving a similar response. In 2015, Peterson's survey was localised and shared across Europe (see Ploss 2016). European respondents were typically students who wished to explore a career with deaf communities or who were simply interested in learning a sign language. 39.2 % of the

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8 M2L2 refers to learners of a second/foreign language (L2) in another modality than their L1. Spoken languages use the oral-aural modality, whereas signed languages use the manual-visual modality.

European student respondents did not agree with the statement that they would learn to sign as well or better than they speak but, like the ASL learners in Pederson's study, 65 % of European sign language students agreed that repetition and practice were central to the language learning process (Plos 2016).

More generally, we note that research on aspects of L2/Ln teaching, learning and the acquisition of sign languages by adult learners in Europe is relatively new, but a more recent increase in attention to elements of M2L2 acquisition suggests this may be changing (Holmström 2019; Boers/van den Bogaerde 2019; Boers-Visker 2020; Sheridan 2019; Ortega 2014; McKee/Rosen/McKee 2014; Chen-Pichler 2012; Ferarra 2019; Rosen 2020).

2.1.2 Sign languages as languages of instruction used in the teaching of other, non-linguistic subjects

Intimately related to the issue of teaching a sign language as a subject is the issue of educational pathways for sign language teachers. Despite the increased recognition of sign languages across Europe over the past decades, there are still significant gaps to be bridged when it comes to ensuring that those who teach sign languages have access to teacher training. While sign language teaching and learning takes place in HEIs in many of the countries of Europe, most countries do not have any formal mechanism for training sign language teachers at all levels of delivery, including HEI. Indeed, national representatives from some 30 European countries attending a 2017 ECML workshop reported that most of their countries had no formal sign language teacher training programme in place (PRO-Sign Project Workshop 2017). Exceptions included Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany where there are programmes offered in HEIs. We also note that there are also vocational pathways in place in some countries, e. g. in the UK and Belgium (Pyfers 2017). In these programmes, a sign language is typically the language of instruction for some, if not all, courses (e. g. for courses on curriculum planning, learner psychology, assessment related courses).

The European Commission (EC) funded project, SignTeach[9], reports that when the project members began work in 2014, there was little or no collaboration between sign language teachers nationally, or across borders. Responses to a survey of sign language teachers (n=243) showed that most respondents were deaf native signers (83 %). Of the 15 % of respondents who were hearing teachers of a sign language, more than 40 % had learned to sign after the age of 20 (Pyfers 2017:23–24). The SignTeach survey also indicated that sign language teachers mostly teach hearing adult learners, though the domain(s) in which this teaching takes place are not identified. Teachers reported that they have to create more than 50 % of their teaching and learning materi-

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9 www.signteach.eu (Last accessed 5 February 2020).

als themselves given the lack of ready-made resources available in sign languages – a major issue replicated across sign language interpreter education too. Haug/Leeson/ Monikowski (2017) note that most resources on sign linguistics/sign language interpreting are published in English, requiring translation to local languages and development of local resources in local signed and written languages to ensure access for local students and dissemination to local deaf communities. Sign language teachers say that in some countries, the teaching of sign languages is considered a hobby rather than a professional enterprise or as a viable career option (Pyfers 2017). Yet, in recent years, the European Network of Sign Language Teachers (ENSLT) has been established, providing a community of practice[10] that supplements work that has been done in projects like the EC funded SignTeach and the COE/ECML ProSign 1 and 2 projects.

One thing that is essential to note is this: most sign language teachers in Europe report that they do not read or write English (or French), which leaves them unable to access a myriad of free, open-access materials published to support teachers from the COE and the ECML. For the purposes of transnational communication International Sign (IS) is preferred, though many are most comfortable in their national sign language (Pyfers 2017). Indeed, SignTeach respondents also note that they need "... (much) more: more information, more information in their national sign language, more contacts with other sign language teachers, as well as answers to sometimes very specific questions." (Pyfers 2017: 22). This is one reason why all content created by the ProSign projects is available in IS and national/local communities are encouraged to translate them to their local signed/written languages. Additionally, the COE's Companion Volume to the CEFR (CEFR-CV (2020) will also be available in IS for this reason.

In the absence of sign language specific teacher training, one might imagine that there would be scope for deaf sign language teachers to qualify as teachers (e. g. of maths, English, art, science, and/or as teachers of the deaf, etc.), and subsequently add the teaching of a sign language to their repertoire, drawing on their knowledge of pedagogy to guide them. However, it is difficult to estimate how many deaf teachers of the deaf there are across Europe, let alone what their experience of accessing teacher training, completing internships, and securing employment is like (Danielson/Leeson 2017; Pyfers 2017). Danielson/Leeson (2017: 140) report that "... it appears that in many countries, there are still significant issues surrounding access to tertiary education in general and teacher education in particular, as well as in securing employment as a teacher. Indeed, it proves almost impossible to find explicit reference to deaf or hard of hearing teachers in official reports.".

Beyond teacher education, sign languages are also languages of instruction on academic courses taught by deaf academics who deliver courses in a broad range of topics (e. g. ethics, occupational therapy, equality studies, etc.). However, the decision

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10 http://www.enslt.eu (Last accessed 5 February 2020).

to teach courses through a sign language may map to the hearing status of the academic and national equality and/or disability legislation rather than an institutional language policy per se (e. g. the Equal Status Acts 2000–2018 in Ireland). Of course, there may also be national/regional legislation that operates with regard to the national/regional sign language, and this too may influence practices on the ground.

Another part of the challenge is the lack of a critical mass of professionals in target fields who have developed specialist vocabulary in dedicated domains (e. g. linguistics, STEM subjects, etc.) in many countries. When interpreters are involved in the mix, they, with Deaf HE students are often obligated to muddle through, creating 'nonce' signs together, that serve as their lexical gap fillers for the purpose of a given course of study (Davis 1989; Leeson 2005; Leeson/Foley-Cave 2007; Napier/Leeson 2016). However, more recently there have been moves to build glossaries, informed by deaf teachers and subject specialists, which will support deaf students, academics, and interpreters in HEIs. For example, the Scottish Sensory Centre has developed a Science glossary with terminology in place for Chemistry, Biology and Physics, and plans to develop a Geography glossary.[11] In Ireland, Dublin City University has applied the same model in developing their STEM glossary in Irish Sign Language (ISL).[12] Such measures also go some way towards supporting professionals who seek to learn the national sign language in order to better engage with the Deaf community, e. g. medical or social care students, who in turn, will become healthcare providers (Napier/Major/Ferrara 2011). This also reflects the fact that while M2L2 signers are commonly students in targeted sign language programs (such as teacher of the deaf, sign language teacher or interpreter in Deaf Studies programs; see De Wit [2016]), there are new populations of hearing and deaf learners seeking to engage with sign language learning for specific purposes.

We can also say that in many interpreter education programmes, a range of courses are delivered in a sign language by deaf and hearing academics, mapping to macro and meso level policies (institutional/faculty/departmental level) around language of instruction. In some HEIs (e. g. Hogeschool Utrecht (HU) in The Netherlands), early stage courses are delivered with interpretation to the local spoken language as it is not expected that learners will have the linguistic competence to deal with the subject matter complexity in their first/second year of studies. However, such programmes may shift to monolingual delivery in a sign language for third/fourth years of study. For example, at TCD's Centre for Deaf Studies, a second year module on deaf education is delivered in ISL with interpretation into English. However, in the third year of the programme, the same academic teaches a module on ethics, and that is delivered in ISL without interpretation to English.

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11 http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/bsl/about.html (Last accessed 5 February 2020).
12 https://www.dcu.ie/news/news/2019/Feb/First-ever-Irish-Sign-Language-STEM-glossary-launched-DCU.shtml (Last accessed 5 February 2020).

2.1.3 Sign languages used by academic staff in research

In considering sign languages in research, we need to consider both the researcher, the topic(s) of research and publication platforms. As noted earlier, there have been myriad barriers to academia for deaf signers. At present, we estimate that there are fewer than 40 deaf PhD holders working in the broad field of applied language studies across the continent of Europe. This under-representation of deaf people in the very fields that describe, theorise and interrogate sign languages and their communities of use is highly problematic (Kusters/De Meulder/O'Brien 2017). Practical peer support for deaf scholars aspiring towards PhDs and academic careers has come primarily from the international Deaf academy. Recent decades have seen the establishment of the Deaf Academics network, an organization of Deaf academics who, since 2002, have met every two years. More recently, #DrDeaf workshops have been established to provide support for deaf students and early career researchers from more experienced deaf scholars. They also have a strong Twitter presence, offering visibility through a much appreciated virtual space for deaf scholars. At the same time, there is a growing community of hearing researchers who also use sign languages in their research work. While some of these researchers are fluent signers, there are many who do not have communicative competence in the sign language(s) they work with, which is highly problematic, risking the presentation of skewed representations of Deaf communities and sign languages, and excluding recognition of the contribution of deaf scholars. Such concerns informed the international Sign Language Linguistics Society (SLLS) decision to publish an ethics statement for sign language research which states that "use of a sign language should be considered as the default means of communication because it fosters equality … and as such it should constitute best practice among Deaf and hearing colleagues."[13]

In practical terms, sign languages are embedded in research processes in a variety of ways. They may be languages of study from a linguistics perspective (e. g. corpus projects). They may be languages of process, enabling engagement with Deaf communities and in documenting/interrogating lived experiences/attitudes of signers (e. g. oral histories projects, sociological/psychological studies/ some action research studies). Or the language may be under scrutiny as an end product (e. g. M2L2 competency, translation/interpretation quality, etc.; see Orfanidou/Woll/Morgan [2015] for further examples). The positionality of the researcher in the field of Deaf Studies is one that needs unpicking. As Kusters/De Meulder/O'Brien (2017: 26) note: "[g]enerally, deaf scholars are more likely to get access to deaf ontologies and epistemologies in the communities they investigate compared with hearing scholars." Thus, it is not enough to assume that linguistic and cultural competence on the part of a researcher is enough to ensure access to the Deaf communities. As Sutherland/Rogers (2014)

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13 See https://slls.eu/slls-ethics-statement/.

report, deaf people often open up more easily to a deaf researcher (see also Kusters/ De Meulder/O'Brien 2017). We clearly need an increased number of deaf sign language users in research, and collaborative deaf-hearing, sign language using teams to ensure that research is more ontologically real.

While research processes entail sign languages in a range of easily identified ways, the publication of research on sign languages is overwhelmingly in English. This reflects academic expectations that successful researchers publish in high status, peer reviewed journals or volumes with highly regarded publishing houses, with such outputs playing a significant role for individual academic progression. This, coupled with the low number of output possibilities for academic research outputs in a sign language, impacts on the availability of academic resources about sign languages in sign languages (Kyle/Allsop 1998; Leeson/Sheikh/Vermeerbergen 2015). Mechanisms for mitigating this challenge have been developed in recent years. For example, Acadeafics is a deaf multi-author academic platform that seeks to facilitate Deaf Studies and sign language researchers to share their work bilingually (IS and English) in a bite-size format, with the goal of mediating academic research for a wider audience.[14] However, not everyone feels confident presenting in IS or in understanding IS (Pfyers 2017), and there are really very few platforms for systematically sharing academic work in national sign languages outside of North America and Brazil. These are challenges that may be resolved to a greater or lesser degree depending on critical mass of researchers who are signers in individual countries, and their commitment to ensuring access to scholarly work in their local sign languages. A contemporary example of this is the Irish Association of Applied Linguistics journal, Teanga, which is due to publish a special volume on ISL in 2020, with authors invited to present content in ISL or English.[15] Notably, no-one submitted in ISL, but most authors report planning to ensure an ISL version of their published paper will be available. This appears to reflect the pragmatism reported by informants in Leeson / Sheikh/Vermeerbergen (2015) who said they find it easier to prepare drafts in English than ISL, as it is less time consuming to work with an English text even if English is an L2/Ln.

Additionally, when presenting information for publication in a sign language, there are considerations that have yet to be fully unpacked around style of presentation, quality and composition of background to ensure visual appeal, and optimal duration of presentations (in some ways, akin to length of submission). Perhaps these challenges are best articulated by a deaf scholar who said that they always prefer for content to be delivered in a sign language by the author of a piece of work (regardless of their hearing status) rather than via interpretation (Leeson/Sheikh/Vermeerbergen 2015).

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14 https://acadeafic.org (Last accessed 27 May 2020).

15 https://journal.iraal.ie/index.php/teanga/announcementview/10 (Last accessed 27 May 2020).

Then there is the need to ensure that individual institutions at the macro level recognise the value of contributions in sign languages as significant, worthy research contributions and not simply as a 'service to the community' (which tends to be weighted lower than research and teaching contributions in promotions processes). One possible mechanism for doing this is to ensure that, where they exist, institutional metrics developed to quantify research outputs include explicit reference to outputs in a sign language. Visibility of sign languages in research-related pages in an institution serves to regularise and mainstream thought around the (for want of a better phrase) 'legitimacy' of sign languages as languages of the academy. As an example, mainstreaming recognition of access issues has saturated the landscape of university thinking at TCD, with scope to add an ISL version of a research output to the university's Research Support System. Additionally, the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences adopted a set of recognised research outputs that can be counted in deeming an academic as 'research active' (a pre-requisite for promotion/ sabbatical, and a status that impacts on budgetary allocations to Schools in the university). These include translations in a sign language, captured as follows: "Translations (literary, legal, etc.) published by a recognised publisher or for sign language a recognised international equivalent." (Faculty of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences 2016: 2).

2.1.4 Sign languages as languages of the university in administrative operations

While much has changed in terms of recognition of sign languages across the COE and EU territories, the position of sign languages as languages of instruction and as languages of the curriculum has a significant way to go in most parts of the world (Rosen 2020). Not all HEIs accommodate the use of sign language alongside the spoken/ written language of the majority. For instance, in many institutes native (L1) users can only use a sign language in language specific exams and not in more generic subjects, because they are obliged by university regulations to write in the language of instruction. This sits within a macro context, in part stemming from the limited standing of sign languages in mainstream curricula more generally, and across all stages of education. Tupi (2019) notes that Deaf-led organisations across the COE territories are worried about the implementation of inclusive primary/secondary education as sufficient attention is not given to the availability of curricula in a sign language, the native proficiency in sign language of teachers or the importance of peers using sign language. She goes on to note that the provision of sign language interpretation in educational settings does not make education inclusive: other things must also be considered, including how the linguistic identity of deaf learners can be supported, and how direct communication with staff members and other students can be made possible. As a consequence of inaccessible education and limited availability of professional sign language interpreting services, "public services and the labour market

to a large extent remain inaccessible for deaf people. Therefore, more support from the COE for sign language issues would be useful." (Tupi 2019: 1)

While the situation at tertiary level tends to be further ahead than in primary and secondary educational settings, in HE settings, provisions are typically couched under the umbrella of 'disability accommodations' (see also Krausneker 2015 for a discussion of the implications of this approach). As an example, TCD has adopted policies on sign languages that include reference to facilitating students to answer exams in a sign language if they have registered with the Disability Support Service. At TCD, a deaf sign language user can self-select to sit examinations or submit work for assessment in ISL. In such situations, exams taken by a deaf sign language user are video recorded and may be interpreted/translated as necessary for a non-signing professor/instructor. This examination policy stems back to the establishment of the Centre for Deaf Studies in 2001 and is now mainstreamed via the university's Disability Support Service. For an example of a deaf student discussing the accommodations he was provided with (in a mix of English and ISL) see: https://www.tcd.ie/disability/assets/video/exams.mp4. While the result of such policies are access to examination processes mediated through a sign language, the situating of sign languages as a disability accommodation serves to mark sign languages as 'other' and fails to respond to sign language users as members of a language community rather than as students (or, indeed, staff – see Kusters/ De Meulder/O'Brien 2017 for more on the issue of the role of deaf scholars) with a disability (a contested notion for deaf communities).

We note that the development of awareness and consequent provisions that exist in many institutions have typically stemmed from the work of individuals and groups of individuals who pushed for the establishment of sign linguistics research, interpreter education programmes, and sign language classes. However, there does seem to be a tipping point where societal attitudes to sign languages shift, often (but not always) accompanied by increased legal recognition of a sign language. In the 1960s and 70s, there was significant effort required to have sign language research taken seriously by the academy, and some would-be sign linguists travelled to the USA to complete their studies. Those who sought to commence research work in Europe were far and few between (e. g. interviews from the "Back to the Beginning" oral histories project with those who initiated sign language related research in Europe in the 1970s, i. e. Virginia Volterra in Italy, Penny Boyes-Braem in Switzerland, Lars Wallin and Britta Bergman in Sweden, Bencie Woll in the UK, etc.). However, today, in all of these countries, there are established teams of scholars with highly regarded reputations at work. This 'first wave' of European scholars (who sometimes, though more rarely – and as a result of the systemic and attitudinal barriers discussed earlier – come from the Deaf community) have typically worked with Deaf community activists to open up pathways in the academy for sign language teaching and learning, and the paths they followed have inspired many other countries who have, for many reasons, begun this work later. Ensuring that deaf scholars have access to the academy has typically

begun as a process of ensuring that deaf students have access. Yet, much remains to be done on both counts, at supra-macro and macro levels.

At the meso level, departments where sign languages are taught can and do examine through their local sign language. Thus, exams related to sign language modules or sign language interpreting courses are run under the auspices of departmental guidelines, with both deaf and hearing students (L1 and L2) submitting in a sign language. These are, of course, overseen by institutional committees (e. g. school or faculty level audits, pan-institutional undergraduate or postgraduate committees, quality committees, etc.) and in some countries, annual processes of external examining also occur as a matter of institutional policy, which evaluates the quality of the approaches, and moderates results awarded.

2.1.5 Sign languages as languages used by the university in external communication

Sign languages are perhaps more rarely used by universities for external communication purposes outside of recruitment/dissemination activities that link to work on sign languages themselves. Some universities are working on this. In TCD, for example, guidelines and procedures regarding the provision of sign language interpreting exist that seek to facilitate deaf staff, students and visitors who wish to attend university events, workshops, seminars, etc. with the provision of ISL interpreting when requested (Trinity College 2016).

2.2 Multilayeredness of language policy in higher education

Darquennes/Du Plessis/Soler (this volume) and others argue that language policies in HEI's are multilayered. Institutions need to establish which regulations apply to sign languages, and with regard to which activities (e. g. teaching, research, communication), identifying which actors are required to comply.

Another factor for consideration is the supra-macro, macro, meso and micro layers of policy, entailing a broad range of actors and stakeholders. While there has been an increase in legislation for sign languages in Europe in recent decades, there appears to be a gap between legislation and operationalization via monitored policy implementation strategies with key performance indicators attached. There are exceptions, like the British Sign Language Act in Scotland (2015), which has implementation strategies and monitoring built in to the process), as does the UNCRPD. Yet, the trickle down effects of such legislation into the field of education, and in particular, to sign language teaching, currently appear to be quite negligible, despite the Herculian efforts of national/ regional deaf associations, the European Union of the Deaf, and the World Federation of the Deaf (De Meulder et al. 2019; Timmermans 2005).

For example, while Portuguese Sign Language (LGP) is recognized in the Portuguese constitution (1997)[16], and LGP is visible on television (TV), social acceptance of LGP remains low and the language is not used in HEIs other than in dedicated LGP degrees or a few other incidental cases (Gil 2020).

On the macro level, policy is often opaque: even in those HEIs that offer sign language courses (in whatever form) there is rarely a centralized language policy approach which includes reference to a sign language, though these may exist at a faculty/school/departmental level (i. e. the meso level). Thus, in HEIs where sign language courses are offered, sign language policies seem to slowly emerge. These *de facto* or official policies tend to cover issues like language(s) of instruction, language(s) of communication between staff and students outside the classroom, official statements and occasionally, frame a stance regarding the use of a sign language in public-facing communications (e. g. dissemination events/marketing/recruitment drives, etc.). We have also discussed macro and meso level policy that can serve to encourage or inhibit research on and through a sign language, and, perhaps, more importantly, factors inhibiting publication and dissemination of academic results in sign languages (see section 2.1.3.).

2.3 Multiple-goal orientedness of language policy in higher education

HEIs have a broad range of target audiences (Lauridsen 2013; Darquennes/Du Plessis/Soler this volume). When we consider how such multiple-goal oriented language policy views add consideration of sign language policy to the mix, we can suggest that HEIs need to consider what audiences use sign languages and for what purposes. HEIs may offer introductory sign language courses to employees but the more proficient signers in a HEI will be deaf students and staff, students in teacher and interpreting programs and their teachers, and the researchers in those institutes. Because of the lack of degree programmes in many countries, deaf students may elect to study internationally; e. g. since at least the 1980's European deaf students have attended Gallaudet University, USA. However, in recent years, we see a critical mass of deaf scholars (from BA to PhD and beyond) coming together and creating an international community via the Deaf Academics network. Support for deaf signers who are students is highly variable across Europe, reflecting the variation we see at supra-macro, macro and meso levels.

In terms of mobility, we note that while hearing students can easily avail of opportunities like Erasmus+ exchanges, for deaf students, additional considerations

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16 Portuguese Constitutional Assembly. 1997. *Fourth Constitutional Revision – Constitutional Law*. https://dre.pt/application/file/653464 (Last accessed 27 May 2020).

that have to be factored in include access to the local language(s) in the host country (spoken/written/signed), and the question of access to interpreting support in language(s) known to the deaf student. In a post-COVID-19 world, there may be greater scope for drawing on remote interpreting services, which may help overcome some linguistic obstacles. More recently, there have been moves to ensure that mobility programmes are equality-proofed in this regard (e. g. there is a 'special assistance fund' that can be drawn on by Marie Curie scholars; anecdotally we know that deaf staff members have secured funding to bring sign language interpreters with them when engaging in Erasmus+ staff exchanges (Croatia, Finland, Ireland, The Netherlands).

As we see an increased availability of undergraduate programmes which offer sign language courses as component elements, we see increased potential for both hearing and deaf signers of one sign language to learn a second or subsequent sign language as part of an exchange programme.[17]

2.4 Multidimensional

Darquennes/Du Plessis/Soler (this volume) mention four activities to further explain the multidimensionality of HE policies. In thinking about sign languages, these concern (i) the social status and (ii) the social prestige of sign languages; and activities to do with (iii) acquisition and by extension (iv) (modifying) the corpus of local (variety) of sign languages.

Activities concerning status and prestige are closely connected, and are particularly complex with regard to sign languages. Official recognition (regardless of the form it takes) of sign languages does not alleviate the fact that they are minority languages which have been oppressed for centuries (De Meulder/Murray/McKee 2019), with, as we have seen, significant negative outcomes for deaf people.

While sign languages are now present in certain educational domains or programs (in parallel language use, see Gregersen et al. [2018]), their presence may not necessarily result from a rights-based approach. To boost the status of sign languages in HEIs, it is essential that they are seen as languages through which many subjects can be taught and accepted as languages for use in examination settings. In the opening chapter of this volume, Darquennes et al. quote Grin (2010: 7), whom we take the liberty of reformulating to incorporate consideration of the situation of sign languages:

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17 For example, we know that Erasmus exchanges have facilitated German Sign Language users (Magdeburg University of Applied Sciences), Flemish Sign Language (VGT) (KU Leuven) and Finnish Sign Language users (Humak University of Applied Sciences, Diak University of Applied Sciences) to learn some Irish Sign Language (Trinity College Dublin); and Irish Sign Language users (Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin) to learn Flemish Sign Language (KU Leuven) and Sign Language of the Netherlands (Hogeschool Utrecht UAS).

"…the exclusion of a local sign language (say BSL) in favor of the use of e. g. English lowers the prestige and social recognition of BSL, depriving its native signers of an asset (the full *usability* of their best language skills), with non-tangible consequences (a feeling of disenfranchisement, for example), but with tangible consequences too (the higher costs incurred, by comparison with native speakers of English, to achieve academic and professional success)" (after Grin 2010: 7).

3 Desiderata

Our list of desiderata is nigh endless, but we have made an inventory of issues that in our opinion need to be dealt with in the next decade with priority.

- **Supra-macro:** European governments must legally recognize sign languages and put measures in effect to also remove the functional language barriers that deaf people face in all domains of society.
- **Macro:** at institutional level systemic reflection and operationalisation via implementation of policies is required to enhance visibility of deaf people; to unpick the barriers deaf people face in order to fulfil academic qualifications. This includes attention to the diversity of scholarly output in sign languages. The work of deaf academics and teachers must be considered and supported, resulting in a commitment to accessibility in order to guarantee equity. To achieve this, dedicated funding to build capacity is needed. The disadvantages facing deaf people of course begin somewhere else entirely, with sign language acquisition during the early years too often compromised, which, in turn, can impact on educational access and outcomes, not least, literacy in the national language (written/ spoken). Sign languages should be accredited school subjects, and languages of the curriculum at secondary level schools and in HEIs. This requires capacity building and recognition of sign language teachers.
- **Meso:** sign language policy must be included in policies regarding teaching, research and communication in HEIs (at institutional, departmental, faculty levels). This supports students and teachers (micro level) who are using a sign language and also encompasses the wider institutional make-up. Effectively, this requires a move away from a medicalised evaluation of deafness where students/ staff have to demonstrate they are deaf in order to qualify for supports. Mentoring for deaf students and deaf early career researchers is paramount. Hand in glove with this is the need to provide statutory funded access to appropriately trained interpreters, which remains a significant problem in many countries (Napier et al. 2020). There should be awareness of the importance of dedicated in-house interpreters as one of the measures to prevent burn-out in deaf students and teachers because of the level of work that has to be done by them in order to get appropriate support (Napier et al. 2020; Hauser/Finch/Hauser 2008). International exchange remains, for now, an excellent opportunity for deaf students, and M2L2 learners, to gain insights in the increasing body of knowledge available HEIs in

the EU, albeit scattered among the few HEIs that are engaged in sign language programs.

– **Micro:** This brings us to the micro level, where students and staff might benefit from international exchanges such as those supported by Erasmus+ or further afield (e. g. Fulbright; inter-institutional agreements like that between Hoge-school Utrecht and Rochester Institute of Technology). The European Union of Deaf Youth (EUDY) has noted this is a problem for deaf students/staff – they face additional barriers (DeafMobile project, EUDY 2016).

4 Conclusions

Applying Darquennes, Du Plessis and Soler's framework on language policies in HEIs presented in this volume with regard to sign languages in these spaces has proven illuminating, facilitating examination of a number of areas at the core of university language policy, like teaching, research and communication. We found that while sign languages are increasingly taught in HEIs, communication by HEIs in or about sign languages is rare. We discovered a shocking absence of policies – most responses are ad hoc, relating to within-programme regulations for sign language programmes. Intended language users (deaf and hearing students and staff) in sign language programmes contend with this lack of policy which, in turn, may lead to a range of unnecessary barriers across and between the macro, meso and micro layers identified. Thus, there is a mass of broad strategic questions that require tackling. There is much to do.

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Appendix: Official recognition of sign languages in Council of Europe Member States (after Tupi 2019: 45–46).

Member State	Year of Recognition	Type of Legislation	Sign Language taught in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)
Albania	2014	Act on Inclusion and Accessibility of Persons with Disabilities	No information available
Andorra	No information available	N/A	No information available
Armenia	Not recognised yet	N/A	No information available
Austria	2005	Constitution	Yes
Azerbaijan	Not recognised yet	N/A	No information available
Belgium	Flanders: 2006 Wallonia: 2003	Flanders: Decree on Sign Language Wallonia: Decree on Sign Language	Yes Yes
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2009	Act on Sign Language	No information available
Bulgaria	No information available	N/A	No information available
Croatia	2015	Act on Sign Language and Other Communication Systems	Not currently, but plans are in progress.

Member State	Year of Recognition	Type of Legislation	Sign Language taught in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)
Cyprus	2006	Act on Sign Language	No
Czech Republic	1998	Act on Communi-cation Systems	Yes
Denmark	2014	Act on Danish Sign Lan-guage Council	Yes
Estonia	2007	Act on Language	No information available
Finland	1995	Constitution	Yes
France	2005	Education Act	Yes
Georgia	1995	Act on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities	No information available
Germany	2002	Act on Disability Equality	Yes
Greece	2017	Act on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities	Yes
Hungary	2009	Act on Sign Language	No information available
Iceland	2011	Act on Language and Sign Language	Yes
Ireland	2017	Act on Sign Language	Yes
Italy	Not recognised yet	N/A	Yes
Latvia	1999	Act on Language	No information available
Liechtenstein	No information available	N/A	No information available
Lithuania	1995	Act on Social Inte-gration of Persons with Disabilities	No information available
Luxembourg	2018	Act on Language	No information available
Malta	2016	Act on Sign Language Council	Yes
Monaco	No information available	N/A	No information available
Montenegro	Not recognised yet	N/A	No information available
Netherlands	Not recognised yet	N/A	Yes
Norway	2009	Act on Sign Language Council	Yes

Member State	Year of Recognition	Type of Legislation	Sign Language taught in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)
Poland	2011	Act on Sign Language and Other Communication Systems	Yes
Portugal	No information available	N/A	Yes
Republic of Moldova	2012	Act on Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities	No information available
Republic of North Macedonia	No information available	N/A	No information available
Romania	2017	Act on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities	No information available
Russian Federation	2012	Act on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities	Yes
San Marino	No information available	N/A	No information available
Serbia	2015	Act on Sign Language	No information available
Slovakia	1995	Act on Sign Language	No information available
Slovenia	2002	Act on Sign Language	No information available
Spain	Spanish Sign Language: 2007 Catalonian Sign Language: 2010	Spain: Act on Sign Language Catalonia: Act on Sign Language	Yes
Sweden	2009	Act on Language	Yes
Switzerland	Not recognised yet	N/A	Yes
Turkey	2005	Act on Persons with Disabilities	Yes.
Ukraine	2011	Act on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities	No information available
United Kingdom[18]	Recognised by one of the constituent countries but not at overarching UK level	N/A	Yes.

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18 The United Kingdom left the European Union formally in 2020.