



Legal Seat – Helsinki, Finland

**WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF
WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF YOUTH SECTION**

An International Non-Governmental Organisation in official liaison with ECOSOC, UNESCO, ILO, WHO and the Council of Europe. WFD was established in Rome in 1951.

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**Input on the Concept note for a General Comment on children’s rights
in relation to the digital environment**

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the World Federation of the Deaf Youth (WFDYS) welcomes the call for input on the concept note for a General Comment on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The world is entering into a digital age where digitalisation is taking a predominant position in the life of every child, including deaf children. It is important that our linguistic diversity is maintained. This certainly also applies to sign languages, the natural and preferred languages of the deaf worldwide.

WFD would like to take the opportunity of this call for inputs to remind the importance of technology and digitalisation to be accessible to and inclusive of deaf people and deaf children through sign languages. Digitalisation is a key tool to safeguard their inclusion in two crucial domains: information, communication and technology (I) and education (II).

I. Information, communication and technology

Information, communication and technology is having a huge impact on the education and development of children, including deaf children. Media can be key factors to build the cultural, social, spiritual and linguistic identity of those children, as recognised by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Thus, States Parties must disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to children, including deaf children. Yet, this dissemination must be done in accordance with the specific needs of sign languages of deaf children – as stated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Deaf children must access information in their national sign languages. The WFD and WFDYS believe digitalisation to be capital for communication, dissemination of information and the promotion of sign languages.

With the booming of avatars and other alternative means of digital communication, the WFD and WFDYS believe that some nuances should be highlighted. On their [statement on the use of signing avatar](#), WFD and WFDYS caution against the use of signing avatar as replacement of human sign language interpreters. Sign languages are fully-fledged languages with their own complex structures that are distinct from spoken language. Thus, a word-to-word translation is not possible, as any translation needs to take into account the context and the cultural norms. Whilst the technology has progressed and offers real potential for wider use of signing avatar, these computerised products do not surpass the natural quality and skill provided by appropriately trained and qualified interpreters and translators.

However, WFD and WFDYS recognise that avatars might be used for pre-recorded static customer information, for example, explaining the structure of a website where one can find information. This is acceptable as long as deaf people have been involved in advising on the appropriateness of the signed sentences, and that there is no interaction or “live” signing required.

II. Education

The CRPD, in its article 24, recognises the right of deaf persons including deaf children to access education in sign languages. As expressed in its [position paper on inclusive education](#), the WFD and WFDYS believe that education to deaf children is better achieved through bilingual education in national sign languages and national written languages. Bilingual schools must follow the official national educational curriculum. Teachers must master sign language with native-level fluency and deaf children must be surrounded by their signing peers in inclusive settings.

Digitalisation is growingly used as a resource to underpin teachers in their educational work. Pedagogical videos and other materials are more and more used in classes to foster debates and interactive participation of students. Those are also tools to achieve other means of education such as non-formal education programs. WFD supports the use of digitalisation in education as a mean to achieve inclusive education for deaf children. Yet, those materials must be accessible not only through captioning but with sign languages translation. Contrary to interpretation, translation is prepared, developed, reviewed, edited and polished before a final version is produced. It does not take place in a live environment.

III. Conclusion

Sign languages is the natural and spontaneous language of deaf children. It is also the preferred languages of millions of deaf people worldwide. The new digitalisation era should be inclusive of those people. It must be a momentum to further disseminate contents in sign languages to deaf children in both information, communication and technology and education.

For further information, do not hesitate to contact the Human Rights Officer, Mr. Alexandre Bloxs at alexandre.bloxs@wfd.fi.

About the World Federation of the Deaf

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is an international non-governmental organisation representing and promoting approximately 70 million deaf people's human rights worldwide. The WFD is a federation of deaf organisations from 122 nations; its mission is to promote the human rights of deaf people and full, quality and equal access to all spheres of life, including self-determination, sign language, education, employment and community life. WFD has a consultative status in the United Nations and is a founding member of International Disability Alliance (IDA). (www.wfdeaf.org) Email: info@wfd.fi

About the World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section (WFDYS)

The World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section (WFDYS) was established in 1995 in Vienna, Austria and WFDYS is a section of the World Federation of the Deaf. The WFDYS has its internal rules that are based on the WFD Statutes. It has 47 Youth Ordinary Members over the world. The main aim of the WFDYS is to advocate for the human rights of deaf youth includes having a full access to bilingual education, to have strong cultural and linguistic identity, and be empowered. Its website is www.wfdys.org