

UPR Info, Pre-session for Slovenia,  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia  
Matjaž Juhart, General Secretary  
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The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia has been operating since 1931 and is the national representative disability organisation for the deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind and for people with cochlear implants. Since its foundation 88 years ago, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia has, among other things, been fighting for the rights of the deaf to use their own language, the Slovene Sign Language. In the past, sign language was banned in deaf education, which in turn resulted in inadequate schooling for deaf people, inadequate level of education, poorer employment opportunities and, consequently, poorer socioeconomic status. Although there have been some positive developments with regard to the sign language in recent years, the whole situation has not yet been adequately regulated. In 2002, the Act on the Use of Slovene Sign Language was adopted, enabling deaf persons to use their language in all public institutions. Yet 17 years after the adoption of this Act, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia still fights for the rights of the deaf to be exercised, especially in the field of education. With the adoption of this Act, the right of deaf people to a sign language interpreter was regulated, allowing the establishment of a network of sign language interpreters, which at present has over 50 interpreters, covering the needs of approximately 1000 deaf sign language users. As the Act on the Use of Slovene Sign Language has not been implemented in full, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs Association of Slovenia on November 7, 2018 submitted to the Slovenian Government an initiative for the amendment of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia so as to incorporate the Slovene Sign Language. At its session on the April 18, 2019, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia approved the initiative by adopting a relevant decision and submitted an initiative to the National Assembly. The National Assembly accepted the initiative and at its Constitutional Commission session on June 26, 2019, unanimously adopted a resolution to initiate the process for amending the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia and incorporating the Slovene Sign Language as its constituent part. With this incorporation of the Slovene Sign Language, we anticipate effects and changes to be brought about in three key areas:

1. The Slovene Sign Language as a proper language equal to the spoken Slovene language:
  - Sign language shall become an official language in the Republic of Slovenia
  - The state shall provide systemic development, standardisation and funding for the Slovene Sign Language
2. Education:
  - As part of education process in primary and secondary schools, deaf children shall be provided the Slovene Sign Language subject as a compulsory subject.
  - Pupils in mainstream schools at the primary and secondary level shall be provided the Slovene Sign Language as an elective subject
  - Deaf pupils and students shall be provided sign language interpreting, that is, the provision of pedagogical practice in the Slovene Sign Language
3. Access to information and communications:
  - Access to information shall be provided by 100% captioning of all TV content on public and commercial television
  - Access to information shall be provided by 5% interpreting of content in the Slovene Sign Language

- Access to communications shall be provided by appropriate written or illuminated signs at all major public institutions such as bus and train stations, airports, health centers, hospitals, courts, administrative units, etc.
- Access to the websites of public institutions shall be provided in the Slovene Sign Language
- Access to information and communication in the media in the event of emergency, disaster or war shall be provided in an appropriate manner
- A 24/7 support of the Call centre for persons with hearing loss shall be provided

An analysis on the provision of state care for persons with disabilities in Slovenia, which was made by the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in 2010, showed that the situation of persons with hearing impairment is the worst as compared to other persons with disabilities. The deaf have the least rights, are socioeconomically the weakest, and the least educated. A survey on education among the deaf found that 89% had a vocational school at most, 10% had secondary education and less than 1% had at least a university degree.

All this indicates a long-standing neglect of the problems faced by the deaf in Slovenia. Incorporating the Slovene Sign Language into the Constitution is a major step and a start of the continuation of the fight for better rights and conditions of living, education and work for deaf people.