

SPECIAL EDITION

Presentation of the JUSTISIGNS project outcomes at the European Parliament in Brussels



A public seminar, entirely dedicated to the JUSTISIGNS EU project, hosted by MEP Helga Stevens and supported by the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli), Trinity College Dublin and Interresource Group Ireland, took place at the European Parliament on 27th April 2016.

The JUSTISIGNS project is the first to look at the barriers to justice for Deaf sign language users on a pan-European level. Research was conducted across Europe to benchmark current practices vis-à-vis provision of sign language interpreters and the project reports on experientially-based feedback from police officers, solicitors, interpreters and deaf people who were victims of crime, alleged perpetrators or family members of those engaging with the justice system. The project also implemented pilot training for key stakeholders over a three-

year period. Key instruments that guided the work were EU 2010/64/EU on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings) Directive 2012/29/EU, which established minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime).

The objective of the seminar was to discuss the policy and practice implications of our work. Panellists from across Europe presented on findings and examined the implications for key stakeholders.



Carlos Alegria (DG Interpretation) and MEP Helga Stevens

JUSTISIGNS HIGHLIGHTS: a selection of thoughts, ideas,

comments and suggestions (Based on notes taken at the presentation and edited by efsli)

MEP Helga Stevens:

BARRIERS

Still Deaf people face issues and barriers when interacting within the legal settings. (...) Lack of interpreters or appropriately qualified interpreters and training.

It also comes back to the Deaf communities lack of understanding about legal structures.

This project [JUSTISIGNS] enabled Deaf people to be active participants.

Carlos Alegria, Head of The Commission's Director General (acting): for interpretation:

INTERPRETERS & GOOD COMMUNICATION

(...) We provide interpretation for thousands of meetings for thousands of delegates and visitors every year in the European Institution. And we cover not just the 23 EU languages according to the Treaties, we also provide interpretation in a number of

other important world languages, including different sign languages.

(...) And I know only too well the importance of good communication. As an interpreter, we try to act as a bridge between different languages, often different ways of understanding and seeing the world. A world which is increasingly complicated and complex and when and where access to information wider, every time. We, interpreters, try to ensure that the message is transmitted correctly and faithfully. This is particularly important whatever the context in which the interpretation takes place. But, in the legal context, the subject of this project, this takes on a particular importance. In the legal setting the interpreter needs to be able to convey often very involved procedures and processes with a very specific vocabulary.



Please tweet: I support access to justice for the deaf community #justisigns

Haaris Sheikh
Project Chair & Chief Executive
Interesource Group

EQUAL RIGHTS

(...) As Ms. Stevens said, she outlined a number of problems that Deaf communities experience when accessing services within the legal settings and other settings as well. And that is the other main area of the project that we're aiming to address. That includes increasing awareness amongst legal professionals exploring problems and evidence-based research (...) And also responding to the needs from the police forces that have indicated some of the problems they have experienced as well. Our research is trying to find out what the problems are and respond to a number of needs for a number of target audiences.

(...) We would like everyone who is not within the community and working with sign language interpreters to recognize the Deaf community as a linguistic and culture minority group. We need to move away from the Disability model and look at Deaf communities within the context of a linguistic and culture minority.

(...) Look at the cost of sign language interpreting as a cost of an event rather than an after cost. That's one of the experiences that most of the interpreters and project managers will say. It is always seen as a burden at the end. Whether or not an event is being

attended by Deaf people, it should be an implicit cost.

Prof. Jemina Napier
Heriot-Watt University

THE IMPORTANCE OF EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH AND TRAINING OF INTERPRETERS

(...) we looked at what research has already been undertaken. A lot of it primarily has been focused on spoken language interpreters in legal settings, particularly in police settings (...) interpreters find working in legal settings challenging. Very challenging, regardless of what language we're working or modalities we're working into. But many interpreters feel quite reluctant to put themselves up to work, for example, in a court setting. So that comes back to the need, the importance of training (...)

(...) we see that there is no one particular standard across Europe. Some countries may have particular standards about interpreting in court, some don't. So what we need to see is standardization across Europe. And standards also are important in terms of training of interpreters, but also those who are police or in the judiciary, it is important they have a better understanding of working with interpreters and the Deaf community.

(...) we would like though research to influence training.

Prof. Lorraine Leeson, Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin:

LEGACY IMPACT

(...) There is the fact that the police forces very often just don't know how to handle interpreted interaction, particularly if they are carrying out interviews. It was really interesting with our Irish colleagues, we had some very experienced detectives say to us: "When we have interpreters [*and their experience had mostly been with spoken language interpreters*], when we have interpreters in the room, we don't feel we are in control of the interview". That is quite a remarkable thing for experienced detectives to say. (...) there are also issues around the fact that interpreters, very generally, do not have access to information about police procedures. Where do they get the opportunity to learn about the interviewing techniques that police officers are going to employ when they are interviewing suspects? Or how they approach dealing with victims of crimes. What protocols are in place? We don't know, our interpreters don't know, so part of our job has been to try and bring some of that content to interpreters, and again this has to have a life beyond the scope of the project. We can only pilot certain things during the life of the project, but as Haaris Sheikh has said, we hope there will be legacy impact moving forward. (...)

Prof. Myriam Vermeerbergen, KU Leuven University

JOINT TRAINING

I am the representative of the Belgian partner and we, as a JUSTISIGNS team, were very fortunate - our institution has a very strong tradition in involvement in European projects and initiatives related to legal interpreting and translation. (...)

(...) joint training is really important, bringing the three target groups of the project together for joint training, but also simply allowing dialogue, allowing people to talk to one another. I give just one example (...) We had a very brilliant discussion two weeks ago between a police officer who had no experience whatsoever dealing with Deaf people and one of my Deaf colleagues, about using hearing children as interpreters. The police officer thought that was very well acceptable. And my colleague really could explain and convince her that it was actually not a good idea. So I think this is really something that we can take home. Yes, joint training, absolutely. But also simply allowing people to talk to one another is really important. (...)

Christian Peters, efsli President

EFFECTIVE COOPERATION

(...) The justice system and sign language interpreters need to cooperate more effectively. I'm really happy to see this process

starting in such a positive way. We also need to look at Deaf interpreters and how they work as teams and educating the legal professionals in terms of how that system works (...)



Christian Peters, efsli President

(...) we need to train the legal system about the importance of bringing in qualified interpreters both Deaf and hearing. And we need to explain to them what qualification actually means. There are not any clear standards throughout the EU countries. And we need to make sure that standards are established. JUSTISIGNS is providing solutions. We have to encourage awareness in public domains. And everyone needs to be aware about access rights, so provision of language interpreters as a right. That goes back to the UN Convention on people with Disabilities. We need to make sure policymakers and lawmakers are aware of these decisions and we need to collaborate with them effectively. (...)

Mark Wheatley, Director European Union of the Deaf

PROFESSIONALISM

Thank you to JUSTISIGNS project to have this event in the European Parliament. It's a

pleasure to participate in this concluding event. When I think about the impact this could potentially have on the Deaf community throughout Europe, I think we cannot underestimate it. When we think about interpreters involved in legal settings, some of the examples and stories I have heard are horrific and numerous. And sometimes we think that these situations have happened in the by gone days, in fact some of them are very recent. So we come back to interpreting, when we look at Europe, we see that there are particular regions of Europe that have very strong training and standards for their interpreters, including Scandinavia and western parts of Europe. But when we look at the South and the east parts of Europe, we don't see the same thing. Sometimes we will see children of Deaf adults or CODAs who are not trained as interpreters working as interpreters in very critical settings. (...)

Prof. Erik Hertog
Professor Emeritus

QUALITY

(...) JUSTISIGNS is, to me, in my mind, the perfect synthesis, the perfect synergy of all the projects that focused on the more general quality issues, the training issues, the certification issues, etc., legal interpreting and translation and at the same time now what we are seeing is this focus on particular target groups and target issues. And I must say that the results and the

achievements that have been presented by the partners have been truly, truly impressive. So what remains to be done now, and it has been said repeatedly by partners, it is expressed as their most manifest priority intention, take the results and achievements to the target groups, it may be a JUSTISIGNS II project. A follow up project that would actually start taking the results to the target group so what I would suggest is, take your work to the police and to the legal professionals, publish in their journals. Go to their conferences set in your interdisciplinary workshops and thus transfer, transcend your achievements from the the consortium, and take it to these target groups, because the thing you have to convince them that quality, that you provide as legal interpreters, simply helps them to do a better job. (...)



MEP Ádám Kósa

Conclusion remarks by MEP Ádám Kósa

CITIZENS' RIGHTS

(...) After viewing a number of the comments that have been said, if there was anything I could add when I think about access to justice ... I think that is a pivotal, fundamental right as a citizen. It

ensures equality. Deaf people, for many years, have been passive acceptors of barriers due to live long experiences of being hinders for access. It is projects like this that can provide inner confidence for people to assert themselves in life. (...) We need Deaf people to be proactive about the barriers that they experience. Otherwise, the system will never change. So that is my first point I would like to address. The second point, when I think about the Deaf community, I also think about sign language interpreters working together. And we also should think about those people in the community who have Intellectual Disabilities. Our sphere of influence can extend beyond the Deaf community, and that is my hope that this will benefit all citizens. And I am very much looking forward to the next iteration of what the JUSTISIGNS project could look like. And I do hope that all the materials and this experience will be shared pan-European. (...)



The JUSTISIGNS Project Team



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