



DEAF
CULTURE,
HERITAGE AND
DIVERSITY

Deaf Studies workshop

Milestones in the history of the Deaf - worldwide



Co-funded by
the European Union

Index

- A: Milestones in the history of the Deaf worldwide
- B: Milestones in the history of the Deaf in Austria



**What comes to your mind when you think of
the word “milestone” (in the history of
humans or in your own personal
biography?)**

The Emergence of Sign Language as a Legitimate Language

- Pivotal milestone = **recognition** of sign language as a **full-fledged language**
- Until the 20th century -> often misunderstood and considered inferior or incomplete.
- In 1957, American linguist **William Stokoe** began extensive research
-> demonstrated American Sign Language (ASL)
is a **complex, independent language** with its own **grammar and syntax**.



William Stokoe (1919–2000) (Photo: Gallaudet University Archives)



Bernard Tervoort

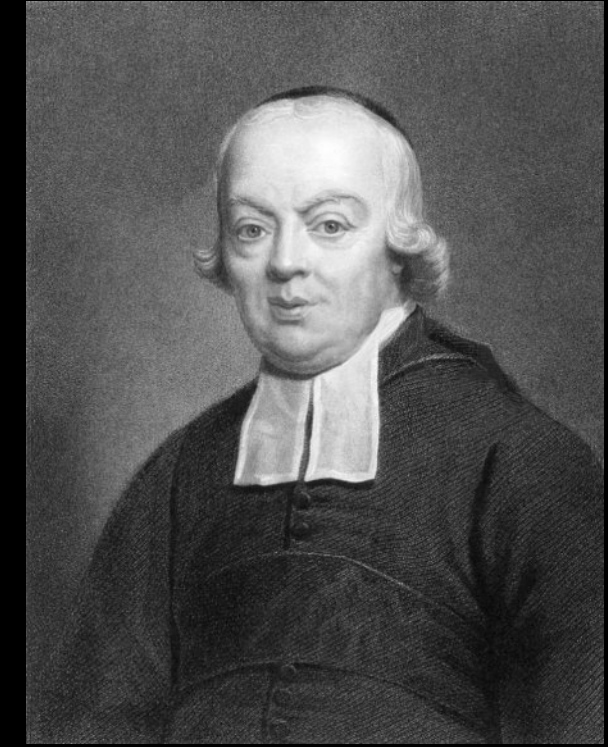


William Stokoe

- **1953 *Bernard Tervoort*** emphasized value of sign language for communication among Deaf people
 - **1960 *William Stokoe*** at Gallaudet College analyzed structure of American Sign Language using modern linguistic methods
- > Stokoe demonstrated convincingly that **sign language is equal to spoken language in its linguistic complexity.**

The Establishment of Schools for the Deaf and Educational Institutions

- founding of schools for the Deaf enabled Deaf children to **access education**
- In **1760**, French priest **Abbé de l'Épée** opened the first public school for the Deaf in Paris
-> birth of modern Deaf education.



Charles-Michel de l'Épée (1712–1789) (Photo: Wikipedia)



Gallaudet University (Photo: Gallaudet University)

- founding of **Gallaudet University** in Washington D.C. in **1864** -> world's first university specifically accessible to Deaf students.
- central role in empowering the Deaf community & promoting both academic and cultural contributions from Deaf people



Recognition of Deaf People as Equal Members of Society

Deaf President Now-Protests (Photo: Gallaudet University Archives)



A key step in the **positive development** of Deaf people was the **growing recognition** of Deaf people as equal members of society.

An outstanding example of this is the “**Deaf President Now**” protest in **1988** at Gallaudet University. -> Deaf students successfully campaigned for the election of the first Deaf president of the university.

International Recognition of Sign Language and Deaf Rights

International recognition of the rights of Deaf people

2006 "UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities"

-> right to education in sign language, access to information, and equal participation in society

Declaration of **"International Day of Sign Languages"**

September 23rd

helped raise awareness of sign language as a cultural and identity feature of Deaf people



Flashmob for International Day of Sign Languages 2024 at Vienna Central Station (Photo: ÖBB/Andreas Scheiblecker)

United Nations



Dr. Yerker Andersson

1st deaf person to talk in front of the **United Nations General Assembly** in **1992**

United Nations



Dr. Liisa Kauppinen

- Liisa Kauppinen (Finland) played a **key role** in **developing and negotiating** the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (**CRPD**).
- As **long-time President** of the World Federation of the Deaf (**WFD**), she advocated for the **recognition of sign languages** and the **cultural identity** of Deaf people in the convention.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- **WFD** as one of the **eight largest organisations of persons with disabilities** invited to participate in the process of drafting the **CRPD**
- **2002**: WFD forged a **partnership** with the UN, the International Disability Alliance and the WFD's Country Members to lobby for the rights of deaf people within the CRPD.
- The WFD was instrumental in **providing comments, proposals and amendments**, to the articles of the CRPD.
- WFD's participation has been imperative in **furthering the promotion of sign language**, and **bilingual and bicultural educational approach**.
-> led to the development of five articles of the CRPD directly concerning deaf persons namely;

- Article 2 – Definition
- Article 9 – Accessibility
- Article 21 – Freedom of expression, opinion, and access to information
- Article 24 – Education
- Article 30 – Participation in cultural life, recreation leisure and sport

Our philosophy and approach are based on and driven by the CRPD.

Since the enforcement of the CRPD in 2008, the WFD continues to actively advocate and promote deaf issues and perspectives in the various forums of the UN.

<https://wfdeaf.org/our-work/crpd/>



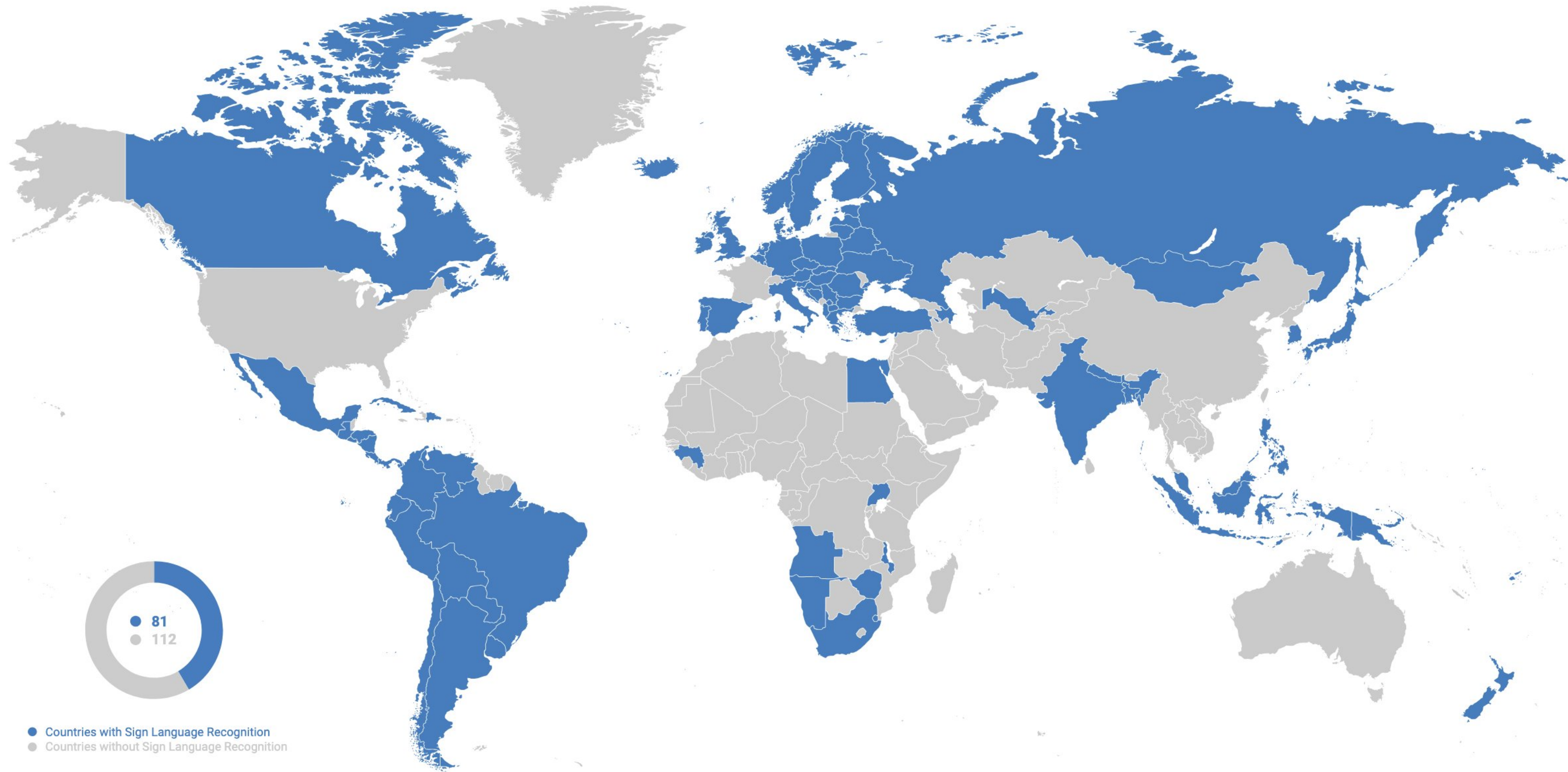
Co-funded by
the European Union



The Legal Recognition of National Sign Languages



READ MORE



The list of **81 countries** that have legally recognised their national sign language:

- Albania
- Belgium
- Colombia
- Denmark
- Finland
- India
- Latvia
- Mexico
- Norway
- Portugal
- South Korea
- United Kingdom
- Angola
- Bolivia
- Costa
- Dominican Republic
- Germany
- Indonesia
- Lithuania
- Mongolia
- Panama
- Romania
- Spain
- Argentina
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Rica
- Ecuador
- Greece
- Ireland
- Luxembourg
- Namibia
- Russian Federation
- Sweden
- Austria
- Brazil
- Croatia
- El Salvador
- Italy
- Malaysia
- Nepal
- Paraguay
- Serbia
- The Netherlands
- Azerbaijan
- Bulgaria
- Cuba
- Estonia
- Japan
- Malawi
- New Zealand
- Slovakia
- Turkey
- Bangladesh
- Canada
- Cyprus
- Eswatini
- Hungary
- Kenya
- Malta
- Nicaragua
- Slovenia
- Venezuela
- Belarus
- Chile
- Czech Republic
- Fiji
- Iceland
- Kosovo
- Marshall Islands
- North Macedonia
- Poland
- South Africa
- Ukraine

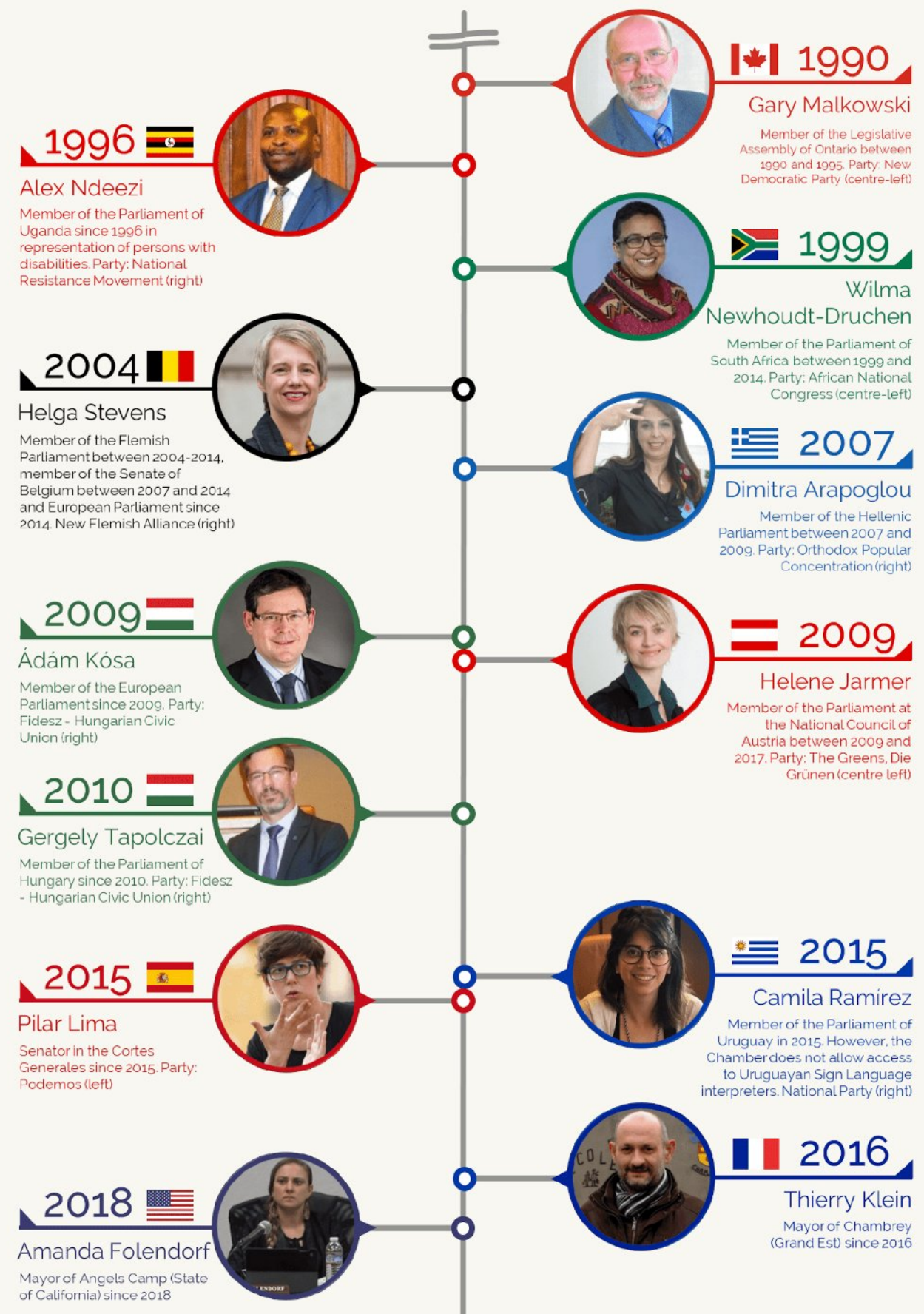


Mehr infos:

<https://wfdeaf.org/the-legal-recognition-of-national-sign-languages/>

Sign Language in politics

Find out in this timeline Deaf people around the world who have held political responsibilities and who communicate in sign language in the exercise of their functions





Technological Innovations Supporting Deaf People

Since the 2000s:

- modern captioning services
- smartphones
- video calls

→ greatly facilitated Deaf people's **access to information and communication** with others.

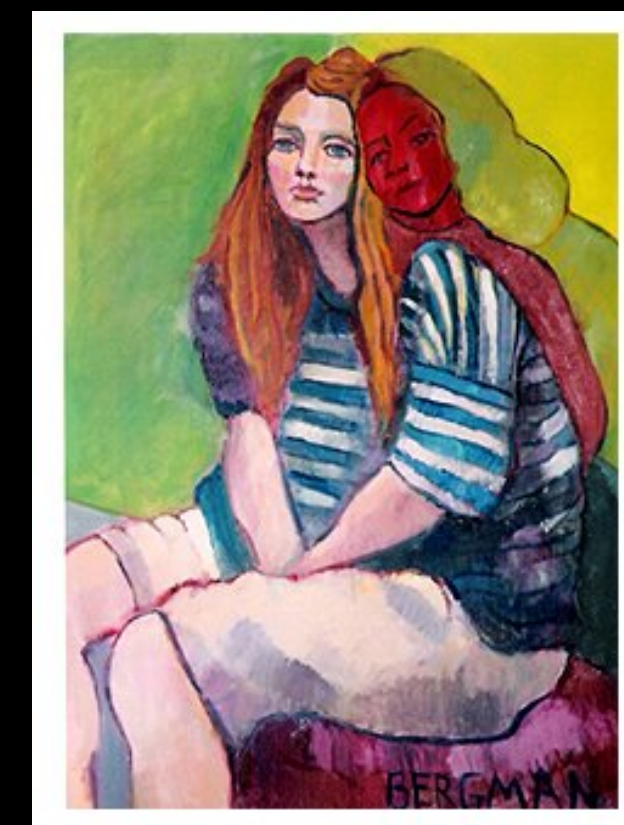
→ contributed to **better integration** of Deaf people in education, work, and daily life.



Promotion of Deaf Culture and Community

Deaf culture has increasingly established itself as an **independent culture with its own history, art, and traditions**

- emergence and recognition of **Deaf Arts**, which include sign language theater, literature, and music
- **Deaf films**, which depict the world from the perspective of Deaf people -> example of cultural enrichment offered by Deaf community



Picture: Claire Bergman (<https://deaf-art.org/profiles/claire-bergman/#>)

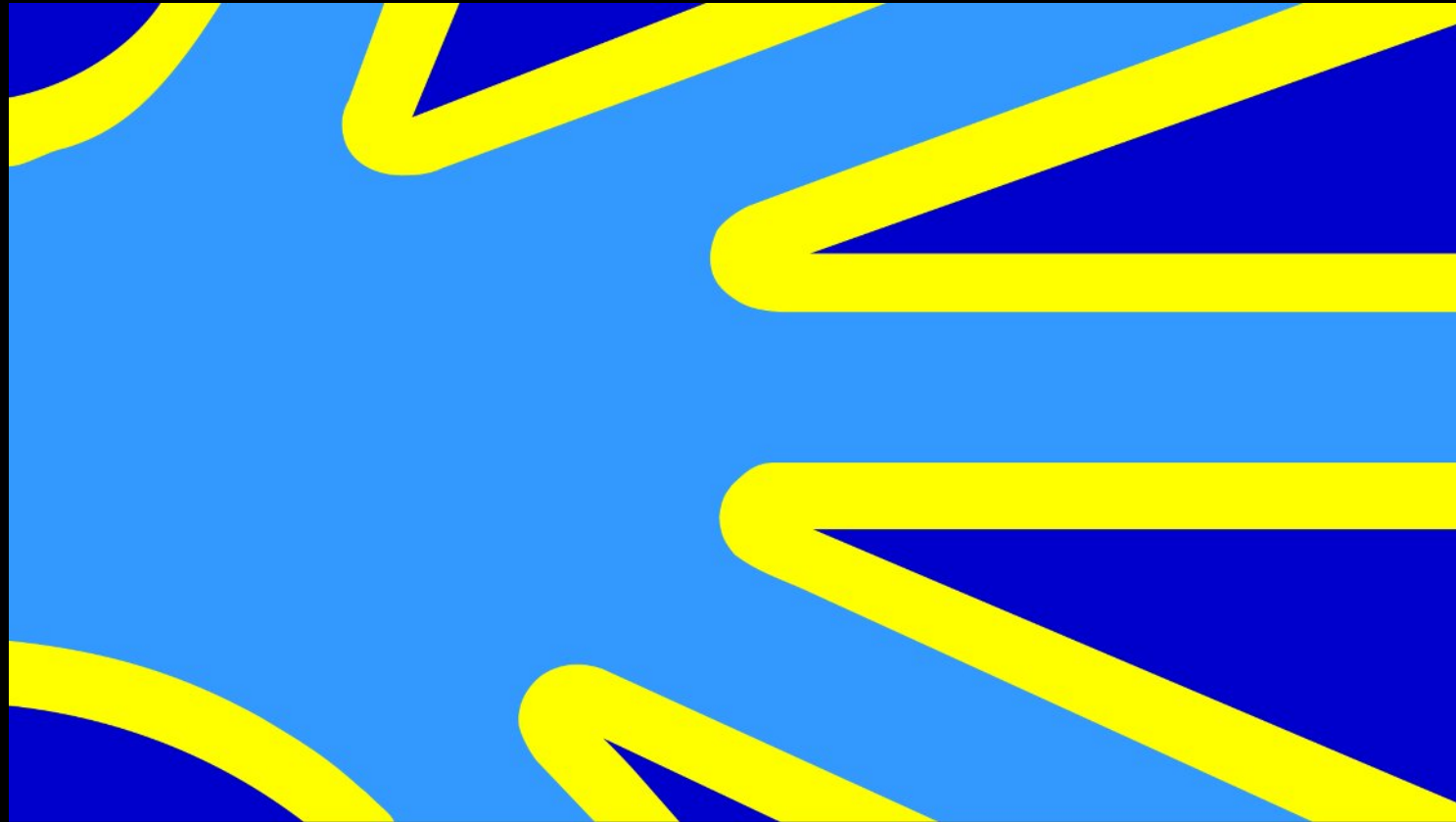


Theater der Jungen Welt Leipzig. Photo:
<https://www.taubenschlag.de/2025/01/dingdingen-5-plus-performance-fuer-taube-und-hoerende-menschen/>



Co-funded by
the European Union

Promotion of Deaf Culture and Community



Deaf Pride movement

- > strengthens **awareness** of the identity and rights of Deaf people
- > calls for **greater societal inclusion**

The term “**Deaf Culture**” refers to the cultural identity of Deaf people, who proudly preserve their language, history, and values.

The Emergence of a Discipline: Deaf Studies

- Deaf Studies emerged from the **Deaf movement** of the **1970s**
- Initially consisted of a few seminars
- by the **1980s** and **1990s**: became a distinct **Bachelor's** and later **Master's program** at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.
- Deaf Studies describe **Deaf identity as a cultural**, rather than pathological, phenomenon

Focus in research:

→ Deafness as a self-determined, diverse way of being rather than as a deficiency or disability

→ Deaf Gain as the opposite of hearing loss → Positive view of Deafness, seeing it as an enrichment



ÖGS Declared Intangible Cultural Heritage (2013)

In 2013, Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS) was recognized as an **intangible cultural heritage** by UNESCO.



Logo:

https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/10/outside_toolkit_20221129_eng.pdf



Co-funded by
the European Union

Workshop

Milestones in your Country

Austria



Contact



<https://deafstudies.eu/>



Deaf Culture, Heritage and Diversity



@deafstudies.eu

TURKOOIS



Innosign

Witaf
Seit 1865 im Dienste der Gehörlosen



ISTITUTO DEI SORDI
DI TORINO

Sources

Lindquist Bergey, J./Gannon, J.R. (2016): Deaf President Now Protest. In: Gertz, G./Boudreault, P. (Hg.): The Sage Deaf Studies Encyclopedia. Los Angeles: SAGE, S. 261-263.

Moss, K. (2016): International Day of Sign Language. In: Gertz, G./Boudreault, P. (Hg.): The Sage Deaf Studies Encyclopedia. Los Angeles: SAGE, S. 484-485.

Pabsch, A. (2016): UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In: Gertz, G./Boudreault, P. (Hg.): The Sage Deaf Studies Encyclopedia. Los Angeles: SAGE, S. 985-990.

