



Don't leave deaf voters behind

Accessibility is the key to ensure the right to political participation
of deaf voters during the European elections 2019

The European Union of the Deaf (EUD), the European Union of the Deaf Youth (EUDY) and the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efšli) emphasise that accessibility before, during and after the European elections must be considered in order to ensure effective and meaningful political participation of deaf voters and guarantee their right to vote.

Ensuring accessibility is an opportunity for the candidates and political parties to reach out to all voters and prove their commitment to an inclusive and innovative solution-oriented mindset, that leaves no one behind.

Therefore, the EUD, EUDY and efšli call upon the candidates for the European Parliament and relevant national authorities to empower deaf voters to meaningfully exercise their right to vote by removing significant obstacles when accessing information and communication during the European elections.

This is done by ensuring the following:



Accessibility of information and communication in national sign language(s)

- All election materials, such as manifestos and political programmes must be accessible in national sign language(s) on the website of the candidate and the political party.
- All information and communication produced in video format must be accessible in sign language(s).
- Public political debates, campaigns, meetings, including local meetings with candidates and political parties, political rallies and discussions during the public events, must be accessible in national sign language(s). Only in cases when the event is attended by deaf participants from different countries, the interpretation in International Sign should be provided.
- Guidelines on How to Work with Sign Language Interpreters,¹ Sign Language Interpreter Guidelines For international/European level Meeting,² as well as the Guidelines on Positioning of Sign Language Interpreters³ when the political campaign takes place in the conference setting or is web-streamed, must be followed.
- During the political campaigns or meetings with the voters, deaf voters must be able to interact with political candidates in sign languages(s).
- While ensuring accessibility in national sign language(s), relevant authorities must consult national associations of the deaf⁴ and national organisations representing sign language interpreters, in order to ensure that provision of sign language interpretation is of the highest quality and is provided by qualified sign language interpreters.
- Trained and/or certified interpreters and translators should be recruited regardless of their hearing status and according to non-discrimination principles.⁵
- Explanations of the electoral process, information on voting procedures as well as voting instructions, and information regarding registration process must be provided in national sign language(s).
- In case of infringements, deaf voters must be provided with an opportunity to submit complaints to relevant authorities in sign language(s).
- Staff working at the voting facilities must be aware of possible deaf-specific barriers, must be adequately trained how to communicate to a deaf voter and must provide him/her with necessary information.

1 <http://efsl.org/efsliblu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/How-to-Work-with-Sign-Language-Interpreters.pdf>

2 <http://efsl.org/efsliblu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/SL-Interpreter-Guidelines.pdf>

3 <https://aiic.net/page/7821/guidelines-positioning-of-sign-language-interpreters-in-conferences/lang/1>

4 Including national associations representing specific groups of deaf persons, such as deaf youth, deaf women or other.

5 <http://efsl.org/efsliblu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Policy-Statement-The-inclusive-notion-of-Sign-Language-Interpreters-2017-1.pdf>

Accessibility of information and communication

- provision of subtitles, captions and use of new technologies

- Information and communication regarding political campaigning, such as political debates, discussions, speeches and all video content related to the European elections available via video-sharing platform services, social media, television broadcasts, including live streams, and on-demand audio-visual media must be subtitled and/or captioned.
- Captions and subtitles must be of a highest quality and transmit clearly an accurate information.
- Real time captioning (subtitles in real time) is a must in all events.
- Transcripts of videos, audio programs and podcasts regarding the European election must be provided.
- The candidates and the political parties should use new technologies, including those that run based on Artificial Intelligence, in order to increase the accessibility of, e.g. speech-to-text technologies.

Accessibility via visual formats

- Political campaign materials must include as much visual content as possible. This includes using colours, images of candidates, logos of political parties and other means of visual representation.
- Information and communication regarding the election must be presented in a coherent structure, include schemas, flowcharts and images that contain information.
- Websites of the candidates and political parties must comply with the Web Accessibility Directive,⁶ EU accessibility standard EN 301549⁷ and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1.⁸
- Information at polling stations and instructions for voting procedures must be available in visual formats.
- Images of candidates and logos of the political parties on the voting ballots must be displayed.

6 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/2102/oj>

7 <http://mandate376.standards.eu/standard>

8 <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>