



Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC)

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan)

Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India

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NOTIFICATION

The Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC), an autonomous body under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MSJE) has prepared draft Guidelines for Accessibility Standards for Professional Indian Sign Language Interpretation Services 2026 to strengthen accessibility and inclusion in accordance with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

The guidelines serve as a national reference framework for ISL interpreters, organizations, schools, colleges, hospitals and clinics, courts, corporate, public service providers, etc. to engage quality ISL interpreter services and ensure full participation of Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens.

ISLRTC invites comments and input from stakeholders and the general public on the draft guidelines. Comments may be submitted by email to islrtnewdelhi@gmail.com by 13th August 2026. The ISL translation of the draft guidelines will be made available soon.

Director

Draft

**GUIDELINES FOR ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS FOR
PROFESSIONAL INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE
INTERPRETATION SERVICES
2026**



**INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTRE
(ISLRTC)**

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
Govt. of India

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FOREWORD

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PREFACE

The Guidelines for Accessibility Standards for Professional Indian Sign Language (ISL) Interpreter Services has been developed to strengthen accessibility and inclusion across India. The document is intended to serve as a national reference framework for ISL interpreters, organizations, schools, colleges, hospitals and clinics, courts, corporate, public service providers, etc. It establishes professional standards, ethical boundaries, and procedures for engaging interpreters to ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens have equal access to justice, education, healthcare, employment, and public life.

By aligning with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD) 2016 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), this guideline affirms that access to qualified ISL interpretation is a legal and linguistic right, and essential for ensuring dignity, equality, and justice. Within this framework, ISL plays a critical role in enabling full participation of Deaf, Hard of Hearing and deaf-blind individuals in society.

This guideline seeks to establish a national framework that standardizes interpreter services, strengthens professional accountability, and promotes accessible communication across all domains of public life. These guidelines will strengthen communication accessibility, collaboration between Deaf and hearing communities, and advance India's commitment to dignity, equality, and full inclusion of the Deaf community in all domains of public life.

STATUS OF THESE GUIDELINES

1. These guidelines are intended to serve as a national reference framework to promote quality, consistency, and standardization in Indian Sign Language (ISL) interpreter services across sectors. They are not a statute, subordinate legislation, or legally binding policy instrument, and do not create new legal rights or obligations. Except where specific provisions reproduce or explain requirements arising under applicable laws, rules, regulations, or judicial directions, the recommendations contained in this document represent minimum accessibility standards, professional standards, and good practices intended to guide government agencies, institutions, service providers, ISL interpreters, and other stakeholders.
2. As the first national guidelines on ISL interpretation services, this document establishes the initial framework for professional practice in the Indian context. Recognizing that the profession is evolving, these guidelines are intended to be a living document and will be reviewed and revised periodically to incorporate changes in law, policy, professional practice, technology, and the needs of the deaf community.

1. INTRODUCTION

As per the Census 2011, India has a population of around 50 lakh persons with hearing disabilities, although unofficial estimates are much higher. The term ‘person with hearing impairment/hearing disability’ includes all those who have mild to profound hearing loss. A large percentage of this group use sign language as their primary language to communicate. Those who use sign language self-identify as Deaf with a distinct linguistic and cultural identity.

In India, the Deaf community is bound together by the shared use of a sign language called Indian Sign Language (ISL). They are thus considered a linguistic minority with their own language and culture.

1.1 Deaf Community and Indian Sign Language

Sign languages are visual-manual languages (not auditory-oral like spoken languages). Visual means that the language is seen (not heard) and expressed through hands and body (not speech). Research studies on sign languages around the world since 1960 have proved comprehensively that sign languages are full-fledged natural languages at par with spoken languages.

ISL is a complete language with its own independent status as a language. It has its own grammar and vocabulary and is not dependent on any spoken language. Like spoken languages, any concept or idea can be expressed in ISL without any limitations. ISL varies across regions and communities, reflecting India’s linguistic diversity, yet remains mutually intelligible among Deaf users across much of the country.

ISL is the first language of the Deaf people in which they communicate in all spheres of life – at home, in school, with friends, at work, in public places, etc. Deaf people learn through ISL, express their thoughts and feelings, share ideas and opinions, debate and argue, in ISL. They also express their creativity in the form of stories, jokes, visual vernacular, etc. in ISL. They learn to read and write through the medium of ISL.

The Deaf community is both a disability group and a linguistic community with its own language, ISL. Communication barriers arise when Deaf people who use ISL communicate with hearing people who use spoken languages. Therefore, communication accessibility through ISL is essential to ensure equal access and participation.

Historically, Deaf persons have faced systemic barriers in accessing education, healthcare, justice, and employment due to the lack of communication accessibility. These barriers have resulted in exclusion, denial of basic rights, and restricted opportunities for participation and equal access. Many deaf students drop out of school, are not able to get jobs, do not have access to medical information, legal information, news, emergency information, etc.

For many Deaf individuals, especially those born Deaf or who acquire hearing loss early in life, ISL is their first and primary language. Spoken and written languages such as Hindi, English, or regional languages are often acquired later as second languages through formal education and may not be fully accessible due to auditory limitations.

When Deaf persons are required to rely solely on written or spoken communication without interpretation, this places them at a disadvantage similar to that faced by a person compelled to

function in an unfamiliar foreign language. In legal, medical, educational, and administrative contexts, such linguistic barriers can lead to serious consequences including misunderstanding of rights, incorrect consent, wrongful statements, and exclusion from participation.

Therefore, it is essential to understand that ISL accessibility is essential for the Deaf community as both people with disability and as a minority linguistic community. The recognition of ISL as a language affirms the right of Deaf people to receive information and services in their own language, in the same manner as speakers of any other language group.

Providing ISL interpretation therefore ensures linguistic equity by enabling Deaf persons to communicate in their strongest language and to receive information in a form that is fully comprehensible to them. This is a fundamental requirement for informed consent, due process, and equal participation.

1.2 Legal Background

The Constitution of India guarantees equality before the law under Article 14, affirming that all citizens, including persons with disabilities, enjoy the same rights and protections. India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which recognizes accessibility as a fundamental human right.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act) mandates the removal of barriers and ensures equal access to justice, communication, education, employment, and public services.

1.2.1 Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights to all citizens, irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Article 14 provides the right to equality before the law and states that no person shall be denied equality or equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) also enjoy the same rights under the Constitution. Article 19 protects the freedom of speech and expression, freedom of movement, and the right to practice any profession, trade, or occupation. These provisions safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities to access information and communication, barrier-free mobility, and employment of their choice.

1.2.2 International Context

India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which came into force in May 2008. The Convention recognizes accessibility as a human right and requires signatories to adopt appropriate measures to ensure equal access for persons with disabilities to justice.

1.2.3 The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

India enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 in compliance with its obligations under the UNCRPD. The RPwD Act is the principal legislation for persons with disabilities. The Act defines the responsibilities of the Central and State Governments and mandates the creation of a barrier-free environment by removing discrimination so that PwDs can equally participate in society, contribute as citizens and share in developmental benefits.

The RPWD Act by including sign language in the definition of ‘communication’ and by mandating communication accessibility in all aspects of life, clearly implies that ISL interpretation services are necessary to promote communication accessibility for deaf persons.

Section 3 of the RPwD Act, 2016 on Equality and Non-discrimination guarantees persons with disabilities equal legal rights and protection from discrimination. It prohibits discrimination on the ground of disability in accessing public services, protects personal liberty, mandates reasonable accommodation, and upholds the inherent dignity of persons with disabilities.

1.2.4 Court Decisions

The Delhi High Court recognized the need for persons with hearing disabilities to access sign language interpreters in public facilities and services in 2011 in *National Association of the Deaf v. Union of India and Ors.* [2011 SCC OnLine Del 4954]. The Court issued directions to conduct an assessment on the need for interpreters in various public facilities and to establish courses for training sign language interpreters.

In *Rakesh Kumar Kalra Deaf Divyang v. State of NCT Delhi* [2023 SCC OnLine Del 5261], the Delhi High Court issued comprehensive directions requiring the State to: provide infrastructure and assistive devices; formulate guidelines on access to justice for persons with disabilities; enhance public awareness; and conduct judicial training for court personnel on disability rights and sensitivity, including awareness of invisible disabilities. The Court specifically directed the deployment of ISL interpreters in courts and the adoption of assistive technologies to facilitate access for persons with visual and hearing disabilities.

Therefore, the right of persons with disabilities to access education, services, information, etc. on an equal basis with others is established through constitutional provisions, statutory law, and judicial pronouncements. These guidelines establish a national framework to standardize interpreter services, ensure professional accountability, and promote accessible communication across all domains of public life.

1.3 Professionalization of ISL Interpretation and Need for Guidelines

Over the past decade, ISL interpretation in India has undergone significant changes. A formal two-year diploma programme has been established and the number of trained interpreters has increased steadily. At the same time, with increasing awareness and the RPWD Act 2016, the requirement of interpreters has also been increasing in all areas.

Access to ISL interpretation is increasingly being mandated by law in courts, police stations, hospitals, educational institutions, workplaces, and public services. The growing demand for interpreters in legal, medical, educational, and public domains has expanded the scope and visibility of interpretation work and placed interpreters in critical roles affecting rights, safety, and justice.

There are two national associations for ISL interpreters that work to promote professionalism, quality standards, and ethics in ISL interpreters. These organizations have developed ethical codes and professional practices.

However, in the absence of uniform national standards and guidelines, interpreter services are currently characterized by:

- a) uneven quality of services
- b) unclear role boundaries
- c) absence of standardized fee and workload norms
- d) lack of formal grievance redress mechanisms
- e) varying levels of institutional awareness.

The increasing reliance on ISL interpretation, combined with its legal mandate, makes it essential to establish clear national guidelines governing professional conduct, certification, deployment, and accountability. Such guidelines are necessary to:

- a) protect the linguistic rights of Deaf persons
- b) safeguard the integrity of interpreted communication
- c) ensure fair working conditions for interpreters
- d) prevent misuse or misrepresentation of the interpreter's role
- e) and promote public confidence in interpreter services

These Guidelines are therefore intended to provide a structured national framework that recognizes ISL interpretation as a professional service of public importance, ensures quality and consistency across sectors, and supports India's commitment to equality, dignity, and accessibility for Deaf citizens.

2. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

2.1 Objectives

The purpose of this guideline is to provide a comprehensive national reference standards for ISL interpreter services in India. It aims to:

a) Establish professional standards for ISL interpreters:

Define clear roles, responsibilities, training, certification, skill upgradation, code of conduct and ethical boundaries for ISL interpreters, ensuring impartiality, accuracy and confidentiality in all assignments.

b) Ensure accessible justice and services:

Promote equal access of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to courts, healthcare, education, workplaces and public services through qualified interpretation.

c) Regulate fees and workload norms:

Recommend fair remuneration, workload limits and team interpreting requirements to protect interpreter welfare and maintain service quality.

d) Promote awareness:

Promote awareness for institutions, and service providers, ensuring effective use of ISL interpretation across sectors.

e) Advance inclusion and empowerment:

Align India's practice with international best standards to promote inclusion and empowerment of the Deaf community.

2.2 Scope

a) These Guidelines provide a national reference framework and recommended professional practices for Indian Sign Language interpreter services.

b) These Guidelines are not a law or legally binding policy. Any legal obligations referred to in these Guidelines arise from existing applicable laws or court directions.

c) The Guidelines do not create a disciplinary or licensing framework, but establish recommended national standards and recommended practices until such a framework is developed.

d) They are intended to guide government agencies, institutions, service providers, ISL interpreters, interpreter associations and other stakeholders in ensuring quality, consistency and accessibility.

e) These Guidelines contain:

- i. Minimum professional standards expected of ISL interpreters and engaging agencies.

- ii. Recommended good practices intended to promote excellence in service delivery.
- f) These guidelines apply to:
- i. Individual ISL interpreters including freelance, contractual, part-time and full-time interpreters
 - ii. Government ministries, departments, statutory bodies, public authorities, local bodies and any other public institutions engaging ISL interpreters, including courts, tribunals, police, healthcare institutions, educational institutions and public service providers
 - iii. Corporate entities, employers, private institutions, NGOs, event organizers and other entities/individuals engaging ISL interpreters for accessibility
 - iv. Interpreter associations and networks
 - v. Deaf individuals and Deaf associations
 - vi. Any other individual, institution or organization that engages ISL interpreters.
- g) ISL interpretation services in India are provided through different modes of engagement, including full-time or contractual employment with organizations and freelance engagement for individual assignments. The qualifications, ethical principles, professional standards, and code of conduct prescribed under these Guidelines are applicable to all ISL interpreters, irrespective of their mode of engagement. Unless stated otherwise, the provisions relating to the engagement of interpreters, assignment procedures, fee structure, travel, cancellation, and other operational arrangements apply mainly to freelance interpretation assignments. Organizations employing full-time or contractual interpreters may adapt these provisions according to their service conditions.
- h) These Guidelines describe the recommended national standards for ISL interpretation services. It is recognized that implementation may vary during the initial stages due to differences in the availability of qualified interpreters, Deaf Interpreters, and institutional capacity. Stakeholders should make reasonable efforts to progressively implement these standards while working towards full compliance.

2.3 Development of the Guidelines

These Guidelines have been developed through a review of relevant legislation, national and international standards, and existing practices relating to sign language interpretation. The drafting process was guided by an Advisory Committee comprising seven external experts, along with consultations with Deaf community members, ISL interpreters, subject experts, government departments, and other stakeholders.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used to assist with drafting, language refinement, document structuring, formatting, and editorial review. The technical content was provided by the Advisory Committee, ISLRTC and final approval was with the competent authority.

3. DEFINITIONS

The definitions and explanations of the terms used in this document are given below.

- a) **Accessibility:** Equal participation and inclusion of Deaf individuals in all domains of life.
- b) **Communication Accessibility:** The provision of appropriate communication support, services, technologies, and accommodations that enable Deaf and hard of hearing persons to access, receive, understand, and express information effectively and participate on an equal basis with others.
- c) **Competent Authority:** The authority designated or notified by the concerned Department or the Central Government for the purposes of implementing and administering these guidelines.
- d) **Deaf Interpreter:** A Deaf professional who interprets between different sign languages, ISL varieties, between ISL and gestural systems or provides appropriate cultural interpretations. A Deaf Interpreter usually works alongside a hearing ISL interpreter.
- e) **Deaf-blind:** Person with deaf-blindness. It is a disability included under Multiple Disabilities in the RPWD Act 2016 and defined as a condition in which a person may have combination of hearing and visual impairments causing severe communication, developmental, and educational problems.
- f) **Engaging Agency / Organizer:** Any organization, institution, company, government body, court, service provider, event organizer, intermediary, or other entity that engages, contracts, deploys, coordinates, or arranges the services of an ISL interpreter.
- g) **Government:** The Central Government, dealing with the subject matters pertaining to or allocated to the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.
- h) **Hearing Impairment:** As defined in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:
 - i. **Deaf:** Persons having hearing loss of 70 dB or above in speech frequencies in both ears.
 - ii. **Hard of Hearing:** Persons having hearing loss between 60–70 dB below in speech frequencies in both ears.
- i) **Home Signs:** Informal signs, gestures, or communication systems developed and used within a family or small social environment by a Deaf person and those around them, which do not constitute a recognized sign language.
- j) **Indian Sign Language (ISL):** Recognized language used by the Deaf community in India. It is a natural human language with full linguistic status and at par with spoken languages. Spoken languages like Hindi and English are expressed through speech (oral) and listening/auditory perception (aural), while ISL is expressed through manual communication, body language and facial expressions (manual) and visually perceived. Therefore, spoken languages are oral-aural while sign languages are visual-manual.

- k) ISL Interpretation: The process of rendering spoken language into ISL and ISL into spoken language, enabling Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf blind individuals to access communication.
- l) ISL Interpreter: A trained professional who facilitates communication between Deaf and hearing individuals by converting ISL to spoken language and vice versa and thus provides linguistic and communication accessibility.
- m) Reasonable accommodation: Necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments, without imposing a disproportionate or undue burden in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise of rights equally with others.

4. ISL INTERPRETERS: ROLE AND PRACTICE

An ISL interpreter provides language accessibility to facilitate communication between deaf and hearing individuals, by converting spoken language to ISL and vice versa.

4.1 Role

- a) An ISL interpreter serves as a communication bridge between the Deaf and the hearing communities. They facilitate accurate, impartial, and complete communication.
- b) Interpreters are communication facilitators only, for providing linguistic access. They do not take charge of the situation or the context, do not offer advice or representation and do not take on roles of teachers, counselors, etc.
- c) Interpreters are required to follow a professional code of conduct which includes ethics, professional behavior and responsibilities.

4.2 Skills

- a) ISL interpreters should be highly proficient in at least two languages - ISL and in the relevant spoken language used in the region that they work in.
- b) They should be skilled in providing accurate interpretation of the content that is linguistically and culturally appropriate.
- c) Cultural sensitivity is a must as they are required to work between various languages, regional spaces and communities, and they should be well aware of cultural spaces and maintain due respect accordingly (workspace, religious spaces, professional environment, educational setting, etc.).

4.3 Training and Certification

4.3.1 Educational Qualification

The Diploma in ISL Interpretation (DISLI) recognized by Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is the minimum qualification for engaging ISL interpreters. DISLI is a two-year course in which hearing students are trained in ISL, interpretation techniques and ethics. This course is designed to develop professionals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to interpret ISL into spoken languages and vice versa. Students who successfully complete the DISLI course are issued a certificate by the RCI.

Initially, from 2001 till 2019, the DISLI course was implemented as three levels – Level A, B and C with total duration of 1 year.

From 2016 to 2019, a full-time one year DISLI course was implemented. From 2019 onwards, the Level A, B, C course and the one-year DISLI course was discontinued, and full-time two-year DISLI course was implemented.

Therefore, ISL interpreters currently working in the field may have any of the following three qualifications, all of which are considered equivalent for purposes of hiring for jobs.

- i. ISL ‘C’ Level
- ii. DISLI (one-year)
- iii. DISLI (two-year)

4.3.2 Professional Registration

Certified interpreters who have completed DISLI must be registered in the Central Rehabilitation Register (CRR) maintained by the RCI, and they should regularly update their CRR registration by participating in RCI approved programmes.

4.4 Scope of Practice

ISL interpreters may undertake one or more of the following professional services, subject to their qualifications, competence, and the requirements of the assignment:

- a) Live Interpretation – Real-time interpretation ISL and spoken or other languages in meetings, conferences, classrooms, courts, hospitals, public events, media broadcasts, online platforms, and similar settings, in physical or online mode. This is the primary work of ISL interpreters.
- b) Recorded Interpretation, Translation and Content Conversion – Conversion of spoken, written, audio, or audio-visual content into ISL through recorded videos and other accessible formats, including translation and adaptation of documents, scripts, educational materials, examination content, public information, websites, e-learning resources, awareness campaigns, social media content, and similar materials.
- c) Communication support service – Assistance provided to facilitate communication between Indian Sign Language and written language, including explaining written information in ISL and assisting Deaf persons in expressing their signed communication in written form, where required for documentation, education, examinations, employment, legal and administrative processes, and other situations..

Some Deaf persons may require assistance in preparing written documents such as applications, letters, forms, or representations. In such cases, they sometimes seek support of ISL interpreters to help convert their ISL content into written text.

Alternatively, they may also request assistance of ISL interpreters to understand written documents wherein interpreters read the written content and explain it in ISL.

Such assistance is distinct from professional interpretation or translation services. It involves communication support requested by the Deaf person to facilitate understanding of written information or preparation of written documents.

While such assistance is distinct from professional interpretation services and falls outside the scope of professional interpretation services, they are included here because ISL interpreters are frequently requested to provide such assistance in practice.

4.5 Modes of Service Delivery

Interpreters provide services in person as well as online, depending upon the need and the situation.

4.5.1 On-site Interpretation

Interpreters are preferred in person for medical services, court proceedings, police cases, visa interviews, physical job interviews, as they involve direct interaction, complex communication requirements, or situations where a high degree of accuracy is necessary.

4.5.2 Online Interpretation and Video Relay Service

Online conferences, workshops, meetings, job interviews, etc., may require an interpreter to participate online to facilitate virtual engagements.

Interpreters may also be required online if and when interpreters are not available in that particular area/region, at the given time in urgent situations or due to cost factors.

Online interpretation can be done via video conferencing apps (for example, Zoom, WebEx) or by video calling apps (for example, WhatsApp). In these cases, an interpreter is at a remote location from the communication participants.

Video Relay Service (VRS) means a communication service that enables a Deaf person using ISL to communicate with a hearing person through a remote ISL interpreter. The Deaf person and interpreter communicate through a video connection, while the interpreter communicates with the hearing person through voice or video and relays the conversation between both parties in real time. VRS calling can be done through a specialized software/app or through video calling apps like WhatsApp.

4.5.3 Telephone Relay Interpreting

Interpretation services may also be provided through a telephone relay arrangement, where the Deaf person is physically present with an interpreter who communicates with the other participant over the telephone.

4.6 Deaf Interpreters

Deaf interpreters are crucial when the Deaf participant uses regional sign variations, has limited exposure to formal ISL, or requires interpretation from gestures/home signs. They work alongside hearing interpreters to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, ensuring accurate and accessible communication.

Currently, there is no professional training and certification of Deaf Interpreters in India. However, they are appointed in specific scenarios or with specific deaf participants who may require such support.

4.7 Team Interpreting

Team Interpreting means an interpreting arrangement in which two or more interpreters work together during an assignment, sharing interpreting responsibilities, alternating as required, and providing support to ensure accuracy, quality, and effective communication.

In cases where the assignment duration is more than 1 hour, has complex subject matter or due to other reasons (see section 6.1) for guidelines on assessing the need and determining the number of interpreters), two or more interpreters may be required.

This is because interpreting is an intense cognitive, linguistic, and physical task. After about 20–30 minutes of continuous interpreting, accuracy and clarity begin to decline and hence interpreters take turns interpreting, and actively monitoring interpretation quality and providing lexical or conceptual support. Therefore, working in rotation helps to prevent fatigue and maintain accuracy.

In high-stakes assignments and large-scale events, team interpreting helps maintain accuracy and quality. The supporting interpreter can provide real-time assistance to the active interpreter, including clarification of content, terminology support, and correction of missed information, particularly in situations where it may be difficult for the active interpreter to pause or seek clarification without disrupting the flow of communication.

4.8 Capacity Building of ISL Interpreters

- a) RCI-approved training institutes conducting DISLI course, ISLIA, ASLI, and similar organizations should regularly conduct training programmes, refresher courses, workshops, seminars, etc. to upgrade the skills of ISL interpreters.
- b) RCI-approved training institutes conducting DISLI course should regularly conduct Continuous Rehabilitation Education (CRE) programmes to share latest developments in the field, and for capacity building.
- c) Specialized modules focusing on various aspects of interpreting may be developed and implemented, for example, news interpreting, sports interpreting, etc.

4.9 Role of Interpreter in Courts

In police and court cases involving Deaf individuals, interpreters are required to facilitate the communication between the Deaf person and other participants. In such cases, interpreters should not be treated as witness. Accordingly, the following guidelines are recommended for such situations.

- a) When an ISL interpreter is engaged for interpretation services, they should not be treated as a witness in a court, tribunal, police case, or other legal proceeding.
- b) The interpreter is not responsible for preparing the written record of the proceedings or for its legal correctness.

5. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR ISL INTERPRETERS

5.1 Code of Ethics

A Code of Ethics is essential for ISL interpreters in India because interpreting directly affects communication access, legal rights, and dignity of Deaf persons. As the field becomes professionalized and increasingly mandated under law, a clear framework of conduct ensures consistency, accountability, and trust. The following fundamental principle guides professional conduct:

Ethics are the values and principles that help interpreters make appropriate professional decisions and provide interpreting services responsibly.

Guiding principle: Always exercise sound professional and ethical judgment in all circumstances, including situations not specifically addressed in this Code, and uphold the highest standards of professional and ethical conduct.

a) Accuracy

- i. Do: Interpret faithfully without altering meaning or intent. Interpreters must convey meaning, tone, and intent without omission or distortion, ensuring equal access to information for Deaf and hearing participants.
- ii. Don't: Add personal opinions, advice or commentary.

b) Confidentiality

- i. Do: Treat all interpreted information as strictly confidential.
- ii. Don't: Share assignment details with unauthorized persons, including on social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc.).

c) Impartiality

- i. Do: Remain neutral and unbiased.
- ii. Don't: Take sides in discussions or disputes.

d) Professional Boundaries

- i. Do: Maintain clear role boundaries as an interpreter.
- ii. Don't: Act as advisor, counselor or decision-maker unless formally engaged for such roles.

e) Conflict of Interest and Professional Independence

- i. Do: Maintain independence and disclose conflicts of interest.
- ii. Don't: Interpret in situations involving personal involvement or authority. Interpreters should not assume roles beyond interpretation unless explicitly requested, preventing conflicts of interest and maintaining neutrality.

f) Accountability

- i. Do: Accept feedback and improve professional practice.
- ii. Don't: Ignore complaints or ethical concerns.

g) Continuous Learning

- i. Do: Engage in ongoing training and skill development.
- ii. Don't: Rely solely on outdated knowledge.

h) Respect for Deaf Community, Deaf Culture and ISL

- i. Do: Respect the deaf community at all times, irrespective of personal or professional disagreement with one or more deaf individuals.
- ii. Do: Use ISL appropriately and respect Deaf cultural norms.
- iii. Don't: Substitute ISL with international/foreign signs, gestures, simplified communication unless requested.

i) Professional Conduct :

- i. Do: Respect the Deaf community and fellow interpreters.
- ii. Don't: Compromise on ethical or professional standards. Conduct yourself in a manner that upholds the dignity and integrity of the interpreting profession.

5.2 Professional Expectations

a) Collaboration

- i. Do: Work collaboratively with Deaf organizations, interpreter organizations and other stakeholders.
- ii. Don't: Undermine professional or community standards.

b) Continuous Professional Development

- i. Do: Engage in ongoing training, learning and skill development.
- ii. Do: Update knowledge of ISL, domain-specific terminology and interpreting practices.
- iii. Do: Participate in professional forums and capacity-building initiatives.
- iv. Do: Seek and reflect upon feedback from Deaf participants, organizers, and other relevant stakeholders to support continuous professional improvement.

c) Professional Responsibility

- i. Do: Advocate for recognition of the interpreting profession, fair remuneration and safe working conditions. Where appropriate, educate employers about best practices.
- ii. Don't: Accept exploitative conditions affecting quality or dignity.

d) Appearance

- i. Do: Wear plain attire and avoid visual distractors to ensure that signs, facial expressions and body movements are clearly visible.
- ii. Don't: Wear printed or distracting clothing, jewellery or accessories or have personal grooming that may interfere with the clear perception of signs.

d) Interpreter Visibility and Role

- i. Do: Ensure that Deaf persons remain central to the communication and participation.
- ii. Don't: Seek or encourage visual prominence or recognition that overshadows the visibility, participation, or contributions of Deaf persons.

e) Professional Recognition

- i. Do: Refrain from accepting public honours, mementos, or ceremonial recognition at assignments where such recognition may overshadow the participation or contributions of Deaf persons. Certificates of appreciation may be accepted as a professional record of service.
- ii. Don't: Use your role as an interpreter for personal gain, publicity or influence.

f) Use of Social Media

- i. Do: Use social media responsibly to promote awareness, appreciation, and learning of ISL.
- ii. Don't: Use interpreting assignments for personal publicity or self-promotion on social media platforms.
- iii. Don't: Use photographs, videos, recordings, or other content from assignments in a manner that promotes themselves as the principal focus of an event or overshadows the participation, achievements, or communication access needs of Deaf persons.
- iv. Don't: Use or promote abusive, offensive, obscene, discriminatory, or derogatory language, gestures, signs, images, or content relating to Deaf persons, the Deaf community, or any individual or group.
- v. Don't: Post content that undermines the dignity, rights, or interests of Deaf persons or the interpreting profession.

5.3 Interpreters as Allies

- a) Interpreters are allies of the Deaf community and should maintain ongoing professional engagement with the Deaf community to strengthen their understanding of ISL usage, cultural practices, regional variations and emerging terminology, and communication needs.
- b) Interpreters should maintain appropriate professional boundaries and should not assume representative or advocacy roles unless specifically engaged or requested to do so.
- c) In scenarios where an engaging agency or employer lacks direct representation or input from the Deaf community, the interpreter should guide and educate the agency on standard communication accessibility norms and best practices.
- d) Where communication barriers affect effective participation, the interpreter may, where appropriate, draw attention to those barriers to facilitate effective communication.

5.4 Multiple Roles

5.4.1 Meaning

ISL interpreters work across a wide range of settings and employment arrangements. Some are engaged as full-time employees by institutions, organizations, government agencies, educational institutions or corporate entities, while others work on a freelance or self-employed basis. Those in full-time employment may be required to perform additional functions when not actively interpreting, giving rise to what are commonly referred to as multiple role positions.

Examples of such positions include, but are not limited to:

- Trainer / Interpreter
- Interpreter / Administrative Staff
- Interpreter / Human resource staff
- Teacher or Special Educator / Interpreter

The nature and priority of duties in such roles vary depending on the employment arrangement. Clearly defining the scope and hierarchy of responsibilities is essential to prevent role conflicts and to ensure that interpretation duties are carried out with the required focus, neutrality and professional integrity.

5.4.2 Guidelines

- a) The following basic principles for multiple roles should be followed.
 - i. Interpretation duties should not be treated as secondary or supplementary activity.
 - ii. The interpreter should accord priority to interpretation duties and ensure that other assigned responsibilities do not adversely affect the availability, preparedness, quality, neutrality, confidentiality or effective performance of interpretation services.
 - iii. Adequate time, relief arrangements and appropriate professional conditions should be ensured for effective interpretation.

- b) Based on the guidelines Multiple Roles in Interpreting published by Registry of Interpreters for Deaf, USA, the following best practices should be followed when developing and implementing a multiple role position with interpreting responsibilities.
- i. Defining confidentiality boundaries applicable to both the interpreting role and any additional assigned roles across a variety of situations
 - ii. Recognising the need to limit the number of hours spent actively interpreting, particularly where the interpreter works without a co-interpreter
 - iii. Specifying the proportion of time allocated to interpreting versus other duties, and clearly indicating whether interpreting is the primary or secondary function
 - iv. Establishing a process for the effective resolution of role conflicts when they arise
 - v. Engaging external interpreters for sensitive assignments, such as personnel reviews, disciplinary proceedings or grievance procedures, where a staff interpreter may have a conflict of interest
- c) Where interpreting is the primary role, the interpreter should ordinarily not:
- i. Disclose, report or use confidential information obtained during interpreting
 - ii. Perform the interpreting role and any other assigned role simultaneously
 - iii. Interpret for extended periods without adequate breaks or relief
 - iv. Undertake other assigned duties during periods when interpreting is required
 - v. Act in roles involving supervision, evaluation or decision-making, including positions such as Human Resource personnel, trainer, coordinator or similar roles that may create a conflict of interest
- d) To avoid conflict of interest and respect participants' rights and confidentiality, great care must be taken to inform all parties of:
- i. The role in which the person is functioning
 - ii. The possible future use of the information gained in that situation
- e) In case of conflict between interpretation duties and other assigned responsibilities, the interpreter should inform the concerned authority and ensure that appropriate arrangements are made so that interpretation services are provided without disruption.

5.5 Ethics of Teaching ISL

- a) ISL is the first and native language of the Deaf community — the language in which they think, communicate, and experience the world. Hearing interpreters acquire ISL through training and interaction with the Deaf community. This creates a professional and ethical responsibility to use that knowledge in a manner that respects the language, the Deaf community, and established professional standards.

- b) Teaching ISL is itself a skilled professional role that is best fulfilled by qualified Deaf individuals. As native users of the language, Deaf teachers bring not only linguistic fluency but cultural knowledge, lived experience, and authenticity that hearing teachers — for whom ISL is a second language acquired through study — cannot fully replicate.
- c) Further, ISL teaching is a significant area of professional opportunity for qualified Deaf individuals. When hearing persons take on ISL teaching roles that Deaf professionals are qualified to fill, they reduce employment opportunities within the Deaf community whose language forms the basis of their professional practice.
- d) Accordingly, ISL teaching roles should be filled by qualified and certified Deaf professionals wherever possible. Engaging agencies, institutions, and training programmes offering ISL courses are encouraged to prioritize the appointment of certified Deaf ISL teachers. This is not only a matter of quality — it is a matter of respect for the Deaf community, recognition of their professional expertise, and a commitment to the principle that the Deaf community should benefit from, and retain ownership of, their own language.
- e) World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), in its position paper on the primacy of Deaf people in the development and teaching of national sign languages emphasizes that Deaf people should be given priority and opportunities to teach their own sign languages. The WFD recognizes that Deaf people, as native users of national sign languages, possess unique linguistic, cultural and lived knowledge that is essential for effective sign language teaching, preservation and development
- f) Accordingly, the following ethical guidelines should be followed.
 - i. Interpreters who have learned ISL through their training and professional work should not use that knowledge to teach ISL for personal or commercial gain. They should avoid taking up a role of teaching ISL formally or informally. This includes videos on social media platforms.
 - ii. ISL teaching roles should be filled by qualified and certified Deaf professionals. Engaging agencies, institutions, and training programmes offering ISL courses, trainings, etc. should make all reasonable efforts to appoint qualified Deaf professionals before considering any alternative arrangement. This is not only a matter of quality — it is a matter of respect for the Deaf community, recognition of their professional expertise, and a commitment to the principle that the Deaf community should benefit from, and retain ownership of, their own language.

6. ENGAGING ISL INTERPRETERS

6.1 Assessing the Need

The requirement of ISL interpreters in a particular situation depends on several factors, such as the communication requirements of the deaf participants, topic of conversation, duration, type of interaction, number of participants, setting, etc.

6.1.1. Principle of Self-Determination

The primary criterion for determining the need for an interpreter should be the preference of the Deaf person.

Engaging agencies should:

- a) Ask the individual directly whether they require an ISL interpreter. Some deaf and hard of hearing persons may prefer to speak or use written language for the interaction, while others may request ISL interpretation.
- b) Respect the individual's choice of communication mode.
- c) Not substitute written communication, lip-reading, or family assistance in place of professional interpretation where ISL interpretation is requested.

6.1.2. Assessment Factors

If, based on the preference of the Deaf person that an ISL interpreter is needed, the following factors need to be considered:

- a) Language: The deaf person's ability to understand and express themselves using ISL. Deaf participant may prefer ISL, regional sign variants or a combination.
- b) Spoken language: The spoken language that will be used in the interaction. An interpreter fluent in the spoken language of the interaction needs to be engaged. For example, if the interaction is expected to take place in Marathi, then the interpreter should know Marathi and ISL.
- c) Duration: The length of the interaction. Longer interaction would require more interpreters.
- d) Subject matter and complexity: The topic and complexity of the subject matter (legal, medical, technical, academic, etc.). An interpreter familiar with the subject matter is preferred. More complex or difficult topics may require more interpreters.
- e) The consequences of misunderstanding (e.g., court decisions, medical consent, official documentation, etc.).
- f) The formality of the interaction: Formal interactions may be more demanding due to the expected norms of behavior, interaction, and formal language use. .
- g) Number of participants and type of interaction: The presence of multiple speakers or fast-paced dialogue. Situations with multiple speakers, fast-paced and overlapping dialogue, more interaction, etc. require more interpreters.

- h) Interpreter preference: Where practicable, engaging agencies should take into account the Deaf person's preference regarding the choice of interpreter. Such preference may arise from language or regional sign variation, gender, established working relationship, privacy or confidentiality concerns, previous experience, or the sensitive nature of the communication.

Based on the above factors, a case-by-case assessment needs to be done to determine the number of interpreters.

6.1.3 General guidelines for number of interpreters

The number of interpreters indicated in the table below is illustrative and intended to support planning and procurement. It does not limit the engagement of additional interpreters where required, nor does it imply that fewer interpreters may be engaged where the communication needs of the assignment require otherwise.

Duration	Subject Matter Complexity	Sample Settings (No. of Participants / Type of Interaction)	Number of Interpreters Required
Up to 30 minutes	Low	One-to-one interactions, routine enquiries, simple meetings	1 interpreter
Up to 1 hour	Low to Moderate	Meetings, consultations, interviews, small group discussions	1–2 interpreters depending on pace, communication needs, and complexity
1–2 hours	Low to Moderate	Training sessions, classroom instruction, workshops, medium-sized meetings	2 interpreters working in rotation
More than 2 hours	Any complexity	Extended meetings, hearings, workshops, public programmes	Minimum 2 interpreters
Full-day assignments	Any complexity	Conferences, seminars, training programmes, public events	Minimum 3 interpreters
Any duration	High	Legal proceedings, police investigations, medical consultations	Minimum 2 interpreters; a Deaf Interpreter may be engaged where required
Any duration	High	Technical, academic, scientific, financial, or specialized subject matter	Minimum 2 interpreters; additional interpreters may be required depending on complexity
Any duration	Any	Large group interactions, panel discussions, conferences, public	Minimum 2 interpreters

Duration	Subject Matter Complexity	Sample Settings (No. of Participants / Type of Interaction)	Number of Interpreters Required
	complexity	consultations, multi-speaker events	
Any duration	Any complexity	Deaf-blind communication, Deaf persons with additional communication needs, limited language proficiency, or unique linguistic requirements	Determined on a case-by-case basis; may require a Deaf Interpreter and/or additional interpreters

6.1.4 Requirement of Deaf Interpreters

Deaf Interpreters should be engaged where:

- a) The Deaf person uses a non-standard or regional sign variety.
- b) The Deaf person has limited language exposure or language deprivation, and uses gestures / home signs.
- c) The Deaf person is Deaf-blind.
- d) The communication situation is complex, legal, or high-risk.

6.1.5 Workload, Rotation and Breaks

- a) The maximum workload for an ISL interpreter should ideally not exceed 08 hours per day, inclusive of breaks.
- b) No interpreter should be required to interpret continuously without appropriate breaks, as this may adversely affect accuracy and quality.
- c) Depending on the duration and complexity of the assignment, appropriate breaks should be given to the interpreters.
- d) Breaks should be treated as part of paid working time.
- e) Interpreters should rotate as applicable and alternate at intervals of approximately 20 to 30 minutes to prevent fatigue and maintain accuracy. Rotation may be adjusted depending on:
 - i. Complexity of content
 - ii. Speed of delivery
 - iii. Environmental conditions

6.1.6 Avoiding Informal Substitutes

Family members, friends, or other untrained individuals should not be used as interpreters in formal, legal, medical, educational, or official settings, except in emergency situations until a qualified interpreter can be arranged.

Institutions and service providers should ensure the provision of qualified interpretation services where required and if available. Failure to provide reasonable communication accessibility may

constitute non-compliance with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and may be subject to the provisions of the Act.

6.2 Guidelines for Communicating Through an Interpreter

When communicating with a Deaf person through an interpreter:

- a) Speak directly to the Deaf person, not to the interpreter.
- b) Maintain eye contact and address the Deaf person using first-person language (e.g., “How are you?” rather than “Ask her how she is.”).
- c) Allow sufficient time for interpretation and for the Deaf person to receive the message and respond.
- d) Speak at a natural pace and pause, where appropriate, to facilitate accurate interpretation.
- e) Avoid speaking over others or engaging in multiple conversations simultaneously.
- f) Ensure that only one person speaks at a time during meetings, discussions, or group interactions.
- g) Provide relevant documents, presentations, agendas, technical terms, names, acronyms, or reference materials in advance, where possible.
- h) Ensure that the interpreter, speaker, and presentation materials remain clearly visible to Deaf participants in accordance with Section 6.3.3.
- i) Where questions or comments are invited, allow sufficient time for interpretation before moving to the next speaker or topic.
- j) Recognize that the interpreter's role is to facilitate communication and not to participate in, answer, or influence the discussion.

6.3 Responsibilities of Engaging Agencies

6.3.1 Engaging an Interpreter

Communication and interpretation needs should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Organizations engaging with Deaf persons should be proactive and take the responsibility to consult the Deaf participant to determine interpreter requirement based on principle of self-determination as given in section 6.1.1.

- a) Engaging agencies should:
 - i. Formally appoint qualified ISL interpreters as early as possible and provide sufficient notice to enable preparation and scheduling.
 - ii. Make payment of remuneration to interpreters in a timely manner in accordance with the fee structure recommended under these guidelines or as notified by the competent authority.

- iii. Arrange for team interpreting, including engagement of additional interpreters where required.
- b) No interpreter should be coerced into taking up engagements that they are not comfortable with or prepared for or do not possess the required knowledge and necessary skills for.

6.3.2 Arrangements for Effective Interpretation Services

- a) Environment: Assess lighting, seating, and visibility to ensure clear line of sight between interpreter and Deaf participants, minimal visual and auditory distractions
- b) Technology: Check if online interpreting or captioning support is required in addition to ISL. In the case of online interpretation services, it should be ensured that technical standards for visibility and clarity are met.
- c) Interpreter Readiness: Confirm interpreter's physical and cognitive preparedness, including rotation schedules for long sessions.
- d) Logistics: Plan for breaks, team coordination, and backup interpreters in case of emergencies.
- e) Confidentiality Needs: Ensure interpreters are briefed on the sensitivity of the content and agree to confidentiality protocols.
- f) Working conditions: Ensure appropriate seating / standing arrangements, access to drinking water and basic facilities, safe and respectful working environment.
- g) Workload and deployment norms: Refer to section 6.1.5.

Inadequate working conditions that affect interpretation quality may be flagged by interpreters, and corrective measures should be taken.

6.3.3 Positioning of Interpreters

The engaging agency should ensure that interpretation arrangements facilitate effective visual communication for Deaf participants.

- a) Interpreters should be positioned so that Deaf participants can comfortably view both the interpreter and the active speaker or presentation content within the same or substantially similar visual field (ideally 1 to 2 meters near the speaker). This means that the interpreter should be positioned such that Deaf participants are not required to repeatedly turn their heads or bodies to look at the interpreter.
- b) The engaging agency should ensure that the interpreter is positioned against a plain, solid-colored, non-reflective background that contrasts clearly with their skin tone. The lighting must be uniform and direct; interpreters should never be placed directly in front of bright windows, moving digital displays, or intense backlighting that creates silhouettes or facial shadows.
- c) If the physical positioning is constrained by the venue, security, protocol, or other factors, appropriate alternative arrangements, such as projection screens or display systems, should be provided to ensure visual access to the interpretation.

- d) Where a Deaf person is the speaker or presenter, interpreter should be positioned directly in front of the Deaf speaker or within the Deaf person's natural visual field, to ensure ease of visual coordination between the speaker and interpreter. This may include reserving seats for interpreters, allowing interpreters to stand or reposition themselves or make other adjustments as needed.
- e) In settings where speakers or discussion area and presentation screens are at separate opposite locations, interpreters at each location should be arranged so that deaf participants are not required to keep turning their heads.
- f) Mirror Interpretation - Where a Deaf participant or speaker is located at a distance from the primary interpreter, an additional interpreter or Deaf Interpreter may be positioned near that participant to serve two functions: first, to relay the primary interpreter's interpretation to the Deaf participant; and second, to convey the Deaf participant's signed communication to the primary interpreter, speaker or audience, as required. This arrangement is referred to as mirror interpretation.

6.3.4 Visibility and Representation of Deaf Persons

Organizations, broadcasters, media agencies, event organizers, and service providers should ensure that interpretation, filming, broadcasting, photography, and other presentation arrangements do not unduly prioritize the interpreter over Deaf participants, speakers, or presenters. Accessibility arrangements should be designed to support effective communication while ensuring that Deaf persons remain visible and central to the communication process.

6.3.5 Video Recording

- a) In programs such as conferences, training programmes, etc. where the program is being recorded or livestreamed, it should be ensured that the ISL interpretation is clearly captured and is visible in the recording and in the livestream.

6.3.6 Cancellation by the Engaging Agency

- a) The engaging agency should provide reasonable notice if an interpretation assignment is cancelled, postponed, or rescheduled.
- b) Engaging agencies should avoid frequent cancellations, postponements, or last-minute schedule changes, as these can affect the availability and professional commitments of interpreters.

6.4 Responsibilities of ISL Interpreters

Interpreters should perform their duties with due diligence, professionalism and responsibility, ensuring effective communication access for Deaf and hearing participants. Interpreters should adhere to the Professional Standards prescribed under these guidelines at all times (see chapter 5).

6.4.1 Acceptance of Assignments

- a) Interpreters should accept assignments based on competence and subject knowledge.

- b) Interpreters should assess their ability to do an assignment, including any factors that may affect their performance, impartiality, accuracy, or well-being.
- c) Where an assignment involves subject matter that may cause significant emotional distress or otherwise impair professional performance, interpreters should consider declining the assignment or seeking appropriate support.

6.4.2 Assignment Commitment and Cancellation

Interpreters should:

- a) Communicate availability and limitations in advance.
- b) Not cancel assignments at short notice without reasonable cause.
- c) Inform the Deaf client or engaging agency at the earliest in case of inability to attend.
- d) Make reasonable efforts to arrange a suitable replacement where feasible.

Repeated unjustified cancellations may be viewed as unprofessional conduct and may affect opportunities for future assignments.

6.4.3 Pre-Assignment Preparation and Coordination

Before starting an assignment, interpreters should carry out the necessary preparation. Interpreters should:

- a) Obtain adequate briefing on the nature and scope of the assignment.
- b) Review relevant documents or materials.
- c) Request team interpreting where required.
- d) Coordinate with engaging agency and co-interpreters.
- e) Maintain physical and cognitive readiness.
- f) Interpreters must enquire of the assignment in advance to prepare themselves for linguistic accuracy of content delivery.
 - i. Seek information about the deaf audience: It is important for the interpreter to know the deaf audience in terms of ISL exposure, linguistic background to enable smooth and comprehensive interpretation. The interpreter can seek this information in advance to the event or at the event (before it begins by interacting with the deaf present).
 - ii. Seek information about deaf presenters: If there are deaf presenters, the interpreter must consult the deaf presenter regarding the interpretation style, terminology, need for emphasis and other linguistic & interpretation nuances that need to be incorporated.

6.4.4 Assignment Management and Coordination

Interpreters should:

- a) Be punctual and reach as per the reporting time, taking into account time needed for coordination and setup.
- b) Coordinate with organizers and co-interpreters regarding interpretation setup and requirements.
- c) Ensure proper seating, lighting and visibility conditions.
- d) Obtain relevant information about Deaf participants where appropriate.
- e) Work collaboratively with co-interpreters including Deaf interpreters and build comfortable and respectful co-working spaces.

6.4.5 Appearance and Dress Code

With reference to para 5.2 (c), interpreters should adhere to dress code requirements appropriate to the setting or as prescribed by the engaging agency, ensuring that attire does not interfere with visual communication. For example, adhere to formal dress standards in courts, tribunals, government offices, Parliament, the Prime Minister's Office, the President's Secretariat and other official establishments.

6.4.6 Clarification and Communication Accuracy

Interpreters should:

- a) Interpreters should match their signing skills and interpretations delivery as per the educational standards/regional variations and comprehension capabilities of the Deaf individuals requiring their services.
- b) Signing styles (verbalizing, finger spelling, level of expression, etc.) to be adapted according to the requirement of the clients/audience.
- c) Seek clarification where necessary to ensure accuracy.
- d) Exercise judgment to minimize disruption. (For example, in high-level or sensitive settings, public rallies, official programmes and large-scale events where interruption may not be appropriate, interpreters should use professional judgment to maintain continuity).
- e) Avoid excessive interruptions affecting communication flow.

6.4.7 Accessibility and Inclusion

Interpreters should:

- a) The interpreter should, where appropriate, provide interpretation of relevant background communications, instructions, announcements or discussions occurring within the communication environment where such information may affect the Deaf person's participation, understanding, safety or decision-making.

- b) Support communication accessibility across sectors.
- c) Facilitate inclusive communication without assuming advocacy roles.
- d) Inform organizers of accessibility requirements where appropriate.

6.5 Responsibilities of Deaf Participants

The following provisions are intended to facilitate effective communication and the smooth delivery of interpretation services. They do not diminish the rights of Deaf persons to communication accessibility or create conditions for receiving interpretation services.

Deaf participants should, where practicable:

- a) Communicate any accessibility, language, or interpretation preferences in advance.
- b) Use designated seating or viewing areas arranged to facilitate effective access to interpretation services.
- c) Inform the interpreter or organizer if interpretation is not clearly visible or accessible.
- d) Allow interpreters reasonable opportunities to seek clarification where necessary to ensure accurate communication.
- e) Respect the professional role and boundaries of interpreters.
- f) Provide feedback on interpretation services, where appropriate, to support continuous improvement.

6.6 Awareness and Sensitization

The effectiveness of ISL interpreter services depends not only on interpreter competence but also on the awareness of stakeholders engaging such services.

A significant proportion of institutions and the general public are not adequately aware of:

- i. The role and professional boundaries of ISL interpreters
- ii. Appropriate ways of working with interpreters
- iii. The importance of using qualified interpreters
- iv. Guidelines for assessing the need for interpretation

This lack of awareness often leads to misuse, underutilization, or ineffective use of interpreter services.

Therefore, awareness and sensitization programmes are essential, including (but not limited to) the following groups:

- i. Judicial officers, court staff, and legal professionals
- ii. Police personnel and law enforcement agencies

- iii. Healthcare professionals and hospital administrators
- iv. Educational institutions and teachers
- v. Government officials and public service providers
- vi. Corporate organizations employing Deaf persons
- vii. Media and event organizers
- viii. Deaf community members and families

Awareness programmes can include the following topics:

- i. Role and responsibilities of ISL interpreters
- ii. Ethical boundaries and professional conduct
- iii. Guidelines for assessing the need for interpreters
- iv. Best practices for working with interpreters
- v. Importance of accessibility and communication rights
- vi. Use of interpreters in different settings (court, hospital, workplace, etc.)

Institutions engaging ISL interpreters should ensure that their staff undergo basic orientation on working with interpreters

6.7 Complaints and Grievances

At present, India does not have a dedicated statutory licensing, regulatory, or disciplinary mechanism specifically for Indian Sign Language (ISL) interpreters. However, concerns relating to the quality of interpretation services, professional conduct, accessibility, or denial of reasonable accommodation may be addressed through existing institutional and disability rights mechanisms.

Complaints regarding an interpreter's conduct or performance may be submitted to the organization, agency, or interpreter association through which the interpreter was engaged, where applicable. Such organizations may include interpreter associations, service providers, or institutions maintaining interpreter panels.

In matters involving accessibility, discrimination, denial of interpreter services, or violation of the rights of Deaf persons, complaints may also be brought before the State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, or any other competent authority under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Where the interpreter is registered with the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), complaints may additionally be referred to the RCI in accordance with applicable procedures.

7. ONLINE INTERPRETATION AND VIDEO RELAY SERVICE (VRS)

7.1 Technical Standards for Online Interpretation

The minimum technical standards for online interpreting in video conferencing software such as Zoom, WebEx and Google Meet are given below.

- a) High-speed internet connection with sufficient internet bandwidth to support uninterrupted high-quality video communication.
- b) High-quality camera (minimum 720p/HD resolution; 1080p preferred).
- c) Proper positioning of the interpreter within the video frame for clear visibility of signs and facial expressions.
- d) Adequate lighting to ensure hand movements and facial expressions are visible.
- e) Reliable device (laptop/desktop/tablet) with stable audio and video functions.
- f) For scheduled online assignments, reasonable contingency arrangements, such as an alternative internet connection, backup device, or agreed communication protocol, should be established where practicable to minimize interruption of interpretation services.

7.2. Interpreter Placement and Screen Display

- a) The interpreter's video should be displayed alongside the speaker's window and remain clearly visible and of sufficient size (ideally at least 50% of the window/screen size) and quality to ensure effective communication access.
- b) Platform settings, screen layouts, recordings, and presentation arrangements should be configured to maintain visibility of both the interpreter and relevant speakers or content.
- c) Organizers should take reasonable measures to ensure continuous interpretation access throughout the session, including during presentations, screen sharing, breakout sessions, and audience interactions.
- d) The video conferencing platform settings should be such that the interpreter is spotlighted/pinned or that participants are able to pin the interpreters themselves.
- e) Similarly, in case of live streamed or broadcasted programmes, the interpreter's window should be at least 50% of the screen size.

7.3 Facilitating Online Interpreting

- a) Before the beginning of the session, organizers and interpreters should verify that the interpreter's video, lighting, framing, audio (where required), and platform settings provide clear and uninterrupted visibility of the interpretation.
- b) Where feasible, organizers should allow sufficient time before the scheduled starting of the session for interpreters to test the platform settings, screen layout, and interpretation arrangements.

- c) Participants should identify themselves before speaking where necessary, particularly in multi-speaker meetings.
- d) Participants should keep in mind that in online settings, there may be time lag due to internet connectivity. Hence, taking turns and waiting for the speaker/ signer/ interpreter to finish are important so that the interpretation is smooth.

7.4 Privacy and Confidentiality

To maintain privacy and confidentiality in VRS and other remote interpretation settings:

- a) Interpretation sessions should be treated as confidential communication between users.
- b) Recording of VRS interactions should not be undertaken without the knowledge and consent of all the participants, except where required by law or authorized by the concerned authority.
- c) Interpreters and users should be informed of any recording, logging or monitoring features of the system.
- d) Where recording is enabled for official or service monitoring purposes, appropriate safeguards should be in place to ensure data protection, restricted access and secure storage.
- e) Personal or unauthorized recording of VRS calls by interpreters, any participant or third parties should be prohibited.

7.5 User Feedback and Service Evaluation for VRS

- a) Where VRS services are provided, it is recommended that the service provider make available a feedback mechanism to users upon completion of each interaction.
- b) The feedback system should be simple, accessible and user-friendly, including options in ISL and/or text format.
- c) Feedback data should be periodically reviewed by the service provider for quality assurance and service improvement.
- d) Appropriate safeguards should be maintained to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for users providing feedback.

8. FEES & WELFARE

The provision of ISL interpretation services requires high levels of linguistic competence, cognitive effort, and professional responsibility. Ensuring fair remuneration and appropriate working conditions is essential for maintaining quality, sustainability, and professionalism in the field.

8.1 Responsibility for Payment of Fees

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 mandates that government bodies and covered establishments ensure communication accessibility for persons with disabilities. Since ISL interpretation is a necessary means of communication accessibility for Deaf persons, the responsibility for arranging and paying for qualified interpretation services lies with the institution providing the service. While the Act does not specify interpreter fees explicitly, the duty to provide accessibility — including through ISL interpretation — is a reasonable accommodation obligation under Section 3, and cannot be fulfilled if the cost burden falls on the person with a disability.

Accordingly, where a Deaf person requires ISL interpretation to access a public service, legal proceeding (police and courts), healthcare facility, educational institution, or any other service covered under the Act, the responsibility for engaging and paying a qualified interpreter rests with the institution or organization providing that service

In line with the accessibility obligations under Section 3 of the RPWD Act, these Guidelines recommend that interpreter fees should not be charged to or recovered from the Deaf person, for services that are required to be accessible under the RPwD Act.

Organizations engaging interpreters should ensure timely payment of fees and related expenses in accordance with applicable policies, contracts, or prescribed rates.

8.2 Recommended Fees

The fee rates as notified by ISLRTC or DEPwD from time to time will be applicable. The ISLRTC website www.islrtc.nic.in may be referred for more details.

8.3 Welfare

To support the health, well-being, and long-term sustainability of ISL interpreters and the profession:

- a) Rest and prevention of overwork: Interpreters must be encouraged to take adequate rest and actively avoid overwork to ensure sustainability in the field. Interpreters should be encouraged to maintain a healthy work-life balance and avoid excessive workloads that may adversely affect their physical or mental well-being.
- b) Basic amenities: Organizers should ensure access to clean drinking water and basic facilities (such as restrooms).
- c) Ergonomics and safety: Organizers should ensure provision of appropriate seating/standing arrangements to prevent physical strain, alongside a safe and respectful working environment.

- d) Paid health breaks: Appropriate breaks should be provided in accordance with Section 6.1.5, to prevent physical and cognitive fatigue.
- e) Reporting of workplace concerns: Interpreters should have access to appropriate mechanisms for reporting harassment, discrimination, unsafe working conditions, or other workplace concerns encountered during assignments.
- f) Peer support: Interpreter associations and service providers may facilitate peer support, mentoring, professional networking, and opportunities for professional development.
- g) Mental health support: The cognitive demands, emotional stress, occupational pressures and mental health challenges associated with interpretation work should be explicitly recognized by engaging agencies, interpreter associations, and service providers, and awareness of the same should be promoted.

9. CONCLUSION

These Guidelines represent a significant step towards recognising ISL interpretation as a professional service of national importance. By establishing standards for qualifications, ethical conduct, fees and working conditions, they seek to ensure that Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-blind persons in India have consistent and reliable access to quality communication support across all areas of public life.

The effective implementation of these Guidelines requires commitment from all stakeholders — government authorities, institutions, service providers, interpreter associations, and the Deaf community. Each has a role to play in building a system that is fair, accountable, and accessible.

These Guidelines are a living document. As the field of ISL interpretation grows and evolves, the standards and provisions set out here will need to keep pace with emerging needs, practices, and legal developments. Accordingly, these Guidelines should be reviewed after a period of three years from the date of notification, or earlier if required. The review should be undertaken with meaningful participation of the Deaf community, interpreter associations, and other relevant stakeholders, and updated provisions should be notified as appropriate.

The overarching goal remains clear: to uphold the linguistic rights of Deaf persons, to strengthen the ISL interpreting profession, and to advance India's commitment to equality, dignity, and full inclusion of the Deaf community in all aspects of public life.

ANNEXURE I

List of Organizations

A. Government Organizations

A list of government organizations working on services for deaf and hard of hearing people are given below.

S.N o.	Name	Organization details	Website & Contact information
1.	Ali Yavar Jung National Institute for Speech and Hearing Disabilities (AYJNISHD), Mumbai	Govt. – National institute under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India	https://ayjinishd.nic.in/ayjnihh-mum@ayjnihh.nic.in
2.	Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC), Delhi	Govt. – National institute under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India	https://islrtc.nic.in/ ISLRTC's Interpreter Directory - https://islrtc.nic.in/directory-of-isl-interpreters/ islrtcnewdelhi@gmail.com
3.	Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), Delhi	Govt. – Statutory body under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India for regulating and monitoring professional and rehabilitation services given to persons with disabilities, to standardize syllabi and to maintain a Central Rehabilitation Register of all qualified professionals and personnel working in the field of Rehabilitation and Special Education.	https://rehabcouncil.nic.in/ To check the CRR registration of interpreters, engaging agencies or deaf persons can check their registration on RCI's portal at https://rciregistration.nic.in/rehabcouncil/Select_Search.jsp

B. Interpreter Services

A list of organizations that can be contacted for ISL interpreter services are given below.

S.No.	Name	Organization details	Website & Contact information
1.	Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI), Delhi	National ISL interpreters organization	https://signasli.com/
2.	Indian Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ISLIA), Indore	National ISL interpreters organization	
3.	SignAble, Bengaluru	SignAble is VRS based ISL interpretation service.	contact@signable.live +919543808827 WhatsApp your video (deaf) : +919567522384

C. National Deaf Associations

The two main national deaf organizations in India that advocate for accessibility and services for deaf community are given below.

S.No.	Name	Organization details	Website & Contact information
1.	All India Federation of the Deaf (AIFD), Delhi	National deaf organization	https://aifdeaf.org/ aifdeaf@gmail.com aifddeaf@yahoo.com
2.	National Association of the Deaf (NAD), Delhi	National deaf organization	https://nadindia.org/ secretary@nadindia.org

ANNEXURE II

List of Resources

1. Position paper 'The Primary of Deaf People in the Development and Teaching of National Sign Languages' by World Federation of the Deaf - <https://wfdeaf.org/resources/position-paper-on-the-primacy-of-deaf-people-in-the-development-and-teaching-of-national-sign-languages/>
2. Rights of Persons with Disability Act 2016 - <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3e58aea67b01fa747687f038dfde066f6/uploads/2023/10/202310161053958942.pdf>
3. Standards/Guidelines on accessibility services notified under the Rights for Persons with Disabilities Rules 2017 - <https://depwd.gov.in/en/acts/>
4. References for professional standards and code of ethics

S.No.	Details	Link
i.	Code of ethics by ASLI, India	https://signasli.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/ASLI-Code-of-Ethics.pdf
ii.	A-Z Code of ethics by ISLIA, India	https://youtu.be/295LwkrKMZ0?si=bSpJcvNIJIINKONm
iii.	Code of ethics of various sign language interpreter associations compiled by World Association of Sign Language Interpreters	https://wasli.org/sign-language-interpreters/code-of-ethics/
iv.	Code of Professional Conduct and Standard Practice Papers by Registry of Interpreters for Deaf, USA	https://rid.org/resources/#spp
v.	EPIC (Ethics and Professional Interpreter's Code) 2019 by Access Mantra, India	https://www.india-epic.com/ In ISL - https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScgQSvLWaBPAKs4V0vbYBHpQYMNGcy8hNGkBP5HOIk-9YZuFQ/viewform