

Why do we need this handbook?

The UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities recognizes that equality and the rights of Deaf people depend on access to sign language. The handbook contains information on how this work can be carried out in a practical, ethical and sustainable ways.

Studies, research and methodological work related to sign languages is a starting point for strengthening any Deaf community. Authorization occurs when the work is performed and conducted by the users of the sign language of that community. Unfortunately, there are still places in the world where hearing people do not include Deaf people in research and methodological activities related to sign languages. There is a lack of respect and willingness to cooperate with the respective local Deaf community. Bulgaria is one of those countries where ethical norms of joint work between Deaf and hearing people have not been observed yet.

This handbook aims to show that the approach by which the community is at the forefront of sign language resource creation processes is the most successful and authentic. Sign language work cannot be performed in isolation, alone or only by hearing people. Due to the lack of an accessible learning environment in higher education institutions, Deaf people have not had the motivation nor the opportunities for professional development in the academic field. Deaf people with experience need the support of experts to develop their knowledge and skills. Sustainability for results can only be achieved by the Deaf community leading this work.

The handbook aims to share ideas on how to conduct research and methodological work related to sign languages. This includes raising awareness of the linguistic value of sign languages and how Deaf people can build skills to stand up for their human and linguistic rights. Deaf people should gain knowledge and experience to improve their position in society with the support of partners, experts, allies, and consultants.

This happens through knowledge of facts related to sign languages, active participation in research activities in sign languages and subsequent methodological work for their use in teaching and educational activities. Sign language work is a way to empower the Deaf community. Without this empowerment, effective and authentic

educational and research practices for Deaf people cannot be created through sign language.

Article 32 of the UN Convention on Human Rights ("International Cooperation") recognizes the importance of international cooperation between different countries. For sign language, this means that those countries with a longer tradition and more experience in sign language research and methodological work can support countries with little or no experience. Countries with much more experience in sign language research can support the documentation, research and development of sign language resources and methodologies in a country with little or no experience.

This does not mean that specific research materials are transferred or that methods and results are "copied and pasted" directly from one country to another. One of the purposes of this handbook is to support and encourage international and local collaborations, which will be charged with engaging in sustainable practices for research and methodological activities related to sign language. This cooperation must be carried out in a mutual and respectful way—keeping in mind that partners are also learning the specifics of the relevant sign language, culture and history of the local Deaf community. Mutual respect and learning will send a strong message with positive results for all.