

What are the basic principles of this handbook?

Sign language research and methodological work includes several important elements and is much more than compiling sign language dictionaries. The aim of this handbook is to awaken the linguistic awareness of the Bulgarian Deaf community and create opportunities for deaf people to get acquainted with linguistics and Bulgarian Sign Language (BGSL) linguistics, which will, in turn, increase awareness, capacity and skills.

The constant research work with BGSL will lead to better inclusion of Deaf people, as they in turn will be able to defend their human and language rights in order to have inclusive education and public life.

As active participants in the research work on the BGSL, Deaf people should rediscover their own identity as Deaf. As a result of this awareness, they will be empowered and motivated to develop and explore their language in more detail.

Media, internet, video content in sign language from other countries and travel bring for “loan wording” in the BGSL. This is why the Bulgarian Deaf community has to strive to preserve and enrich the local Bulgarian sign language and the culture of Deaf people in Bulgaria. It is necessary to preserve the authenticity of BGSL from the influence of the international sign system, which is artificially created and has no status of a language. Our goal is to preserve the local Bulgarian culture of the Deaf and to limit the linguistic influences of brought in from other sign languages and to promote BGSL, with its rich history and linguistic nuances.

The mission of Listen Up is to carry out research and methodological work by the local Deaf people themselves. The participation of consultants is to assist, guide in the planning of linguistic sign language activities together with the community, to provide training resources and to support the learning process only in their capacity as consultants. The leading roles will belong to Deaf people—for the work of the creation of materials and resources in BGSL.

The research work, followed by methodical and implementation activities of our BGSL, is a long-term mission that will take years to achieve—to become a sustainable

platform for community development. Although the principles of research and methodological work in sign language are universal for most countries around the world, this handbook itself is not mandatory. Nevertheless, it aims to provide guidelines and recommendations for effective work on the development of BGSL and its application in various fields and in the social life of Deaf Bulgarians.

The listed principles take into account the fact that the educational system in Bulgaria has never officially applied a bilingual approach to education, namely BGSL and the writing of Bulgarian verbal language. For this reason, Deaf people have relied on hearing and hard of hearing partners and consultants to create the written part of all research materials. The activity itself is planned to be performed by Deaf people with the support of international and/or local consultants/advisors on the methodological implementation.

Eventually, we aim to introduce a bilingual approach to the education of Deaf children and youth in Bulgaria. This innovative model for Bulgaria guarantees the growth of Deaf people as equal citizens, receiving the opportunity for education and development.