



The World Federation of the Deafblind (WFDB)

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Public statement on Deafblind interpreting/Guide-interpreting fees

The World Federation of the Deafblind (WFDB) firmly advocates for the rights of persons with deafblindness to access high-quality, professional interpreting services and to enjoy equal access to information and communication. WFDB is a true global voice of the Deafblind, representing one of the most underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities that is very heterogenous with specific, individually tailored support requirements related to communication, social inclusion, orientation, environment description and mobility. Despite progress, challenges remain in ensuring consistent recognition and equitable compensation for qualified deafblind interpreters/guide-interpreters at international events, meetings, and forums. This issue has been observed across a range of high-level platforms, including the European Parliament, the Conference of States Parties (COSP), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and the Global Disability Summit (GDS), among others.

Time and again, we encounter inconsistent policies, systemic funding gaps, and persistent undervaluation of deafblind interpreting services, making it difficult for deafblind participants to secure the qualified support they need. In many cases, while sign language interpreters for Deaf participants are appropriately funded, deafblind interpreters receive significantly lower pay or, in some cases, are not funded at all. This creates a major barrier to equal access — meaning the ability to participate fully and independently, on the same basis as others.

The Distinct Role and Critical Need for Deafblind Interpreters

It is crucial to distinguish between sign language interpreters and deafblind interpreters/guide-interpreters, as these roles are not interchangeable:

- Sign Language Interpreters for Deaf or Hard of Hearing People interpret spoken language into International Sign (IS) or national sign languages. They typically provide interpretation in a visual format and do not have responsibilities beyond communication facilitation. These interpreters are paid standard professional rates for their services.
- Deafblind Interpreters or guide-Interpreters take on far greater responsibilities. Beyond language interpretation, they also provide environmental descriptions, tactile or adapted sign language communication, and mobility guidance. They accompany deafblind individuals at all times, including during travel, meetings, breaks, and moving between venues. Unlike standard sign language interpreters, they must tailor their communication to the specific needs of each deafblind person, which can vary widely based on individual preferences, needs and context.

Despite the demanding nature of their work, qualified deafblind interpreters/guide-interpreters often face significantly lower pay than standard sign language interpreters. This unjust discrepancy results in systemic barriers to participation for persons with deafblindness in international forums.

Our Call to Action

To ensure equitable access and uphold the rights of persons with deafblindness, we call on international organizations, governments, and funding bodies to:

1. Recognize deafblind interpreting as a specialized profession requiring fair and standardized compensation that reflects its complexity.
2. Ensure parity in funding policies so that deafblind participants receive the same level of support as deaf participants, including proper interpreter fees

and resources.

3. Adopt regional and international standards for deafblind interpreters/guide-interpreters fees to prevent discrimination and ensure accessibility at all events. While the specific amount may vary depending on the context, country, and event, compensation should always reflect the level of expertise and support provided.
4. Encourage governments, donors, and other funders to take responsibility for funding deafblind interpretation services for their representatives at both national and international events.
5. Promote and ensure high-level educations for deafblind interpreters/guide interpreters according to global standards (refer to WASLI Deafblind education guidelines https://wasli.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/279_wasli-db-interpreter-education-guidelines-1.pdf), emphasizing the specific qualities, skills and the level of job complexity in the role of deafblind interpreters/guide-interpreters.

The exclusion of persons with deafblindness due to inadequate interpreting services is a violation of their right to equal access and stands in direct contradiction to the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)—particularly Article 9, which obligates States Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure accessibility to information, communication, and services on an equal basis with others

We urge all stakeholders to take immediate, concrete action to end this disparity and uphold the right to equal access for persons with deafblindness — ensuring that no one is left behind.