

FINLAND

General Population: approx. 5 351 000 (in 2011)

How many Deaf people: approx. 5000 Deaf, Sign Language users (about 0,15% of population)

Official spoken languages: Finnish, Swedish

Minority languages: Finnish Sign Language, Sami, Romany

Sign Language(s): Finnish Sign Language (FinSL) and Finnish-Swedish Sign Language used by the minority of Deaf people within the Finnish Deaf community (approx. 200). This minority has Swedish as their written language.

Capital City: Helsinki, in the southern Finland by the Gulf of Finland (Baltic Sea)

National Association of the Deaf

The Finnish Association of the Deaf (FAD). Founded in 1905, FAD has a long tradition of advocating on behalf of deaf people. During its history, it has worked to ensure full human, linguistic and social rights for deaf people and an environment in which they can be proud of their heritage, language, history and culture. The offices of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) President and General Secretary are located in the Light House in Finland. Markku Jokinen has been President of the WFD since 2003- (www.kl-deaf.fi)

Deaf Education

FAD states that their aim in deaf education is providing FinSL throughout the educational process. There are 11 state Deaf comprehensive schools in Finland. Two upper-secondary schools offer education in Finnish Sign Language either by using interpreters or providing the instruction in FinSL. In recent years amount of deaf children has radically decreased because of the cochlear implants. Due this change teaching language in comprehensive schools for deaf has unfortunately changed more and more to Sign supported speech. Even if the right for the education in sign language or the right to study Finnish sign language as your mother tongue is secured by the Finnish law, there are still variation on how this is implemented. Another option for deaf pupils and students is to study in any school with hearing students by using a Sign Language interpreter.

FAD also runs the Finnish Folk High School for the deaf, which offers programmes and courses for FinSL users. Its curriculum is organized in cooperation with universities and polytechnics. (www.kuurojenkansanopisto.fi)

Jyväskylä University in central Finland has three training programs aimed for deaf students and other fluent signers. The training programs provided are in the field of linguistics and education. Since 2010 the Sign Language Centre founded by Ministry of Education has located in University of Jyväskylä. It provides Sign Language research and gives training for expertise in Sign Language industry.

Laws to protect the rights of deaf people in Finland

Sign Language has been officially recognized in Finland since 1995.

The Constitution of Finland (731/1999)

- § Section 17 ... The rights of persons using Sign Language and of persons in need of interpretation or translation aid owing to disability shall be guaranteed by an Act.

Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act (133/2010)

- § Section 5 ... In the arrangement of interpretation services, a person shall be considered severely disabled if he is deaf, deafblind or he has a severe speech defect. Interpretation services comprise all interpretation in sign language to manage work, study, everyday affairs, social participation, leisure activities, recreation or any other corresponding purpose.
- § Section 6 ... interpretation service amount for the deafblind minimum 360 hours/year and deaf 180 hours/year. ...also allocated to use the service when travelling abroad if the trip is obligatory concerning persons daily life, studies/work.
- § Section 8 ... Interpretation services can also be arranged as distance interpreting... when applicable.

Law on basic education (628/1998)

- § Section 10, subsect 1 ... The language of instruction and the language used in extracurricular teaching...may also be Sami, Romany or Sign Language.
- subsect. 2 ... Pupils with impaired hearing must be given teaching in Sign Language, when needed.
- § Section 12, subsect. 2 ... As mother tongue, the pupil may also be taught the Romany language, the Sign Language...

Law on upper secondary school (629/1998)

- § Section 6, subsect. 1 ... The language of instruction in the upper secondary school is either Finnish or Swedish. The Sami, Romany or the Sign Language can also be used as a language of instruction...
- § Section 8, subsect 2 ... On the basis of the student's choice, also...the Sign Language can be taught as a mother tongue.
- Law on vocational education (630/1998)
- § Section 11, subsect. 1 ... the Sign Language can also be used as languages of instruction...
- § Section 12, subsect. 3 ... On the basis of the student's choice...the Sign Language... can be taught as a mother tongue.

Law on the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland (591/1996)

- § Section 1, subsect. 2 ... Among the duties of the Research Institute is also to take care of research and the preservation of the purity of the Sign Language and the Romany language.

Decree on the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland (758/1996)

- § Section 1 The duties of the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland include:
 - studying... and other related languages as well as the Finnish Sign Language and the Romany language;
 - developing and preserving the purity of... and the Finnish Sign Language and the Romany language;

Language Act (423/2003)

- § Section 37 – Report on the application of language legislation
- Each electoral period the Government reports to the Parliament... on the application of language legislation and on the securing of linguistic right and, as necessary, on other linguistic conditions.
- The report deals not only with Finnish and Swedish but also with at least Sami, Romany and Sign language.

Non-Discrimination Act (21/2004)

- § Section 6 ...Nobody may be discriminated against on the basis of ...nationality, language...disability...

Act on Yleisradio Oy (National broadcasting company) (746/1998)

- § Section 7 ...on equal grounds and to produce services in the Sami and Romany languages and in Sign Language..

Act on the Status and Rights of Patients (785/1992)

- § Section 3 ... The mother tongue, individual needs and culture of the patient have to be taken into account as far as possible in his/her medical care and other treatment.

Law on the position and rights of the social welfare client (812/2000)

- § Section 4 ...When executing social welfare, the wishes, opinions, interests and individual needs as well as the mother tongue and cultural background of the client must be taken into account.

Amendment to the law on pre-trial investigation (427/2003)

- § Section 37, subsect. 3 ... Other than a Finnish...speaking person to be heard in a pre-trial investigation has the right to an interpreter free of charge, unless the authority responsible... provides the interpretation services.

Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003)

- § Section 26 ... The authority shall arrange for interpretation in a matter that can become pending on the initiative of the authority, if: 1) a party using the Romany language, Sign Language or another language does not know the language, Finnish or Swedish, used in the authority; or...

Nationality Act (359/2003)

- § Section 13 - General requirements for naturalization
 - applicant has satisfactory oral and written skills in... or instead of oral skills similar skills in the Finnish Sign language

Language policy programme of Finnish Sign Language in 2010-2015 by FAD and Research Institute for the Languages of Finland KOTUS

UN Convention of the rights of persons with disabilities

Sign Language Interpreters:

- How many interpreters?
 - The number of educated Sign Language interpreters is approximately 650 (active Sign Language interpreters 450, full-time interpreters 200-250). Every year there are about 50 new graduates.
- Do you have an Interpreter Association?

- The Finnish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SVT) was established in year 1982.
- How many members?
 - There are 503 members in The Finnish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SVT). Full members 380, student members 123, plus 96 support members.

Details of your Interpreter Training

- The Sign Language Interpreter Degree Programme is 240 ECTS.
 - Humak University of Applied Sciences: Campuses in Helsinki and Kuopio. (www.humak.edu/english)
 - Diaconia University of Applied Sciences: Campus in Turku. (<http://www.turku.diak.fi/> in English)
- In addition the Bachelor degree programmes we have two postgraduate Master degree programmes: national and international. The national Master degree programme takes 1.5 years and is jointly run by Diak and Humak. The European master of degree programme is called EUMASLI and is jointly run by Humak University of Applied Sciences (FIN), Heriot-Watt University (UK) and Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal (GER). The programme takes 2.5 years.

Details of your Interpreter Testing/Assessment

Interpreting students are in general tested in the end of each course. Courses vary in the amount of work required from the student from five to one ECTS. In addition to this constant assessment in the end of each course the students need to pass their final exams in order to graduate as interpreters. In the final exams the interpreter students are tested for example in professional ethics, professional knowledge, language skills and interpreting skills in various settings interpreting FinSL-Finnish and Finnish-FinSL.

Details of your Interpreter Accreditation/Certification

So far there is no nationwide Interpreter Certification. Trained interpreters sign up for the interpreting registry upon graduation. Once one is in the registry she/he is free to work as an interpreter. This current register is not officially monitored by any one and there is no separation between interpreters' skills and work experience.

Future goal is to provide countrywide register for all interpreters. The biggest unsolved existing problem at the moment is: which body (authority) will be maintaining the register in Finland. Other important facts that need to be considered are: which are the assessment tools, how and how often interpreters update their skills and will there be a different register for sign language interpreters, signed speech interpreters, speech-to-text interpreters and sign language teachers.

Important achievements

- New law of Interpreting service for persons with disabilities from 19.2.2010
- The new nationwide structure of providing interpreting services since 1.9.2010; a clear model for interpreting service in terms of provider (The Social Insurance

- Institution of Finland, Kela), producers (employers), interpreters (employees) and client statuses. Each party now knows what their rights and responsibilities are.
- Master Programmes in Sign Language Interpreting (first group started in 2009):
 - EUMASLI (90ects) and Master Programme in Sign Language Interpreting (90ects)
 - Two collective agreements for Finnish SL interpreters by Viparo 8.12.2010 and Via Sign Language Cooperative, New National collective agreement from 1.2.2010-
 - Annual EFSLI's Special Attendance Fund donations.
 - Organizing a Nordic Seminar in Turku in 2010. Theme was "Recode your Ethics".

Goals for the future

- Improving the new interpreter relay system and practices to ensure smooth cooperation between all parties. Making sure that quality of the interpretation services doesn't drop due to the new service providing system described in achievements.
- Challenges because of the new system: deaf can not choose an interpreter; interpreters' special skills go wasted if relay service is not working properly. Also feedback between interpreters working in different companies.
- Postgraduate training for interpreters to meet the new challenges on the professional field. More higher-educated deaf clients; interpreters have to work in various academic circumstances and their educational level needs to be upgraded. More deaf children are implanted; the communication method when interpreting to implanted client is still unclear.
- Relay interpreting with deaf interpreters (with immigrant clients). Spoken language interpreter as a partner with Finnish Sign Language interpreter - or Sign Language interpreter training towards better English skills
- SVT's 30th anniversary in year 2012; planning a nationwide training/celebration campaign for all interpreters
- Strengthen and unifying the practices of police and legal interpreting field in Finland. Joining EULITA in 2011 first as an associate member.

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