



WASLI is committed to the development of the profession of sign language interpreting worldwide

Spain



FILSE  
FEDERACIÓN ESPAÑOLA DE INTÉRPRETES  
DE LENGUA DE SIGNOS Y GUÍAS-INTÉRPRETES

Report presented by: FILSE (Federación Española de Intérpretes de Lengua de Signos y Guías-Intérpretes), the Spanish Federation for Sign Language Interpreters and Interpreter-Guides for the Deafblind.

[www.filse.org](http://www.filse.org)

[www.facebook.com/FILSE.org](https://www.facebook.com/FILSE.org)

## General information

- Size of Spain: 504.780 km<sup>2</sup>
- Population: 47,150,800 (2011)
- Capital city: Madrid
- Spoken languages: Spanish (*castellano*): official language in the entire state of Spain, Basque (*euskera*): co-official language in the Basque Country in the north of Spain, Catalan (*català*): co-official language in Catalonia, in the east of Spain, Galician (*galego*): co-official language in Galicia, in the north-west of Spain.
- Sign Languages: Lengua de signos española – LSE (Spanish Sign Language) used throughout most of Spain (and present in Catalonia alongside LSC), Llengua de signes catalana - LSC (Catalan Sign Language) used throughout the region of Catalonia.

## The Deaf community in Spain

National Association of the Deaf: CNSE (Confederación Estatal de Personas Sordas de España – [www.cnse.es](http://www.cnse.es)). CNSE also has a sister organisation which deals with sign language training resources and publications:

[www.fundacioncnse.es](http://www.fundacioncnse.es).

Deaf population: 1,000,000 approx (approximately 120,000 profoundly deaf people, 365,000 hard of hearing, and 530,000 who have problems in perceiving spoken language).

Around 150,000 deaf people use Spanish or Catalan Sign Language, but in addition to this, approximately 250,000 hearing people (such as interpreters, families, professionals and students) also use sign language.



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Legal framework: The Spanish Government recognised the sign languages of Spain in 2007. The full text of the law is available (in Spanish) at: <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2007/10/24/pdfs/A43251-43259.pdf>. In addition, Spain has various laws relating to Disability Discrimination. Several regional governments, such as Catalonia, Andalusia and Valencia give official recognition to sign language by means of the Regional Statutes or specific regional laws.

### **Deaf Education**

- Only a handful of schools exclusively for deaf children still exist and the students at these schools have multiple disabilities.
- The dominant model for deaf students is mainstreaming, typically with sign language support at the primary level and sign language interpreters at secondary level. In the last ten years in large cities the bilingual-bicultural methodology has slowly been implemented in four or five schools.
- In recent years more and more deaf students are reaching university level studies.

### **Sign language interpreters**

- Interpreter Association: FILSE (Federación Española de Intérpretes de Lengua de Signos y Guías-Intérpretes), the Spanish Federation for Sign Language Interpreters and Interpreter-Guides for the Deafblind. FILSE is an umbrella organisation that groups together the regional associations of sign language interpreters. Individual members affiliate to the regional associations.
- Number of members: there are 11 regional associations affiliated to FILSE and in total these associations have around 560 individual members.
- Spain is in the unusual position of having a huge number of qualified sign language interpreters (around 5,000). Only a small proportion (we estimate between 15-20%) of these SLIs actually find work as interpreters due to a lack of provision of interpreting services.

### **Interpreter training**

- In Spain there is only one official, legally recognised qualification. This qualification is obtained through the *Ciclo Formativo de Grado Superior*



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*en Interpretación de la Lengua de Signos* (two-year vocational training course), which consists of 2000 hours divided into 11 modules: Spanish Sign Language, modern language (English), sociopsychology of Deaf and Deaf-Blind people, body language (non-verbal communication), interpretation techniques, orientation on the labour market, linguistics of Spanish Sign Language, interpretation contexts, International Sign System, interpretation-guiding for Deaf-Blind people, and work placement (3 months) in organisations which employ interpreters (e.g. Deaf associations, high schools). The vocational training course is offered in around 50 different centres in Spain.

- In 2008, a university in Barcelona (*la Universitat Pompeu Fabra*) began to offer sign language as one of the languages within the translation and interpretation degree program.
- The University of Valladolid offers an official European Master specialised in training sign language interpreters for legal and educational settings. This course offers specialised training for sign language interpreters who are already qualified.
- As a result of the university reforms arising from the Bologna process, other universities are beginning to offer courses with sign language interpreting content, but there seems to be no co-ordination or regulation of these qualifications.
- The training situation in Spain is currently in transition. On the one hand, it is not clear what status these new “official” university qualifications will have. On the other hand, it seems likely that the vocational training course will be terminated and training will be provided at the university level; however there is currently no indication of how this will be implemented.

### **Assessment and accreditation/certification**

- There is currently no external/independent testing or assessment body for sign language interpreters (or for sign language competence) in Spain. The vocational training course involves testing and assessment (for each of the modules, see above). If you don't pass the exams, you don't complete the course.
- There is currently no external/independent accreditation or certification body for sign language interpreters (or for sign language competence) in Spain.
- The vocational training course forms part of the official national training system and comes with an official (state-recognised) qualification.



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- Prior to the existence of the vocational training course, which started in 1997, the only testing/certification process was carried out by the National Deaf People's Association. To regulate the transition to the official qualification (the vocation training course), there was a complicated and drawn-out process to ensure that interpreters who qualified before 1997 were recognised. This process involved negotiations between the FILSE, National Deaf People's Association, the National Deafblind People's Association and the relevant government bodies.
- With the current move towards university training, it is not clear what sort of accreditation process will be enforced.

### **Important events since 2007**

- The passing of the law that recognises the sign languages of Spain and makes specific mention of the role and importance of sign language interpreters (see *Legal Framework* above).
- National Sign Language Interpreters Congress 2008 held in Barcelona.
- National Sign Language Interpreters Seminar 2010 held in Madrid.
- Stronger links with the spoken language interpreting community including participation in the publication of a Proposal for Community Interpreting.
- Growing presence of interpreter training in universities.
- Launch of various video interpreting services.
- Increasing presence of sign language and sign language interpreting on the web and TV.
- The setting up of a National Sign Language Centre by the Government and administered by the National Deaf People's Association. The Centre's objectives include planning and co-ordinating training in sign language and promoting material related to sign language interpreting.

### **Goals for the future**

- Improve working conditions and professional recognition for sign language interpreters and interpreter-guides for the Deafblind.
- Create a sign language interpreter Good Practice Guide that will serve as a reference for interpreters, clients and service providers.
- Oversee the transition of basic sign language interpreter training from the vocational to the university level working closely with the new National Sign Language Centre and the National Deaf People's Association.