

South Africa



General information

- Population: 49.99 million (2010).
- Capital City: Pretoria (executive), Bloemfontein (judicial), Cape Town (legislative).
- Spoken Language(s): Afrikaans, English (South African English), isiNdebele, Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Siswati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, isiXhosa, isiZulu.
- Sign Language: South African Sign Language (SASL).

Deaf People in South Africa

- National Association of the Deaf: Deaf Federation of South Africa (DeafSA).
- Number of Deaf people: 600, 000 (including people who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and deafened).
- Laws to protect their rights: Constitution of South Africa – Bill of Rights, UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, Employment Equity Act.

Deaf Education

- 1 in 10 babies in SA are born with some degree of hearing loss.
- In certain cases hearing loss or deafness are diagnosed as late as 4 years of age and in worst case scenarios as late as 8 years of age.
- Deaf children often enter Grade R with little or no language.
- The average Deaf school-leaver has a reading age of 8.
- Only 12 out of 64 schools for the Deaf offer Grade 12; these schools are concentrated in only 3 provinces.
- SASL is recognised as a medium of instruction in the Schools Act of 1996.
- Only 3 FET colleges in SA employ SASL interpreters.



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- Only 14% of teachers in schools for the Deaf can sign fluently.
- SASL is not a school subject.
- 75% of the Deaf community is functionally illiterate.
- 70% of the Deaf community is unemployed.

Sign language interpreters

Numbers and background information:

Race	M	F	CODA	M	F	Trained	M	F	Community	Provincial	National	Accredited	M	F
Black	21	48		1	11		6	25	37	24	8		1	1
White	4	16		3	7		4	9	6	2	12		0	2
Coloured	2	7		1	3		0	5	3	3	3		0	0
Indian	0	2		0	0		0	1	1	0	1		0	0
Total	27	73		5	21		10	40	47	29	24		1	3

- South Africa does not have an interpreter association, although we have a group called “Mzansi DiToloki”. This is just a general group where people can join on Facebook, BBM etc to share information about SASL interpreting. We also have a 6 monthly newsletter. This group is open to all. In July 2011 we had 56 Facebook members and 22 BBM members.
- There are currently 100 registered interpreters on DeafSA’s database. 50 are trained, 50 are untrained, 4 are accredited, and 4 are trained Deaf interpreters.

Interpreter training and accreditation

- Interpreter training is currently offered by UFS (University of the Free State), WITS (University of Witwatersrand, and NWU (North-West University).
- Interpreters who complete the courses are assessed based on language skills (vocabulary, grammar, purity), content/message (faithfulness to message, accuracy, clarity), interpreting technique (fluency of delivery, hesitation, lag time, irritating habits, eye contact), and professional conduct (preparation, knowledge of the topic, behaviour, dress code). Students also write a theory examination at the end of the training.
- SASL interpreters are accredited by the South African Translators Association (SATI). SASL interpreters are accredited on a national basis. Currently only 4 SASL interpreters are accredited.



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- Collaboration with SATI on the establishment of a CPD system for SASL interpreters is a work in progress. This will ensure that accredited interpreters are still practising and developing in the profession.

Important events since 2007

- Policy on the regulation and provision of SASL interpreters (2008).
- Formal training of the first South African Deaf Interpreters (2009/2010).
- Training of the first level 2 SASL interpreters (2009/2010).
- Development of the first mentoring model for SASL interpreters (2010/2009).
- Distribution of Mzansi DiToloki newsletter every 6 months (2010/2011).
- Development of an EPS (Ethical Practices System) for the regulation of SASL interpreters (2011).
- Draft CPD system: work in progress.
- Training of OSISA country interpreters (African outreach).
- Provision of interpreters on SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) news (17:30; 20:30), E-TV news (18:00, 22:00), local elections broadcasted on SABC, national events broadcast on SABC (State of the Nation, budget speech etc.)
- 5 SASL interpreters appointed in Parliament.

Goals for the future

- Establishment of a National Association Accreditation of all SASL interpreters on various levels (provincial and national).
- Awareness training on the use of the EPS system (Deaf and hearing).
- Awareness training on the use and role of Deaf interpreters.
- Awareness training for state departments providing services to Deaf people on the recruitment of SASL interpreters.

Major challenges for the sign language interpreting community

- Ongoing lobbying for support from SASLI to establish a National association with difficulty in maintaining provincial associations and voluntary way of running an association.
- Regulating the profession with unprofessional opportunistic interpreters taking advantage of Deaf people.



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What interpreters in South Africa can offer WASLI

A mentoring model for the training and development of new interpreters, especially suitable for developing countries.

What WASLI can offer interpreters in South Africa

Guidelines and support on the establishment and sustainability of a National Association.