

Accessing Public Services: South African Sign Language Rights

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The Deaf community, as a linguistic and cultural minority, are afforded linguistic and human rights protection via human rights and disability legislation. Section 6 of the South African Constitution states that everyone has the right to use the language and participate in the cultural life of his or her choice. Further to this the United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disability, of which the South African Government is a signatory and thus obliged to deliver on, states in Article 9 (The right to accessibility) – “ States Parties shall also take appropriate measures: e) To provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and **professional sign language interpreters**, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public;

With the current hype around South African Sign Language under consideration by the South African Government to declare it an official language, I present a reflective analysis of the impact on language practice in its current form, taking into consideration the demand and supply of South African Sign Language translators. Providing access to public service documents, in video format, to enable accessibility for the Deaf community, presents unique opportunities and challenges, of which this presentation provides critical anticipation of resources required, specifically professionally trained sign language translators.

The presentation evaluates the unprecedented role of Deaf translators and their role in the evolving landscape of language practice in South Africa.