

# The Deaf Community's perspective on ICT

By Johan WESEMANN  
European Union of the Deaf (EUD)

# Introduction: EUD

- European non-profit making organisation whose membership comprises National Associations *of* Deaf people in each of the EU member states
- Represents Deaf Europeans at European Union level
- Emancipation and equal opportunities are key philosophies

# Empowerment through communication and information

- This is one of the three specific aims of EUD.
- Thus EUD has always paid much attention to developments in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT).
- ICT has diluted the communication barriers which Deaf people always have faced, but may create new/other problems.

# Accessible information and communication are crucial for Deaf people

- Information and communication permeate each aspect of our daily life: education, employment, entertainment, telecom, public transport, safety, tourism etc.
- Deaf people used to be cut off from the information flow which was mostly auditory based.
- ICT has changed this.

# ICT helped Deaf people to come out of social isolation, but

- Some problems still remain.
- No or very limited access to TV in most countries: no subtitling and/or sign language interpretation on TV.
- USA and UK show that it can be different.
- Digital TV: in UK 5% of digital terrestrial TV programmes must be presented in sign language or sign interpreted.

# Information in sign language

- Many technical advances in ICT open up new possibilities.
- EUD has a website which provides information in 9 sign languages, in addition to 11 written languages: [www.eudeaf2003.org](http://www.eudeaf2003.org).
- Statistically Deaf people have more often a computer than hearing people. Computer is gateway to society.

# Need for EU-wide strategy

We need to create a Europe-wide strategy to cover networks, services and terminals in conjunction with the new EU regulatory framework for electronic communications which is now being implemented.

# EU Framework regulation

- In order to facilitate access by disabled users to electronic communication and telecommunication services:
- A closer cooperation between network operators and terminal equipment manufacturers is needed.
- Equality of access, choice, price and quality for disabled people need to be ensured.
- Attention to be paid to access needs: access to public telephone and emergency services

# COCOM

- = Communications Committee
- Assists European Commission in its work with regard to the Framework Directive
- Set up a special working group in 2003: “Inclusive Communications” (INCOM)
- EUD was member of INCOM

# INCOM

- For 1st time, Deaf & Disability (E)NGOs could work alongside EU Commission and member states governments on telecom issues
- INCOM to identify constraints and barriers which Deaf and disabled people face in telecom
- INCOM to propose harmonised actions

# Access to telecom is a rights issue

- Telecom is an essential tool in daily life.
- A move to harmonisation at European level on accessibility is necessary to avoid fragmentation of the system and incompatibility
- Deaf people continue to be excluded. EUD asks EU and member states to finally take real action.

# INCOM's key areas

- Access to national emergency services
- Access to telephone services for persons with deafness/severe hearing impairment/speech impairment/deaf-blindness
- Access to public pay telephones
- Access to mobile telephones
- Access to directory services

# Concrete barriers faced by deaf people

- No access at all to **emergency services** – this was the most urgent and important of all areas identified by INCOM.
- Experiments with SMS in some countries. However, sms is unreliable
- No access to 112 number
- More examples can be given...

# Time to take practical action

- Deaf people are tax payers too.
- Deaf people want to be part of the information society, and contribute to it.
- But to be able to take active part, barriers need to be taken down.
- EUD and its members ready to cooperate with governments.

# Contact details

- European Union of the Deaf (EUD)
- Coupure rechts 314
- B- 9000 GENT
  
- fax: +32 9 225 08 34
- general e-mail: [info@eudnet.org](mailto:info@eudnet.org)
- director e-mail: [hs@eudnet.org](mailto:hs@eudnet.org)
- websites: [www.eudnet.org](http://www.eudnet.org) and [www.eudeaf2003.org](http://www.eudeaf2003.org)