

17 November 2023, Bangkok and Zoom

Time (Thailand Standard Time)

10:00-11:30

Language: English.

Reasonable Accommodation: Onsite international sign interpretation

Leaving no one behind: don't forget deaf women! Importance of reproductive rights of deaf women and sign language-based communication

Concept note and tentative programme

Background

An estimated 750 million persons live in Asia and the Pacific with some form of disability. Amongst them, Deaf women tended to be left behind in society due to a combination of ignorance on and discrimination against persons with disabilities and women. Regarding their access to services related to reproductive rights, Deaf women tend not to be able to make their own decisions about their reproductive health, including family planning. They experience more unwanted pregnancy, and there are cases where they are deprived of their parental rights as they cannot communicate in spoken language. The provision of sign language interpretation is not ensured in a wide range of situations in which Deaf women need the interpretation.¹

SDGs recognize persons with disabilities as one of the key social groups who tend to be left behind, and requests Member States to take disability-inclusive policy actions. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) generally promotes the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities. ESCAP, through the Social

¹ Source: <https://pacific.unfpa.org/en/news/women-and-young-people-disabilities-pacific-need-better-access-sexual-and-reproductive-health-1>; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9484760/#:~:text=Sexual%20health%20literacy%20and%20behaviors,unintentionally%20than%20the%20general%20population>; and <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/ijie/vol12/iss2/3/>

Development Division (SDD), commits itself to supporting its member States disability inclusion within the framework of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023-2032, and its guiding documents, the Incheon Strategy, and the Jakarta Declaration.

Regarding deaf persons' right, the CRPD recognizes sign language as a form of languages through Article 3. Goal 3 of the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific promotes accessibility to the physical environment, information, communication, and services, and it requests member States to submit data on sign language interpreters and the provision of sign language in mass media.

Regarding the rights of women with disabilities, the CRPD has a stand-alone Article 6 on the subject. The Incheon Strategy has its devoted goal: Ensure gender equality and women's empowerment, which requests member States to ensure that all girls and women with disabilities have access to sexual and reproductive health services on an equitable basis with girls and women without disabilities. The Jakarta Declaration reinforces the idea by promoting a gender-responsive life cycle approach to developing and implementing disability-related policies and programmes during the current 4th Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023-2032.

Fundamental to the lack of access to any services or participation is the general lack of knowledge and misunderstanding about sign languages. To address the issue, ESCAP developed a book, "Sign Language: What is it? An ESCAP Guide towards Legal Recognition of Sign Languages in Asia and the Pacific" in 2022. The book helps member States unpack myths about sign language, and understand its history, complexity, and key elements to be included in laws and regulations at the national level.

The organization of the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference, organized by ESCAP and the UNFPA, and held from 15 to 17 November 2023, provides an opportunity for policymakers concerning population, and reproductive rights to enhance their knowledge on deaf women's issues on the subject and the importance of sign language-based communication.

Objectives, targeted audience of a side event

Against the background, a side event, "**Leaving no one behind: don't forget deaf women! importance of reproductive rights of deaf women and sign language-based communication**" will be held from 10:00 to 11:15 at UNCC on 17 November 2023 with the following primary targeted audience and objectives.

Primary targeted audience:

1. Policymakers on reproductive health, women's issues, disability;
2. Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

Objectives:

1. Raise awareness and enhance knowledge on issues faced by deaf women;
2. Raise awareness and enhance knowledge of sign languages;
3. Motivate policymakers to collaborate with Deaf persons to ensure use of sign languages in their communications in development dimensions including access to reproductive health services.

Tentative Programme

10:00-11:30	
10:00-10:05	Welcoming participants by Emcee ❖ Ms. Aiko Akiyama, Social Affairs Officer, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, SDD, ESCAP.
10:05-10:15	Overview of Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023-2032, Operational Guide, issues faced by women with disabilities ❖ Ms. Cai Cai, Chief, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, SDD, ESCAP.
10:15-10:45	Issues faced by Deaf women ❖ Ms. Mariah Agbay, President, Philippine Federation of the Deaf ❖ Ms. Sudarat Makeshine, Association of Deaf, Thailand
10:45-11:00	Showing of the ESCAP videos “Sign Language What Is It?”
11:00-11:25	Importance of recognizing sign language and Deaf women's rights in law (5-7min per speaker) ❖ Mr. Dandy Victa Project Development Officer V, Chief of Technical Cooperation Division and Officer-In-Charge of the National Council on Disability Affairs, Government of the Philippines

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Benjamin M. Mendillo, Jr., PhD, Commissioner, Commission on Language (TBC) ❖ Dr. Andesha Mangla, Assistant Professor, Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India
11:25-11:30	Questions and answers
11:30	Closing by the TNF representative
	Lunch box to be provided to all onsite participants outside upon completion of the event