



# SIGNS

## DEAF YOUTH

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Abstract:	<p>This report summarises the results of a transnational meeting that included a needs assessment involving Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) youth from Poland, Greece, Ukraine and Slovakia. Based on structured group discussions, the project partners identified the main barriers, needs and priority areas that affect the lives of young DHH people in education, healthcare, communication, mental health and social participation.</p>
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# Partnership

Name		Logo
1	Polish Association of The Deaf	
2	Deaf Association of Northern Greece	
3	Web2Learn	
4	NGO Vidchui	
5	The Association of the Deaf of Slovakia	

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Version	Date	Revised	by Reason
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## Executive Summary

This report presents the outcomes of WP2A1, the first analytical activity of the SIGNS project, aimed at mapping the lived realities of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) youth in four European contexts: Poland, Greece, Ukraine and Slovakia. The objective of the activity was to identify key barriers, unmet needs and emerging opportunities affecting young DHH people in their education, health, communication, social participation and personal development.

The data was collected during a facilitated international workshop involving representatives and youth workers from partner organisations. Discussions were conducted in national sign languages, International Sign and English, supported by professional sign-language interpreters. Participants shared experiences from their local communities and analysed them collectively.

The findings show a striking convergence of challenges across countries: lack of teachers and professionals fluent in sign language, limited access to healthcare and psychological support, communication barriers in public services, insufficient access to information, and weak preparation for independent adulthood and employment. These barriers are compounded in crisis contexts, particularly in Ukraine, where war conditions further restrict access to information, safety and services.

At the same time, the workshop revealed strong opportunities: motivated Deaf youth, resilient Deaf communities, high potential in digital and visual communication, and committed partner organisations ready to co-create inclusive solutions. These insights form the strategic basis for the development of the WP2 training programme, educational resources and the citizen social science activities in WP3.

## **Introduction**

The aim of the WP2A1 meeting was to understand the key needs, barriers and experiences of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) youth from Poland, Greece, Ukraine and Slovakia. Participants shared what is difficult for them in daily life, education, health services and social relationships.

The information collected during the meeting forms this report, which will guide the next steps in the SIGNS project — especially the creation of educational materials, masterclasses and later citizen social science activities.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

Representatives working with DHH youth from the partner organisations took part in the meeting:

- Poland – PAD
- Greece – EKVE
- Greece – W2L
- Ukraine – Vidchui
- Slovakia – ANEPS

Each organisation delegated at least two participants. The participants communicated in their national

### **Workshop Process**

The workshop lasted 1.5 hours and included:

- group work,
- discussions in English and International Sign (IS) with EN–PJM (PSL) and PJM (PSL)–IS interpreters,
- sharing personal experiences,
- mapping barriers and needs.

### **Data Analysis**

All ideas and issues were organised into the following key areas:

- education and linguistic accessibility,
- communication and daily life,
- health and safety,
- social wellbeing and relationships,
- personal development and culture.

## Context

Although each country has a different education and support system, the participants identified many common problems:

- limited access to information in national sign languages,
- lack of trained teachers and specialists,
- communication difficulties with public institutions,
- discrimination and stereotypes,
- no mental-health professionals who know sign language,
- insufficient support for the transition to adulthood and employment.

In Ukraine, the situation is even more challenging due to the war — emergency messages are not translated, internet access is limited in shelters, and accessible information is often unavailable.

## **Identified Barriers**

### **Education**

- Teachers often do not know national sign languages.
- There is a lack of visual and bilingual materials (including sign-language content).
- Mainstream schools do not provide adequate support.
- Lessons take place without interpretation into sign language.
- The national spoken language is taught as a first language, although for most DHH students it is a second/foreign language.
- There are no training sessions led by Deaf educators for hearing teaching staff.

### **Daily Life and Communication**

- There is a strong dependence on interpreters — without them, communication is almost impossible.
- Writing is more difficult and slower, and it is not an equivalent or natural form of communication for many DHH individuals.
- There is little awareness that the interpreter supports both sides of the interaction.
- Subtitles and sign-language translations are lacking in media and public institutions.

### **Health, Emergencies and Safety**

- There are no interpreters available on a daily basis, meaning 7 days a week and 24 hours a day, in hospitals and medical facilities.
- In many places, communication is completely impossible.
- Older DHH individuals face technological difficulties and depend on younger family members.
- In Ukraine, there are additional problems: no accessible emergency messages and no internet in shelters.

### **Social Wellbeing and Mental Health**

- Stereotypes, discrimination, and paternalistic attitudes.
- Lack of dignity and unequal treatment in interactions with others.
- No psychologists who know sign language.
- A strong need to strengthen Deaf identity and create safe community spaces.

## **Culture and Personal Development**

- Limited preparation for the labour market.
- Low accessibility of cultural events — lack of subtitles and live sign-language interpretation.
- Insufficient use of technology in education.

## **Needs by Country**

### **Poland (PAD)**

- Teachers trained in PJM; access to bilingual and visual educational materials.
- Interpreter access in hospitals, emergency units and public services.
- More subtitles and PJM translations in media and cultural events.
- Youth-friendly integration spaces, including international exchanges.
- Psychologists who know PJM.
- Support for entering the labour market and preparing for job interviews.

### **Greece (EKVE & W2L)**

- Need for more teachers and specialists fluent in Greek Sign Language (GSL).
- Strengthening Deaf youth communities and peer-support groups.
- Support for developing independent living skills.
- Development of digital tools and educational materials accessible in GSL. Stronger cooperation between educators, interpreters and youth workers.
- Training for young DHH people in digital skills, citizen social science and online communication.

### **Ukraine (Vidchui)**

- Critical need for accessible crisis communication: emergency alerts, news, safety instructions in Ukrainian Sign Language (USL).
- Lack of internet access in shelters, limiting access to information.
- Limited access to interpreters in hospitals, evacuation points and temporary accommodation.
- Support for young DHH people displaced by war: education continuity, digital learning tools and social support.
- Opportunities to strengthen Deaf identity and rebuild youth communities disrupted by migration and war.

### **Slovakia (ANEPS)**

- Wider availability of interpreters in Slovak Sign Language (SSL) across public services.
- More Deaf-led activities and involvement of DHH youth in decision-making.
- Limited accessibility in healthcare settings and emergencies.

## Opportunities

Based on the discussion, participants identified several opportunities and strengths:

- strong potential of DHH youth in the areas of technology and visual communication,
- readiness of partner organisations for international collaboration,
- opportunity to create new educational materials in national sign languages,
- high motivation of young people to participate in projects, workshops and masterclasses,
- strong Deaf communities in each country, which can support youth development.

## Conclusions

The most important needs of DHH youth include:

- full linguistic accessibility,
- improved and inclusive education systems,
- accessible healthcare and psychological support,
- development of social and professional skills,
- creation of safe spaces for meeting and community-building,
- strengthening Deaf identity and youth empowerment.

## Summary

This report presents the key barriers and opportunities identified by DHH youth and representatives from partner organisations during the WP2A1 workshop. Despite differences between the participating countries, the challenges faced by DHH young people are strikingly similar: limited linguistic accessibility, insufficient support in education and healthcare, communication barriers in public services, a lack of mental-health professionals fluent in sign language, and inadequate preparation for adulthood and employment.

At the same time, the workshop highlighted important strengths — including strong engagement of DHH youth, active and motivated Deaf communities, and the commitment of partner organisations to improve accessibility, cooperation and educational resources. These shared insights offer a clear direction for the next steps in WP2 and WP3, guiding the development of inclusive materials, masterclasses and citizen social science activities.