

## Diversity in the workplace

This project has been designed with the precise intention to address cultural and linguistic diversity in workplaces typically characterized by distance, noise and maneuvering on machines. This is, construction and manufacturing environments.

These environments are also the ones among which deafness, as a workplace disease, count the highest number of victims. According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, Risk Observatory Thematic Report "[Noise in figures](#)" (2005):

"Noise-induced hearing loss is still one of the most prominent and most recognised occupational diseases in the Member States of the European Union"

In order to face both cultural and linguistic diversity and deafness in the workplace, the consortium has developed the glossary and eLearning system using International Signs as the main reference language, with the hope to help in the creation of a standardized, accessible language to be used in the workplace, despite of any linguistic ability in the worker.

## Deafness in the workplace

As any other disability, deafness has multiple faces. The picture below, from [HoughEar Institute](#), clearly illustrates the different sources of deafness:



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According to the degree of deafness, this can be addressed using hearing supports such as hearing aids and/or cochlear implants (learn more in our eLearning course).

People who were born deaf or lost their hearing before their third year of age, normally experience greater difficulties in learning the spoken language of their countries. Their degree of competence with the spoken and written language of their countries will largely depend on the family (hearing or deaf), on the success in the use of any hearing support and the speech therapy in use, on the use of sign language for their education. Although all native deaf people go through hearing and speaking rehabilitation, not all deaf people use sign language on a daily base or even know about it.

### Sign language and deafness

Sign language is a potent mean of communication for deaf people who chose to use it:

- It's a visual-gestural language, thus providing full access to their users
- It's a natural language, meaning it has all the features that any live language has
- It's deaf users are grouped in a linguistic minority group which is defined by literature as "Deaf people", with a capital 'd'.

Sign language is not unique for every country and culture. [Actually Ethnologue](#) counts up to 150 deaf sign languages, each of which could easily count a great number of variations and dialects.

As you will also find in the eLearning course, International Sign Language is an artificial one, an "auxiliary language where meaning has to be negotiated between signers. IS Signers reportedly use a set of signs from their own national sign language mixed with highly iconic signs that can be understood by a large audience" (credit: [EUD](#)).

Thus, there are no such thing as a universal sign language or a formalized system of International Signs, rather, there are multiple ways to sign in international settings, according to the origin of the signers themselves.

### International signs in emergency settings

Considering the diversity in the target of this project and the particular setting where the glossary would find its use (emergency settings), the IS glossary has been designed keeping in mind that the vocabulary would be destined to a broad public, mainly including people with no signing experience. Thus, particular attention have been given to the selection of words and phrases that could easily be managed by non-signers, as well as selecting IS signs with hand shapes that are easy to recognise (with a high level of iconicity) and produce. In order to ease the correct production of signs, we considered what Robbin Battison (1978) first described as basic handshapes for ASL: the signs for the letters A, B, C, S, and O and the numbers 1 and 5 (picture below):

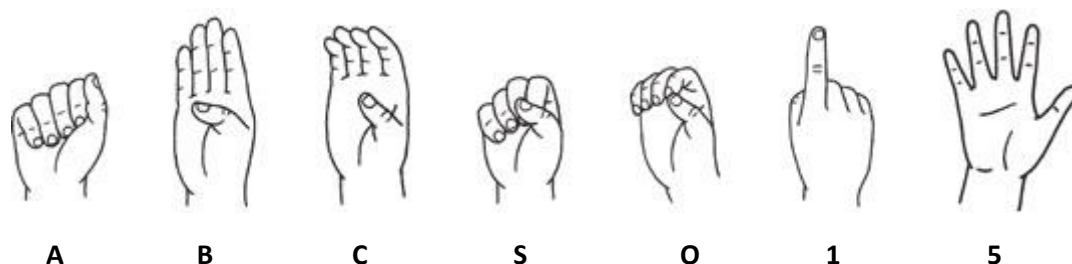
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These above mentioned handshapes are high-frequency shapes that are present in most SLs in Europe. For that concerning other parameters of SL (non-manual components, labialization and face expression), our experience in SL education proves the difficulty for first-time signers to learn facial expression in direct combination with learning handshapes, position and movements. In a search for simplification and ease of use in case of distant communication (where facials are less visible than hands), we decided to keep facial expression out of the phrase structure or to use them only when strictly required by the phrase intention (questions, degree of exaggeration, etc.), so that the learner could rely mostly on the hand sequence.

Are you ready to challenge yourself in learning the glossary? [Click here](#) to begin your journey.

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