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Count me In (Increasing the participation of Deaf people in the perception of culture)
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Eva



Panos

REPORT:

Culture Accessibility for Deaf People

Manual for Cultural Organizers

Count
me In

Creative Europe
Program 2024



Rafat

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Count me In



Increasing the participation
of Deaf people in
the perception of culture

**Manual for Cultural
Organizers**

Wrocław 2025



Introduction

A cultural event – including events, concerts, exhibitions, and museum displays – is no longer simply an arrangement of objects in space, but a complex environment of communication: visual, material, aural, linguistic, and emotional. In it, the viewer encounters not only art but also the intended way of experiencing it. Therefore, accessibility cannot exist on the margins of the curatorial and production process – it should be at its core, embedded in the concept from the very first draft, not just “finished off” during implementation.

Cultural participation is a fundamental right. Accessibility for Deaf people must not be treated as optional, supplementary, or charitable assistance. Instead, it is a cultural obligation and a core dimension of artistic inclusion, audience development and legal compliance in the European Union (European Parliament Research Service, 2025).

These guidelines provide EU cultural organisations with practical, professional and enforceable standards that support:

- > linguistic inclusion of Deaf people who use national Sign Languages,
- > communication equality for D/HoH audiences,
- > universal enjoyment of artistic and cultural experiences,
- > alignment with international rights frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Accessibility must be embedded into long-term strategy, budget, staffing, marketing, design and programming (Culture Action Europe, 2025) and implemented not as “special access services” but as standard cultural infrastructure.

Deaf audiences are not simply “people with hearing loss,” but members of a linguistic and cultural minority who use Sign Language and experience the world primarily through visual forms. Recognizing this identity means that accessibility cannot rely solely on assistive technologies; it must include full linguistic access through national Sign Languages.

Sign Language interpretation is not an optional “aid” for disability, but a complete language service essential for cultural participation (Solar Bear, no date). Cultural organisations must therefore treat Sign Language with the same respect afforded to spoken languages in multilingual institutions. This requires the consistent provision of qualified interpreters who possess not only linguistic expertise but also performance and artistic competence.

By embedding Sign Language into cultural programming, institutions affirm accessibility as a cultural right, ensuring that Deaf audiences are welcomed as equal participants and co creators in the shared cultural space.

Communication access services, i.e. captioning, assistive listening systems, visual alerts, must be standard features of programming, not special additions provided by exception. Audiences should not be required to prove disability or request services after booking.

Accessibility must be present in strategic plans, annual budgets & staff roles (Culture Action Europe, 2025). Organisations must appoint an Accessibility Coordinator with authority over:

- > budgets
- > staff training
- > purchase and maintenance of access technology
- > scheduling interpreters and captioners
- > emergency communication systems

Accessibility in the cultural sector often looks good only on paper. The manual we present here offers practical guidance on how to prepare a cultural event that is truly accessible for Deaf audiences. The team that developed this material included Deaf contributors, long-standing collaborators of the Deaf community, and experienced cultural organisers.

In the following chapters, we share good practices, formal requirements, and our reflections drawn from organising a wide range of events. We hope this manual will help you better understand the needs and expectations of the Deaf community and enable you to meet them more effectively.

Because it is genuinely worth making culture accessible to everyone!



Chapter 1

Organizing Exhibitions



Introduction / General Overview



A cultural event – including festivals, concerts, exhibitions, and museum displays – is no longer merely an arrangement of objects in space, but a complex environment of communication: visual, material, sonic, linguistic, and emotional. The audience encounters not only the artworks themselves, but also a carefully designed mode of experiencing them. For this reason, accessibility cannot remain on the margins of the curatorial and production process; it must form its core, embedded in the concept from the very first sketch, not added only at the stage of implementation. Universal design is today the most mature model for thinking about exhibitions and cultural events in this way. It rests on a simple yet demanding premise: a good cultural space is one that is legible, usable, and welcoming to the widest possible range of audiences – regardless of how they perceive, communicate, or move through the environment. The goal, therefore, is not to create separate routes “for selected groups,” but to design a single shared experience that excludes no one. The accessibility standards outlined below

develop this perspective and translate it into concrete organisational and design practices.

The Participant’s Perspective – From Audience to Co-Creator

Audiences at international cultural events today expect **participation, dialogue, and contextual understanding**, while artists in turn seek **attentiveness, respect, and openness to interpretation**. The expectations that creators hold toward exhibition visitors can be outlined in several key points:

- a) **Engagement and Interaction** – visitors should take an active role in experiencing the artwork rather than remaining passive observers. Emotional, intellectual, and at times even physical involvement fosters the creation of a shared artistic experience.

- b) **Openness and Dialogue** – artists hope that audiences will approach their works with readiness for new perspectives, even those that challenge their own beliefs. Dialogue should take place both between the artist and the work, and among the visitors themselves.
- c) **Reflection and Interpretation** – audiences are encouraged to make the effort to understand the work, leading to reflection on its themes. The goal is not to find a single answer but to stimulate thought and awareness.
- d) **Support and Appreciation** – valuing an artist’s work, both emotionally and symbolically, is a key source of creative motivation and recognition.
- e) **Attentiveness and Focus** – visitors are expected to devote time to “reading” the artwork, to pause, observe, and offer it due attention and presence.
- f) **Openness to Interpretation** – viewers do not need to guess “what the artist meant,” but should remain open to their own emotional and intellectual responses.
- g) **Respect for Space and Objects** – refraining from touching artworks, moving carefully through the space, and avoiding excessive noise are basic forms of respect toward the artist’s creation.
- h) **Willingness to Engage in Conversation** – artists value questions, comments, and discussions.

In this way, art becomes a **space of exchange**, not merely a one-sided presentation.

- i) **Awareness of Context** – visitors may prepare for the experience by reading curatorial materials or learning about the artist’s background. Conscious reception highlights the significance of their participation.
- j) **Readiness for Co-Creation** – in participatory art, audiences become **active elements of the artwork**, completing it through their presence, gestures, or actions.
- k) **Absence of Prejudice** – openness is expected not only toward diverse artistic forms (contemporary art, performance, installation) but also toward the artist as a person, regardless of age, origin, language, or disability.



Accessibility Standards



1. Universal Design – From Concept to Implementation

The fundamental principle of contemporary exhibition organization is **universal design** – planning an event from the very beginning with the needs of all audiences in mind, without the need for later “adjustments” or retrofitting. A modern cultural institution moves away from the idea of “facilitations” or “adaptations” and instead designs events to be accessible by default. The principle of universal design assumes that every solution – spatial, linguistic, and technological – should be clear, comprehensible, and functional for the widest possible audience: Deaf and hard-of-hearing people, seniors, individuals with sensory disabilities, as well as international participants. Every element of the exhibition – from the curatorial plan to the catalog description – should therefore be conceived in a way that makes it understandable and accessible to everyone.

The design process should from the outset include:

- > **Multisensory experience** – enabling the perception of content through sight, touch, movement, and light;
- > **Pre-guide materials** – an introductory guide offering essential information about the venue (e.g., the gallery), communication rules within the space, and the structure of the current exhibition or cultural event;
- > **Clarity of communication** – clear visual and linguistic messaging, descriptions in **Easy-to-Read (ETR)** format, and translations into **Sign Language (SL)**;
- > **Readable spatial structure** – a logical layout of exhibits, proper lighting, high-contrast signage, and the elimination of unnecessary barriers;
- > **Equal access** – ensuring comfort for people with different modes of perception, movement, and communication;
- > **Planning for accessibility from the conceptual**

stage – treating it not as an afterthought but as an integral part of the project;

- **Diverse content formats** – text, sign language (SL), ETR, subtitles, and video recordings;
- **Visual information** – a consistent system of pictograms, QR codes, and high-contrast color schemes;
- **Emotional accessibility** – friendly communication, open staff attitudes, and the absence of mental or formal barriers;
- **Linguistic awareness** – perceiving the audience not as “special,” but as **equal participants in the aesthetic experience**.

Universal design therefore represents a shift in perspective – from the question *“How can we make things easier for people with disabilities?”* to *“How can we create exhibitions that are naturally accessible to everyone?”*

Before the event is designed, a Deaf person should be included in the project team, bringing lived experience of perception and communication. Before implementing the concept, it is crucial to verify whether a Deaf person can participate **without stress, confusion, or a sense of exclusion**. If not – the project requires revision. This is a simple yet fundamental test of accessibility quality, based on the principle: *nothing about us without us*.

2. Co-Creation with Deaf People

Co-creation with Deaf people is not an “accessibility add-on”, but a shift in perspective: moving from designing “*for*” to designing “*with*”. It means genuinely involving Deaf people as co-authors of the event – from the concept through the exhibition’s language and communication tools. Such collaboration brings essential cultural competencies and serves as a quality test for the project: if a Deaf participant can engage without stress or disorientation, the event is well designed. Below are practical forms of collaboration and organisational stages that translate the principle of “nothing about us without us” into concrete actions.

Practical Forms of Collaboration

- Artistic residencies for Deaf creators;
- Workshops and training for students, curators, and museum teams conducted in collaboration with Deaf participants;
- Joint development of promotional and film materials in Sign Language;
- Consultations on the exhibition scenario, focusing on visual communication and spatial clarity.

Such collaboration not only raises the level of accessibility but also enriches the language of the exhibition itself, introducing the perspective of visual-gestural culture into the curatorial process.

Organizational Stages

- 1. Diagnosis and Partnerships** – understanding the cultural context, analyzing audience needs, and consulting with local organizations (Deaf associations, NGOs, educational institutions).
- 2. Curatorial Plan** – defining the narrative axis of the exhibition: theme, rhythm, method of display, communication formats, and visual communication strategy.
- 3. Accessibility Budgeting** – including all accessibility-related elements in the main budget: Sign Language interpretation, captions, hearing loops, visual materials, and staff training.
- 4. Production and Logistics** – planning lighting, transport, insurance, documentation, and installation in accordance with international standards of safety and accessibility.
- 5. Promotion and Communication** – preparing multilingual materials, accessibility signage, and short invitation videos in Sign Language and the languages of partner institutions.
- 6. Evaluation and Reporting** – collecting participant feedback, including that of Deaf and international audiences, through surveys, interviews, or short Sign Language videos.

Table 1 presents a method for planning Eight-Area Planning Method that make the event accessible and artistically complete.

This model can be successfully adapted for international artistic projects.



Table 1 Event Availability Planning

AREA	OBJECTIVE	EXAMPLE ACTIONS
Artistic Creation by Deaf Artists	Inclusion in programmes and exhibitions	Residencies, small-scale exhibitions, collaborative workshops
New Forms of Expression	Experimenting with visual language and movement	Light performances, rhythm visualisation
Interdisciplinary Collaboration	Connecting art, language, and technology	Cross-disciplinary projects
The Role of Institutions as Mediators	Creating organizational frameworks for accessibility	Providing spaces, hosting public debates
Artist Education	Developing social and linguistic competences	Sign Language mini-workshops, peer learning
Accessibility in Art Production	Considering the audience from the design stage	Subtitles, Sign Language videos, Easy-to-Read (ETR) descriptions
Technological Innovation	Using simple digital tools to enhance access	QR codes, VR/AR experiences, <i>making-of</i> videos
Promotion and Public Presence	Visibility and communication with audiences	Social media, accessibility pictograms, short films



Examples of Good Practices



- 1. Welcome Video in National Sign Language (SL)** – a short recording (1–2 minutes) introducing the concept of the exhibition and the layout of the space, available both at the entrance and online.
- 2. Quiet Exhibition Opening** – an inauguration without noise, music, or loud effects, focused on light and performative gestures, with the presence of a Sign Language interpreter (Deaf/hearing).
- 3. Interpreter as Part of the Exhibition** – Sign Language integrated into the visual narrative, e.g. through the projection of the artist's gestures. Sign Language becomes an artistic element (performance, projection, gesture recording) rather than a purely technical addition. Deaf interpreters and Deaf artists play a central role in shaping this narrative, not only by translating but by contributing their own expressive language,

rhythm, and cultural perspective. Their presence transforms interpretation into co-creation, enriching the exhibition's aesthetic and communicative depth.

- 4. Tactile and Visual Materials** – For Deaf individuals, especially those who rely primarily on visual and spatial perception, such materials are not supplementary – they are essential. Tables with material samples, textures, 3D models, and infographics that allow perception through sight and touch deepening comprehension and emotional connection; high-contrast graphics improve visibility and support clear navigation. Tactile elements also foster inclusive participation for Deafblind individuals and those with diverse sensory profiles.
- 5. Multilingualism and International Sign (IS)** – for international exhibitions, it is worth providing videos in International Sign. Posters and

catalogues may include Sign Language symbols, Easy-to-Read (ETR) versions, and QR codes linking to videos in the partners' languages.

- 6. Visual Evaluation** – Deaf participants provide feedback in the form of short video statements, which become part of the project's documentation. In this way, Deaf participants become active contributors to the institution's development process.





Recommendations



For Institutions and Organizers

1. Recognize Sign Language as an **equal medium of artistic and informational communication**.
2. Include Deaf people in the process of creating artistic activities—from planning, through implementation, to evaluation.
3. Provide **training in Deaf culture** for the entire institutional team.
4. Design exhibition spaces to be **visually communicative and free from sensory barriers**.
5. Ensure Sign Language interpretation, captions, and Easy-to-Read (ETR) materials at every key audience contact point.
6. Include accessibility costs in the **main budget**, not as a separate or optional expense.
7. Collaborate with local and international **Deaf organizations**.
8. Report good practices and create a **catalogue of accessible solutions** to inspire other institutions.
9. Treat accessibility not as an obligation but as a tool of **professionalism, ethics, and cultural empathy**.

For Curatorial and Design Teams

1. Integrate accessibility into the **curatorial brief**, artist agreements, and exhibition documentation.
2. Use **visual language as a component of the narrative**, not merely as a technical message.
3. Promote the principle **“Nothing about us without us”**.
4. Treat Sign Language interpreters and accessibility consultants as **part of the creative team**.
5. Implement **systematic accessibility evaluation** after each event, documenting the process in Sign Language video materials.



Evaluation and Sustainability of Results



Every event should be evaluated with the participation of Deaf people. A few simple guiding questions can shape the process:

- > What worked well?
- > What was challenging?
- > What can we improve?

Feedback can be collected in Sign Language videos, through group feedback sessions, or via short interviews.

The most important step is to report the findings and implement the resulting improvements.

Every artistic event should conclude with a process of reflection and evaluation:

- > Collecting feedback from audiences (also in Sign Language video form);
- > Assessing the quality of international collaboration;
- > Preparing a report with recommendations regarding language, space, and technology;
- > Building and strengthening networks of interpreters, technicians, and partner institutions.

Evaluation is not a formality, but a continuation of the creative process – a learning tool for the institution, enabling growth, reflection, and sustainable change.





A snapshot of selected countries

1. Accessibility Checklist – a Practical Starting Point

Communication and Promotion

- > Website compliant with WCAG standards (contrast, alternative text, responsiveness).
- > Event announcements also available in Sign Language and with captions.
- > Posters and leaflets with a clear visual layout (pictograms, accessibility icons).

Event Programme

- > Sign Language interpretation provided during live events.
- > Subtitles included in all video materials and online broadcasts.
- > Easy-to-Read (ETR) versions of descriptions available.

Space and Logistics

- > Visual information complementing or replacing sound (screens, light signals).
- > Proper lighting ensuring visibility of interpreters and facial expressions.
- > Reserved seating close to the stage/screen for Deaf participants.

Organization and Collaboration

- > Consultation with Deaf people during event design.
- > Training for staff on Deaf culture.
- > Dedicated budget for interpretation, subtitles, and visual materials.
- > Evaluation of the event with participation of the Deaf community.
- > Hiring a Deaf person as a guide or mediator.

2. Inclusive Event Planning Framework – Step by Step

STEP 1

Identifying Needs

- > Analyse the target audience, including diverse groups (Deaf, or hard-of-hearing).
- > Consult with Deaf organizations or foundations.

STEP 2

Planning and Budgeting

- > Integrate accessibility costs into both the timeline and the budget.
- > Identify resources: Sign Language interpreters, captions, technology, and accessible spaces.
- > Organising conversations with the authors/creators of the artistic events.
- > Include artistic and technological workshops as well as sessions explaining the creative process (technique, materials, artistic solutions).
- > Prepare tactile materials (e.g., material sample tables) accessible also for Deaf participants.

STEP 3

Communication

- > Promote the event in visual and Sign Language formats.
- > Clearly mark available accessibility services (PJM, captions, etc.).

STEP 4

Event Implementation

- > Ensure the presence of a visible Sign Language interpreter.
- > Provide appropriate lighting and comfortable viewing conditions.
- > Instruct presenters: speak slowly, face the audience, and allow time for interpretation.

STEP 5

Evaluation

- > Gather feedback in Sign Language (videos, visual surveys).
- > Report accessibility activities.
- > Apply improvements for future events.



3. Guide: „Ten Mistakes to Avoid” – Warnings and Pitfalls

1. Adding accessibility *at the end* instead of designing for it from the beginning.
2. Using artificial or manually coded systems like Signed Polish (SJM) instead of natural Polish Sign Language (PJM).
3. Lack of captions in online or offline materials.
4. Hiding the interpreter in a small corner of the screen – the interpreter should be a visible, integral part of the event.
5. Assuming that Deaf people will “manage on their own” – this trivializes real barriers.
6. Planning accessibility „for them but without them” – no consultation with the Deaf community.
7. Treating accessibility as an extra cost rather than an investment.
8. Chaotic visual communication – too much text, lack of icons and pictograms.
9. Conducting events too quickly, leaving no time for Sign Language interpretation.
10. Failing to conduct evaluation and collect feedback – the institution loses the chance to learn and improve.



Organizing Exhibitions



Introduction – Accessibility as a New Language of Culture

An accessible exhibition is not a corrective measure for existing barriers, but rather a new language of culture in which form, communication, and space converge into one coherent experience. Accessibility – especially in relation to Deaf people – is not limited to the addition of interpreters or subtitles. It is about designing a world where different senses collaborate. Through sign, visual, and gestural languages, art regains its rhythm, presence, and materiality, while its message acquires a shared, communal dimension.

Objective

The goal of an accessible exhibition is to create an artistic space that enables **full and equal participation for all audiences**, regardless of their mode of perception. A contemporary cultural institution should not merely “make content available,” but **design an event as a shared experience** – one in which language, form, and space respond to the

diverse needs of participants. In the context of Deaf audiences, this requires **a shift in perspective**: from the medical model (focused on the “lack of hearing”) to the **linguistic and cultural model**, which recognizes sign language as a full-fledged medium of communication and artistic expression.

The Exhibition as a Form of Intercultural Communication

A modern exhibition is no longer merely a site for presenting artworks; it has become a platform for dialogue between artists, institutions, and audiences. In the age of mobility and global cultural networks, the exhibition serves as a space for negotiating meanings – across languages, media, cultures, and modes of perception. The event organizer assumes the role of mediator, translator, and strategist, balancing artistic intentions with technical, legal, logistical, and social requirements.

The four main pillars of contemporary exhibition organization are:

- Diversity and inclusion – addressing the needs of audiences with diverse cultural, linguistic, and sensory backgrounds,
- Sustainability and ecological awareness,
- International collaboration and local networking,
- Technological and educational innovation.

The Contemporary Exhibition

– New Relationships

Therefore, contemporary exhibitions:

- invite the viewer to co-create meaning – through performative, interactive, or participatory actions,
- offer multiple levels of access to content – visual, tactile, auditory, and linguistic,
- bridge the emotional and intellectual spheres, creating a space for reflection and shared experience.



Exhibition Accessibility Standards



Principles of Universal Exhibition Design (Universal Design)

a) Considering Accessibility from the Very Beginning

Do not „add an interpreter at the end.“ The exhibition plan should integrate various forms of communication from the very start – visual, tactile, and signed. The Sign Language interpreter should be regarded as a fully-fledged participant in the event, not as an auxiliary addition.

b) Visual and Linguistic Communication

For Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences, **visual clarity is essential**. This applies not only to the exhibition space but also to the institution’s entire communication system:

- > Social media posts should also be made available in sign language versions.
- > All materials (posters, wall texts, social media,

websites) should include sign language pictograms, subtitles, and accessibility icons.

- > Cultural content should be transferred online and to social media not only as announcements but also through sharing full exhibitions, events, and performances.
- > Key information – such as invitations and curatorial introductions – should be prepared as short videos in Sign Language (SL).
- > Exhibition texts should include Easy-to-Read (ETR) versions and captions for any films or projections.
- > Provide a visual and signed floor plan, for example, a short SL video at the entrance.
- > Every video, projection, or recording should feature open captions.
- > Use clear visual signage and pictograms throughout the gallery.
- > Films, presentations, and sound installations should include either captions or visual equivalents (light, graphics, rhythm).

- > The Sign Language interpreter must be well-lit and visible at all times.
- > The exhibition space should avoid excessive noise while maintaining good lighting – clear visibility of faces and gestures is essential for communication.
- > Recommended standard: at least one Sign Language communication element at every key stage of institutional communication.

c) Exhibition Space

- > The Sign Language interpreter should always be clearly visible and well-lit; diffused lighting ensures that both the interpreter's face and hands are visible. The interpreter should be an integral part of the event, actively engaged in its communication.
- > Sound messages should be complemented by visual signals (light, screens, graphics).
- > Provide seating with a clear view of both the stage and the interpreter, allowing lip reading or access to captioned displays.

d) Visual Information

Clear navigation is fundamental: color, pictogram, and arrow – not text. At the entrance, display a board or screen with a Sign Language video explaining the exhibition layout and the rules of movement within the space. It is crucial that communication remains coherent, consistent, and unambiguous – the visitor should never have to guess where accessibility information can be found.

Recognizing the Cultural Identity of Deaf People

Deaf people constitute a linguistic and cultural minority, not a group in need of “hearing rehabilitation.” For them, sign language is their first language and a form of artistic expression, and therefore cultural institutions should:

- > translate content into Sign Language (SL) rather than simply “adding sound” to events;
- > create visual equivalents of sound – for example, through light, rhythm, or movement;
- > design visual communication with the understanding that many Deaf individuals perceive the world primarily through sight;
- > include Deaf people as co-creators of events – as consultants, artists, interpreters, guides, curators, and performers;
- > ensure the visibility of interpreters and the aesthetic quality of signed communication;
- > provide International Sign (IS) interpretation for events of European or international scope;
- > ensure that all audiovisual materials include open captions and/or sign language versions;
- > treat accessibility as an element of artistic quality, not merely a formal requirement.

The exhibition thus becomes a space of intercultural dialogue, where gesture, movement, and light serve as equal artistic languages;

- > take into account the visual nature of Deaf culture – its aesthetics of gesture, rhythm, light, and movement.

The Exhibition as a Process of Co-Creation

Every exhibition requires the development of an institutional collaboration model that connects artists, interpreters, technicians, curators, and audiences. The contemporary model of cultural management can be described as micro-institutional – based on awareness, trust, and collaboration among diverse competencies, rather than rigid hierarchies. Authentic inclusion means involving Deaf people at every stage of the process – from concept and production to the evaluation of the event.

It is advisable to establish an Accessibility Council or to invite Deaf artists and consultants to join the curatorial team – not as symbolic guests, but as equal co-authors of the project.

Team and Organizational Competences

An accessible exhibition requires a team that is aware, trained, and engaged. It is people – not technology – who create real accessibility. For this reason, systematic competence-building is crucial, encompassing both knowledge and an attitude of openness.

Key Actions

- > Training in **Deaf culture** and basic Sign Language (SL) for visitor services, curators, and educators;
- > Workshops on **interpersonal communication with Deaf individuals** – including eye contact, speech tempo, gestures, and visual signals;
- > Workshops on **visual accessibility** and content design for audiences with diverse needs;
- > **Employment of Deaf people** as consultants, guides, educators, or members of the project team;
- > Involvement of an **accessibility consultant** from the conceptual stage, not only during implementation;
- > **Coordination of Sign Language translations**, captioning, and visual materials – planned in parallel with the exhibition schedule;
- > **Accessibility budgeting** as an integral part of the project, not as an optional or additional cost item;
- > **Evaluation involving Deaf participants**, conducted through surveys, interviews, or short video feedback in SL;
- > Development of **internal communication and openness standards**, fostering a lasting culture of accessibility within the institution.

When organized in this way, the exhibition becomes the result of a synergy of competences – **artistic, educational, linguistic, technical, and organizational**.

It is worth developing an internal linguistic and visual style guide – a document defining *how to speak, write, and what to avoid* when communicating with diverse audiences. Such a guide not only formalizes standards but also reinforces institutional coherence and ethos, positioning the organization as open, empathetic, and contemporary. Table 2 presents the minimum accessibility measures for exhibitions.



Table 2 Minimum Accessibility Actions for Exhibitions

AREA	MINIMUM ACTION	EXTENDED ACTION	OUTCOME
Communication	Website compliant with WCAG, captions, pictograms	Sign Language video, QR codes with translations	Greater reach and public trust
Space	Proper lighting of faces and hands	Quiet zones, tactile plans, 3D models	Comfort and safety for visitors
Team	One-time SL training	Continuous workshops on Deaf culture	Long-term team competence and empathy
Evaluation	Written survey	Video feedback in SL	Better adaptation of future events
Promotion	Accessibility signage	Media campaigns in Sign Language	Institutional visibility and credibility

Recommendations

1. Treat accessibility as a measure of quality, not as a cost.
2. Invite Deaf people to co-create the exhibition – not just to attend it.
3. Use visual language as a legitimate medium of communication.
4. Design space to be welcoming and perceptible to all senses.
5. Include Sign Language translations and captions in all audiovisual materials.
6. Plan the accessibility budget at the conceptual stage.
7. Collaborate with Deaf and hard-of-hearing organizations at local and international levels.
8. Conduct evaluations involving Deaf participants and document the outcomes.

Accessibility Checklist for Exhibition Organizers

Planning

- > Include Deaf professionals at the concept stage (as curatorial or advisory team members).
- > Budget for Polish Sign Language (PJM) interpretation and captioning.
- > Create a schedule that includes interpreters and Sign Language materials.
- > Ensure the team has completed communication training with Deaf audiences.

Implementation

- > PJM interpreter present during openings and guided tours.
- > Subtitles for films, sound installations, and all audiovisual materials.
- > Adequate lighting and visibility for lip-reading.
- > All audiovisual content must have captions.

Promotion

- > Mark events with accessibility symbols (Sign Language, captions, hearing loop).
- > Publish accessibility information on websites and social media.
- > Create a short invitation video in Sign Language, with subtitles in partner languages.

Evaluation

- > Collect feedback in Sign Language (e.g., short video testimonials).
- > Analyze what worked well and what needs improvement.
- > Prepare a report with recommendations for future events.



Exhibition Accessibility Standards



Art as a Shared Language

An **accessible exhibition** is a testament to modern cultural thinking – understanding culture as a space of encounter, coexistence, and equal participation. Considering the needs of Deaf people is not an act of goodwill, but a mark of professionalism and respect for diverse ways of perceiving the world. As international experiences show, an exhibition designed in collaboration with Deaf people does not lose its artistic value – on the contrary, it gains new dimensions: visual, gestural, and communal.

Accessibility is not a gesture of charity but a contemporary organizational standard that broadens the definition of intercultural dialogue and enriches visual culture.

Today, the artist, the institution, and the audience – through action, dialogue, and mutual trust – together create the language of accessible culture. Accessibility is not a limitation but a new dimension of expression. Art that embraces Sign Language, gesture, light,

and rhythm becomes a meeting space for different perceptual cultures. Organizing exhibitions that address the needs of Deaf people is not only a matter of ethics and law – it represents the future of contemporary culture built on empathy, presence, and shared experience. Accessibility extends beyond technology.

An **accessible exhibition** also means an emotional attitude – openness, attentiveness, and respect. For many Deaf visitors, feeling treated with equal warmth and seriousness matters more than any caption or subtitle.

In visual culture, every gesture – a look, a pause, a smile – carries meaning. Collaboration with Deaf artists and audiences opens art to new dimensions of rhythm, silence, light, and gesture. An exhibition designed together becomes a space of shared vision, where different ways of seeing converge into one narrative. Accessible culture is culture of coexistence – where everyone has the right to perceive, to express, and to remain silent.



Chapter 2

Accessibility of Museums for Deaf People





Introduction

Access to culture is a fundamental human right that must be ensured equally for all individuals, regardless of disability. In this context, the accessibility of museums for Deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors is an integral part of broader policies promoting social inclusion and the participation of people with disabilities in public life. Museums are obliged to develop appropriate practices and services that respond to the specific linguistic, cultural, and communicative needs of this community.

According to contemporary studies (Constantinou et al., 2016; Westerhoff, 2017), a key element of accessibility is the provision of information in sign language, both through live interpretation and via digital media, such as videos with sign language interpretation or multimedia mobile applications. These technological solutions, especially when combined with QR codes at each exhibit, allow Deaf visitors to access museum content directly, without the need for an external companion or interpreter, thereby enhancing their autonomy.

In parallel, the presence of subtitles in all audio or audiovisual materials and the provision of written documentation are essential complementary measures to strengthen accessibility, particularly for visitors who do not use sign language. Equally important is the training of museum staff in communication with Deaf individuals, as well as the encouragement of meaningful collaboration with the Deaf community to ensure that the services provided meet the actual needs and expectations of users.

Overall, an accessible museum for Deaf visitors does not merely comply with legal mandates of equality but must adopt a holistic and multimodal approach that integrates technological and pedagogical innovations. The goal is to create an inclusive cultural environment where the museum assumes not only a functional but also a social role, promoting understanding and respect for diverse forms of communication and cultural expression.



Fundamental Principles of Accessibility



The design of an accessible museum must be grounded in core principles that govern inclusion and equality. First and foremost, accessibility should be treated as a fundamental right—not as an optional initiative or act of charity—so that every design decision considers the needs of all visitors from the earliest stages of exhibition planning. Second, the approach must be holistic and multimodal: information should be offered through multiple formats to accommodate diverse preferences and abilities. Third, the principle of “Nothing about us without us” must guide every action, ensuring the participation of Deaf individuals in both the design and evaluation phases. Finally, accessibility must be dynamic and evolving: as needs and technologies change, museum policies should anticipate and support continuous review and improvement.



Institutional and Legal Framework for Accessibility



The concept of accessibility in museums and cultural institutions is no longer considered an optional act of goodwill, but rather a legally established right. Access to culture for people with disabilities—and particularly for Deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors—is institutionally protected at both international and national levels. Greece ratified the Convention through Law 4074/2012, Poland ratified it in 2012, and Cyprus in 2011 through Law 8(III)/2011. The Convention has been ratified by a total of 185 countries, affirming their commitment to defending the rights of this social group and promoting equality, accessibility, and social inclusion on a global scale.

Within this framework, the right to participate in cultural life, entertainment, and the arts is explicitly recognized, and states are called upon to take all appropriate measures to ensure equal access.

At the national level, Greek Sign Language is officially recognized as the language of the Deaf community through Law 4488/2017. This recognition obliges both public and private entities to ensure

communicative accessibility, particularly in cultural and educational services. In parallel, the European Directive (EU) 2016/2102 on the accessibility of public sector websites and mobile applications mandates access to digital content for people with disabilities, including Deaf visitors.

The institutional framework is further supported by European Recommendations on Universal Accessibility in Culture and the criteria of the European Accessibility Charter, which encourage the creation of cultural spaces where all citizens can participate equally. Therefore, accessibility in museums for Deaf individuals is not merely a socially sensitive initiative—it is a legal obligation and a marker of cultural democracy.



The Deaf Community and Sign Language



The Deaf community is not homogeneous and does not perceive hearing loss as a one-dimensional problem, but rather as an element of cultural and linguistic identity. Sign language—whether it is Greek Sign Language or another local or international form—possesses its own structure, aesthetics, and cultural significance. Museums that aim to be truly accessible must approach this community as a linguistic minority with the right to authentic representation of knowledge. The direct presence of native signers as narrators, the provision of guided tours by Deaf guides, and the involvement of the community in content design enhance the credibility and acceptance of accessibility measures.



Communication of accessibility



Communicative accessibility refers to the quality and format in which information is delivered. To be effective, it must include multiple channels:

- > Sign language
- > Subtitles
- > Written language
- > Visual representations

A key practice is the production of sign language videos for every significant point of the exhibition, which should be easily accessible via on-site screens, portable devices, or QR codes placed next to exhibits.

The use of native signers as narrators ensures cultural authenticity, while Deaf guides offer experiential and community-based perspectives during tours.

Another dimension of communicative accessibility is the quality of written information. Textual descriptions should be concise, clear, and written in plain language without unnecessary jargon, serving both hard-of-hearing visitors and those who do not use sign language. The combined use of images and brief text enhances comprehension and helps visitors retain the content of the exhibition.



Subtitles, Written Information, and Alternative Formats



Subtitles in all audiovisual materials should be considered standard, not optional. Every video, educational resource, or audio guide must be accompanied by accurate subtitles and, when possible, a transcript available in both print and **digital formats**. Written documentation should be accessible and offered in multiple formats: brochures, downloadable PDFs from the website, mobile app content, and even large-print versions for those with concurrent visual impairments.

Alternative formats of information may also include interactive screens with adjustable text size, simple images accompanying written descriptions, and key phrases that summarize the meaning of each exhibit.



Technological Solutions and Digital Tools



Technology offers practical tools for integrating accessibility into the everyday operational fabric of the museum. Multimedia guides available through mobile apps and tablets allow visitors to choose between sign language, text, or images, and to adjust the pace of the tour to their own rhythm. QR codes placed next to exhibits serve as bridges between physical objects and digital content, providing immediate access to sign language videos, subtitles, brief descriptions, and additional information. Augmented reality, when applied with respect for the visitor's experience, can

visualize historical or functional aspects of exhibits and offer smart, visual narratives that do not rely on sound. Additionally, speech-to-text applications and services can function as support tools during tours or presentations, enabling real-time display of spoken language on screens. The availability of free and stable Wi-Fi within the museum is a necessary condition for the seamless use of these applications, while technical support and quality control of digital content should be integrated into the museum's regular maintenance routines.



Exhibition Accessibility Standards



The physical environment of a museum plays a central role in the experience of Deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors. Lighting must be designed to support lip-reading and the visibility of sign language: evenly distributed, free of harsh shadows, and sufficient in areas where tours or presentations take place. Additionally, every auditory alert—such as announcements or alarms—must be accompanied by a visual signal to ensure that all visitors receive the same safety messages. Signage should feature clear icons, high contrast, and legible font sizes to support both orientation and access to information.

The installation of assistive technologies, such as hearing loops or FM systems, enhances the experience for hard-of-hearing visitors who use hearing aids. Finally, interior spaces should also include zones for silence and visual focus, with seating and designated areas for those who wish or need more time for observation.





Visitor Experience and Aesthetic Approach

The museum experience for a Deaf visitor goes beyond the provision of information in sign language—it involves a holistic visual and emotional interaction with the space, lighting, exhibits, and narrative. A truly accessible museum must redefine the concept of “silence” and transform it into a creative tool. Through thoughtful lighting, clear signage, and exhibition flow, a space can be created where visual communication becomes a language of culture.

Visual storytelling is a key element of this approach. Each exhibit can “tell” its story not only through words but also through images, gestures, symbols, and multisensory elements. When sign language is creatively integrated into exhibition design, it functions not only as a medium of information but also as an art form that connects the visitor deeply with the content.

The aesthetics of accessibility also rely on respecting the visual attention of Deaf visitors. Spaces should be well-lit, with clean lines and adequate spacing to facilitate the observation of sign language communication. Exhibition design must allow for a natural flow of visual perception, free from obstructions, harsh shadows, or glare. In this way, accessibility becomes not just a technical specification but an aesthetic experience, where the silence of sound is replaced by the voice of sight.



Staff Training and Awareness



Staff training is not optional—it is a fundamental requirement for implementing accessibility policies. Employees must receive practical training in communicating with Deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors, including basic elements of sign language, lip-reading techniques, and the use of alternative communication methods. Training should also cover familiarity with the technological tools offered by the museum and protocols for behavior in emergency situations, ensuring both the safety and dignity of all visitors.

Furthermore, hiring or collaborating with Deaf professionals and guides empowers staff with experiential knowledge and enhances cultural understanding.



A Necessary Methodological Adaptation



The museum tour experience for Deaf visitors requires a different approach than that for hearing individuals. While hearing visitors can listen to spoken commentary and simultaneously observe the exhibits, Deaf visitors need visual access to the interpreter, the Deaf guide using sign language, or a video with sign language translation. This means they cannot simultaneously absorb the information and examine the exhibits.

For this reason, the methodology of guided tours for Deaf visitors must be designed to meet their visual needs. Specifically, each stop on the tour should

begin with an introduction to what visitors are about to see, possibly using visual materials (e.g., photos, sketches, or sign language videos) to provide the necessary context. Once the presentation and explanation are complete, visitors should be given ample time to observe the exhibits comfortably and with full attention. This process should be repeated at each subsequent stop of the tour.

Such an approach is not merely a technical adjustment—it is an expression of respect for the linguistic and cultural identity of the Deaf community, ensuring equal access to knowledge and cultural experience.



Collaboration with the Deaf Community



Meaningful involvement of the Deaf community in the development of accessibility services ensures that solutions truly reflect the needs and desires of users. Establishing advisory groups composed of Deaf visitors and professionals, organizing co-creation workshops, and commissioning projects from Deaf artists or curators all contribute to the sustainability of these initiatives. Through such collaboration, the museum gains access to insights and experiences that are difficult to capture otherwise, while also giving a genuine voice to the community it serves.



Safety of Deaf Visitors



Ensuring the safety of Deaf visitors in museums requires specific measures to guarantee equal access to emergency information and response. Since auditory announcements are not accessible, it is essential to provide:

- > Visual alerts, such as flashing lights and screens with written instructions;
- > Signage with icons and sign language, where feasible, to guide visitors to emergency exits;
- > Staff training in communication with Deaf individuals, enabling clear and effective assistance;
- > Availability of interpreters or sign language videos during organized visits or emergency situations;
- > Customized evacuation plans that consider the needs of Deaf visitors.

Implementing these measures strengthens both the safety and confidence of Deaf visitors, fostering a truly accessible and inclusive cultural environment.



Communication and Promotion



Promoting accessibility services is essential for attracting and informing the public. The museum’s website should include clear information about available services, such as sign language tours, subtitled videos, options for borrowing portable devices, or the presence of hearing loops. Social media promotion must be handled with care and include accessible content—such as sign language videos, subtitles, and image descriptions. Additionally, special events aimed at the Deaf community, like silent evenings or visual arts festivals, strengthen the museum’s relationship with this audience and showcase its commitment to inclusion.



Evaluation and Improvement

15.



Accessibility services must be evaluated regularly and collaboratively. Gathering feedback directly from Deaf visitors—whether through sign language videos or written checklists—helps capture the actual experience and identify areas for improvement. An annual review of practices, in partnership with the community, aimed at evidence-based adjustments and testing of new technologies, ensures that the museum remains current and responsive to evolving needs.



Impact Assessment and Accessibility Data Collection



The success of an accessible museum is not measured solely by the presence of technical measures, but by the real impact these have on visitor experiences. To ensure continuous service improvement and accountability to the public, systematic evaluation of accessibility levels is essential.

Evaluation may include both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data—such as the number of Deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors, their participation in tours or educational programs, and their use of digital accessibility tools—provides objective indicators of progress. At the same time, qualitative data—such as feedback videos in sign language or interviews with visitors—captures experiences, suggestions, and emotional responses.

Museums can also collaborate with research institutions, sign language schools, and universities to analyze this data and shape evidence-based accessibility policies. Documenting impact enhances transparency, demonstrates the social value of initiatives, and can serve as proof for funding or awards for best practices. Evaluation, therefore, is not merely an administrative tool—it is a key mechanism for cultivating a culture of empathy and ongoing development.



Examples of Good Practices



Museum 1

Research revealed that the needs and preferences of Deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors vary significantly—for example, in their use of sign language or preference for written information. As a result, a pilot multimedia guide was developed featuring sign language videos with optional closed captions (cc), allowing visitors to navigate at their own pace. The use of native signers as narrators, rather than relying solely on interpreters, enhanced the authenticity and clarity of the information. During guided tours, Deaf visitors expressed a preference for Deaf guides, as interpreter-led tours often caused fatigue and difficulty in following due to the need for constant visual focus. On the infrastructure and technology front, the museum implemented microphones with speech-to-text software for hard-of-hearing visitors, emphasized the importance of proper lighting, ensured all videos were subtitled, and provided written versions of audio guides. Staff received training in communication with Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals,

and the involvement of the Deaf community in the design process was considered essential.

Museum 2

This museum highlighted the essential components required for accessibility: full provision of information in sign language, subtitles in all audiovisual presentations, and written content for those who do not use sign language. Digital solutions within the museum included apps with multimedia guides specifically designed for Deaf users and QR codes next to exhibits that offered direct access to sign language content. Staff training and the creation of an accessible website with clear information about available services complemented the approach. Technical support through hearing loops and acoustic optimized spaces supported the use of hearing aids, while collaboration with the Deaf community ensured the development of appropriate content.

Museum 3

A comprehensive checklist was presented outlining the elements a museum must include to be accessible: sign language information via videos and guided tours by native signers, subtitles and written support for all video and audio materials, technological solutions such as mobile apps and QR codes, trained staff, collaboration with the Deaf community, appropriate visual signage, and online information with sign language content and subtitles for virtual tours.

Anex: **Museum Accessibility Checklist** **for Deaf Visitors**

Below is a practical checklist designed to help organizers evaluate the accessibility measures in place for Deaf visitors. Each item can be marked as completed or pending, and accompanied by comments and implementation priorities.



Table 3 Museum Accessibility Checklist for Deaf People

CATEGORY	ACTION	COMPLETED
Information	Sign language video for each exhibit	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Subtitles on all videos and audio media	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Written versions of audio guides and presentations	☐ Yes / ☐ No
Technology	QR codes with access to sign language content	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Mobile app with sign language, text, and image options	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Augmented Reality (AR) support	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Free Wi-Fi for accessible app usage	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Speech-to-text applications for converting speech to text	☐ Yes / ☐ No
Space	Adequate lighting for lip-reading and sign language visibility	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Visual signals instead of sound alerts	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Hearing loops or FM systems	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Visual emergency notifications	☐ Yes / ☐ No
Staff	Training in basic sign language skills	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Awareness of Deaf culture	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Participation of Deaf employees or collaborators	☐ Yes / ☐ No
Community	Deaf advisory group for planning activities	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Co-creation of content with the community	☐ Yes / ☐ No
Communication	Website with sign language and subtitle information	☐ Yes / ☐ No
	Accessibility promotion on posters	☐ Yes / ☐ No



Chapter 3

Organizing concerts





Introduction

Do Deaf People Like Music?

Do they go to concerts, shows, or festivals?

The answer is Yes!

Deaf people have their own musical preferences, favorite artists, and distinctive ways of experiencing rhythm and sound. And here's something many don't realize: Deaf individuals can also be DJs, rappers, musicians, performers, and professionals across the music scene. Still, despite the talent, dedication, and creative research they invest, many performances end up offering little value to them.

Why? Because concerts are often designed without considering their needs.

Accessibility in concerts for Deaf audiences invites us to rethink what music is and how it can be experienced through more than one sense. This shift in perspective reveals music's unique quality: it serves as a bridge for communicating emotions and memories, and it is not limited to

sound alone. Rhythm, vibrations, and concert lighting create a distinctive atmosphere that can be perceived in different ways.

Organizers must take this broader dimension seriously. Accessibility is not abstract or optional, nor is it an “addition”; it is a creative aspect of designing the concert experience. The goal is for Deaf audiences to participate actively and to have equal access to cultural life.

The effectiveness of accessibility solutions reflects an authentic commitment to listening, learning, and creating an inclusive concert experience that resonates with the diverse needs and preferences of all attendees.



Legal Framework and Responsibilities



For cultural organisations, accessibility is not an optional service but a binding obligation rooted in international, European, and national frameworks. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) makes this clear: Article 30 affirms the right of persons with disabilities to participate fully in cultural life, while Articles 9 and 21 guarantee access to communication and information, including Sign Language and accessible formats. These provisions establish that equal participation in culture must be ensured as a matter of rights, not charity.

At the European level, directives require equal access to culture and communications, and ministries of education and culture across member states are expected to fund accessibility as **core cultural infrastructure** rather than treating it as temporary or project based. This means that accessibility must be planned, budgeted, and delivered with the same seriousness as conservation, digitisation, or artistic programming.

National laws further reinforce these responsibilities. Cultural organisations must ensure that contracts for interpreters and caption providers comply with professional qualifications, which building modifications follow European standards for accessibility, and that procurement budgets include ongoing maintenance and upgrades. Accessibility cannot be a one off intervention; it must be embedded into the organisation's long term strategy and daily operations.

By aligning with these legal and institutional obligations, cultural organisations demonstrate leadership in inclusion and sustainability. More importantly, they affirm that accessibility is a cultural right, ensuring that all audiences are recognized as equal participants in the shared cultural space.





Accessibility in Practice

Accessible cultural design is fundamentally visual. Whether a space hosts exhibitions, performances, tours, or events, visual communication must be guaranteed through architecture, seating, lighting, and technology. Accessibility requires multiple, integrated communication channels so audiences can choose the most suitable form. Accessible programming is not only about removing barriers; it is about actively creating culture *with* Deaf communities, rather than *for* them. Cultural organisations must recognize Deaf audiences as participants, co creators, artists, and experts—not merely attendees.

The core services are:

3.1. Sign Language Interpretation

Institutions must:

- Provide interpretation using qualified professional interpreters trained in performance, storytelling or music concerts training.

- Ensure interpreters receive scripts, tour content, exhibition notes or slide decks in advance.
- Promote interpreted events clearly in marketing materials, specifying:
 - where interpreters will stand,
 - which language(s) they will interpret into,
 - seating recommendations for Deaf viewers for best visibility.

At festivals: Stage plans must reserve space for interpreters before artist contracts are signed, not as a last-minute modification.

Interpreter Dress Code: Interpreter clothing follows clear guidelines to ensure visibility and focus during performances. Typically, interpreters wear plain, dark attire without patterns or distracting accessories, creating a neutral background that highlights hand movements and facial expressions. The aim is not style but clarity: good contrast with skin tone, professional consistency across the team, and suitability under stage lighting. This simple measure makes

interpretation easier to follow and demonstrates respect for Deaf audiences.

3.2. Sightlines and Spatial Planning

Cultural spaces must ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing audiences can always clearly see:

- Sign Language interpreters.
- Captioning screens or projections.
- Speakers or performers.
- Visual alerts and announcements.

To ensure visibility:

- Provide designated Deaf accessible seating zones with optimal sightlines, especially when interpretation is provided.
- Avoid seating Deaf audiences behind pillars, extreme angles or back rows in theatres and auditoriums.
- Sign Language interpreters must be positioned in clear, front facing sightlines, close to the stage and supported by appropriate lighting. Their placement should avoid corners, obstructed views, excessive distance, side exits, poorly lit areas, or situations where visibility is disrupted by people passing through or other barriers. This ensures that Deaf audiences can follow performances without visual strain and participate fully in the cultural experience.
- Use elevated platforms for interpreters in flat-floor spaces, such as outdoor festivals, community halls or heritage tours.

3.3. Lighting Requirements

- Lighting significantly impacts Deaf access. Institutions must provide:
- Bright, even lighting on interpreters' hands and faces.
- No backlighting, silhouette effects or strobe effects where interpreters stand.
- Non-reflective, matte backgrounds behind interpreters (Solar Bear; Peruzzi, 2024).
- Avoid patterned, bright, or moving backgrounds behind interpreters or caption screens.

Important: Outdoor events: Provide dedicated lighting rigs for interpreters, independent of performance lighting.

3.4. Sound Technology and Assistive Listening

Cultural institutions must:

- Install and maintain induction loops, FM systems or infrared systems in theatres, large halls and reception points (IFHOH, 2021; Deafness Forum of Australia).
- Display hearing loop signage prominently at entrances, reception desks and seating areas
- Provide portable assistive listening systems for guided tours and temporary event spaces

Important: These technologies do **not replace Sign Language access**. They primarily benefit audiences who use hearing aids or cochlear implants.

Also:

There is a growing range of “visual sound” technologies that use LED lighting to represent music and environmental sounds in real time. These systems allow **D/HoH** audiences to see rhythm, tone, and alerts during performances, transforming sound into dynamic patterns of light. In cultural spaces, such solutions can be integrated into stage design, safety systems, and interactive installations, ensuring that sound is always accompanied by a clear visual equivalent.

During **guided tours**, it can provide real time transcription and alerts.

- In **auditoriums**, it can notify D/HoH audiences of announcements or cues.
- At **reception points**, it can ensure equal communication without relying solely on hearing loops.
- **It helps Music awareness** as it can detect beats, rhythm, or changes in sound intensity and translate them into **visual cues or vibrations**.

During concerts such tools act as a **bridge between sound and visual communication**, making performances safer, more immersive, and more inclusive.

3.5. Captioning and Subtitling

Captioning must be:

- available for all live events, talks, film screenings and tours,
- accurate, real-time and displayed in readable size,

- inclusive of speaker identification, background sounds, and music cues.

All events and promotional videos must have captions by default, not “upon request”.

Avoid poor practice: Staff should never ask audiences whether they “need captions”. Captions must always be available.

3.6. Vibrating Jacket & Music-Reactive Light Bracelets

The vibrating tool tested now is the **vibrating jacket**. It uses six or more small oscillators that convert audio signals into haptic feedback, allowing the wearer to feel the music through vibrations across the body. This makes musical experiences more accessible for Deaf or hard-of-hearing users by transforming sound into a physical sensation.

Vibrating jackets or haptic-music vests can be sourced from several companies that distribute within Europe.

Music-reactive light bracelets are wearable devices that use built-in LEDs to create visual patterns that follow the rhythm of the music. The lights pulse, flash, or change color in response to sound, giving users a visual way to experience the beat. For Deaf or hard-of-hearing audiences, these bracelets add an important layer of accessibility by turning musical elements into visible cues, helping them engage with the atmosphere of a concert or performance through light and movement.



Communication Access Services



Clear visual communication is essential for creating accessible events. Organizers should ensure that information is always available in formats that can be seen and understood without relying on sound.

Provide clear signage throughout the venue.

Signs should be easy to read, placed at eye level, and use high contrast colors. They guide visitors to entrances, seating areas, restrooms, and emergency exits without confusion.

Use pictograms and icons to show available services.

Symbols for assistive listening systems, captioning, or Sign Language interpretation should be displayed prominently at entrances, reception desks, and seating areas. Icons are universally understood and help visitors quickly identify what support is available.

Display real time text notifications.

Digital screens, mobile apps, or captioning displays should provide instant updates about schedule changes, queue instructions, or delays. This ensures that Deaf and Hard of Hearing audiences receive the same information as everyone else, without relying on spoken announcements.



Co Creation with Deaf Experts



Cultural institutions cannot design accessibility *for* Deaf audiences without working with them. Policies and programmes are most effective when they are co created alongside Deaf experts, ensuring that solutions reflect lived experience rather than assumptions.

This collaboration can take many forms:

- Establishing **Deaf advisory boards** to guide decision making.
- Creating **ongoing consultation groups** that provide feedback throughout the year.
- Partnering with **Deaf led organisations** to co develop events and services.
- Commissioning **projects from Deaf artists and curators**, embedding accessibility into the creative process itself.

Meaningful involvement of the Deaf community transforms accessibility from a technical adjustment into a cultural practice. Institutions gain insights that are otherwise impossible to capture, while Deaf audiences receive a genuine presence in shaping the spaces they inhabit. The result is programming that is more sustainable, more innovative, and more trusted by the communities it serves.

By treating Deaf experts as co creators rather than beneficiaries, cultural organisations demonstrate leadership in inclusion and ensure that accessibility is woven into the fabric of their mission.



Safety and Emergency Communication



Guaranteeing equal access to emergency information and response during concerts requires specific measures designed for Deaf and D/HoH audiences. Since auditory announcements alone are not accessible, it is essential to provide:

Visual alerts, such as flashing alarms, on screen or scrolling text, and dedicated display panels with written instructions.

Clear signage with icons, and where feasible, sign language indications to guide visitors toward emergency exits.

Flashing light systems connected to alarms, announcements, or doorbells ensure that critical signals are seen, not just heard

Dual communication systems (sound + visual) installed throughout all public areas, including bathrooms, outdoor spaces, and seating zones.

Staff training in visual evacuation support, enabling personnel to communicate using gestures, pointing, or basic sign language, and to guide Deaf visitors without relying on speech.

Availability of interpreters or sign language videos during organized visits or large scale events, ensuring immediate communication in case of emergencies.

Customized evacuation plans that take into account the specific needs of Deaf visitors, rehearsed regularly with staff to ensure clarity and efficiency.

Implementing these measures strengthens both the safety and confidence of Deaf audiences, transforming concerts into truly accessible and inclusive cultural environments where all visitors can participate with equal assurance.





Audience Engagement & Accessible information

Informing the audience is critical to ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing participants are aware of accessibility provisions and can take part on equal terms. Communication must be clear, multi channel, and visually understandable.

Information Strategies – Clear Promotion

Visibility on official website and social media

Announcements should include clear accessibility icons (e.g., Sign Language interpretation, captions).

Integration of accessibility into the program

Information about interpreters, captions, or “visual sound” technologies must appear alongside each event listing, not in a separate section.

Visual materials

Use posters, videos in Sign Language, and captioned content so accessibility is immediately visible.

Collaboration with Deaf communities

Dis-seminate information through associations, Sign Language schools, and networks that reach Deaf audiences.

Staff training

All staff (ticket office, reception, ushers) should be informed and able to explain accessibility services.

Timely announcements

Accessibility information must be published well in advance so audiences can plan their participation.

Networking with Deaf organizations

Build connections with Deaf associations, federations, schools, and other community stakeholders to strengthen outreach and trust.

Organisations should

- > **Commission or host Deaf led work, performances, and concerts.**
- > **Encourage collaborations** between Deaf and hearing artists, educators, and cultural practitioners.
- > **Invite Deaf creators to lead workshops and tours**, recognising Sign Languages as artistic and cultural expressions in their own right.
- > **Present Sign Language poetry, theatre, storytelling, and choreography** as part of mainstream programming, not as side events.

At least one Deaf led performance or showcase per season (e.g., Deaf music interpreters, Sign Language poetry, or visual sound art).

Sign Language interpretation provided for concerts and **guided backstage or rehearsal tours** scheduled regularly.

Collaborations with Deaf artists are funded and professional, ensuring equal recognition and visibility in programming.

Do not rely on interpreters to compensate for poor design. Tours and workshops must integrate clear visual materials, written supports, and accessible layouts alongside spoken content. Effective programming pairs information with visuals, demonstrations, and hands on elements, ensuring that communication is not dependent solely on speech with translation. Interpreters enhance access, but they cannot replace inclusive design that makes content understandable for everyone.



Staff Training and Organisational Culture



Accessibility requires human capacity. Technology alone cannot deliver inclusion.

Front-of-house, educators, marketing, producers, and technicians must receive training in:

- > Deaf awareness and culture
- > Basics of visual communication (gestures, writing, pointing)
- > Basic Sign Language greetings to welcome visitors
- > How to guide a Deaf person during emergencies
- > Working effectively with interpreters and captioners
- > Managing induction systems and visual alert technologies

Training should be **continuous and recurring**, not limited to a one time induction module. Ongoing sessions reinforce knowledge, adapt to new practices, and ensure that staff remain confident and competent in delivering accessible and inclusive experiences.

Regular refreshers also signal that accessibility is a core value of the organisation, not a checkbox completed at the start.

Organisations should appoint a dedicated **Accessibility Coordinator** to ensure that inclusion is embedded across all aspects of programming and operations. This role is not symbolic—it is central to planning, delivery, and evaluation.

The Accessibility Coordinator:

- > **Coordinates budgets and resources** to guarantee that accessibility measures (interpreters, captioning, assistive technologies) are properly funded and sustained.
- > **Manages interpreters and captioning services**, ensuring they are scheduled, visible, and integrated into events.
- > **Oversees signage and staff training**, making sure that communication is clear, consistent,

and staff are confident in supporting diverse audiences.

- **Leads evaluation and feedback collection**, gathering input from audiences and artists to refine practices and measure impact.

Where possible, organisations should also **appoint or commission Deaf experts** in advisory roles. These experts bring lived experience and cultural knowledge that enrich decision making. Importantly, their contributions must be **paid and recognised as professional expertise**, not voluntary or symbolic.





Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Organisations must evaluate success via participatory and measurable methods.

- > Collaborate regularly with Deaf focus groups and organisations.
- > Gather feedback through forms in Sign Language video format.
- > Ask about emotional impact and sense of belonging, not just technical access.

Institutions must commit to **systematic annual tracking** of accessibility measures. This ensures accountability, highlights progress, and identifies areas for improvement. Accessibility is not static—it requires ongoing evaluation and transparent communication with audiences.

Key Areas to Track

Programming

- > Percentage of events that include Sign Language interpretation.

- > Percentage of events that provide captioning.
- > Number and proportion of Deaf led events produced each year.

Spatial & Technology

- > Percentage of functioning hearing loops and assistive listening systems.
- > Percentage of exhibition media (videos, installations, digital content) that are captioned or otherwise accessible.

Audience Engagement

- > Number of Deaf visitors attending events.
- > Number of access requests received and successfully fulfilled.

Satisfaction

- > Visitor satisfaction ratings collected specifically from Deaf participants.
- > Qualitative feedback gathered through written responses or video testimonials in Sign Language.



Case Studies: Examples of Good Practices

Music Concert in Deafestival 2025 in Greece

The Deafestival 2025, organised by the Federation of Deaf Greece in collaboration with MyRadio 104.6, took place from 26 to 28 September 2025 at Syntagma Square in Athens. The festival included a rich program of cultural events, with its highlight being a Saturday night concert featuring the band **Passpartout the Band**, performed with live interpretation into **Greek Sign Language**.

The music concert at Deafestival 2025 was a central event that showcased how accessibility can be embedded into live performances.

Accessibility Measures:

Before: Role of Accessibility Advisor
in Concert Preparation and Promotion

An **Accessibility Advisor** was actively involved in



planning the concert to ensure that Sign Language interpretation was delivered effectively and remained visible throughout the event.

- > **Interpreter Placement:** The advisor guided decisions on where interpreters would stand in relation to the performers and the audience, ensuring clear sightlines and balance between stage action and interpretation.
- > **Video Wall Integration:** They oversaw the positioning of the two large video walls, confirming that interpreters were displayed prominently and consistently, so Deaf audiences could follow without obstruction.
- > **Coordination of Teams:** The advisor worked with the five Deaf interpreters and two feeder interpreters, organising rehearsals with the band and clarifying transitions between interpreters during songs or program changes.

- > **Flow and Continuity:** By planning how interpreters would rotate and signal changes, the advisor ensured smooth handovers, avoiding confusion or gaps in accessibility.
- > **Audience Perspective:** Their role included anticipating how Deaf participants would experience the concert, making adjustments to maximise visibility, rhythm synchronisation, and cultural resonance.

The advisor also contributed to the communication campaign by shaping accessible promotion strategies. In the months leading up to Deafestival 2025, organisers invested in inclusive and wide reaching outreach to ensure the festival was visible and welcoming to all.

- > **Greek Sign Language (GSL) Spots:** Festival announcements were presented by Deaf signers in GSL and broadcast across all media channels.
- > **Television and Radio Campaigns:** National TV carried accessibility focused announcements, while MyRadio 104.6 hosted interviews with Deaf performers, artists, advocates, and interpreters.
- > **Cross Channel Outreach:** Social media, radio, and television worked together to ensure visibility and anticipation.

Also:

- > **Preparation of the songs by the Deaf interpreters and the hearing feeder interpreters, including rehearsal with the band**
- > This phrasing makes the roles clear, keeps the grammar smooth, and highlights the collaborative preparation process.

During: Concert Delivery &

- > Live interpretation into Greek Sign Language, delivered by **five Deaf interpreters supported by two feeder interpreters**, ensuring audiences could fully engage with lyrics and rhythm.
- > **Two large video walls** positioned to the left and right of the stage displayed the interpreters clearly, guaranteeing unobstructed visual access.

After: Community Impact

The event reinforced the festival's powerful motto: **“There are no human rights without rights to Sign Language.”** It celebrated Deaf culture while promoting equality, inclusion, and universal accessibility in public cultural life.

Audience reactions were overwhelmingly positive — Deaf participants expressed joy and pride at seeing their language and culture placed at the center of a major public concert. The presence of interpreters on large video walls was praised as a breakthrough in visibility.

Feedback gathered during and after the concert reflected **enthusiasm, gratitude, and a strong sense of belonging**. Many attendees described the experience as empowering, noting that it was not only accessible but also vibrant and inclusive. The atmosphere of celebration and solidarity demonstrated how accessibility can elevate the artistic experience for everyone, while strengthening trust between institutions and the Deaf community.

Identified Areas Requiring Improvement

Several choices during the event created unnecessary barriers. The release of stage smoke obstructed visibility between Deaf interpreters, while medley style songs proved confusing or inaccessible for Deaf audiences. Bright lights directed at interpreters' faces reduced visibility and concentration, and sudden lighting changes distracted both interpreters and audience members. Poor sightlines, last minute rehearsal with interpreters, and inconsistent use of captioning further added to the challenges.

In addition, strobe effects and rapid flashing caused disorientation and made it difficult to follow visual communication, extreme backlighting or spotlights washed out facial expressions and hand movements, and busy or fast changing visual projections created visual overload that competed with interpreters' visibility.

Despite sincere efforts, these practices highlight a deeper concern: the tendency of hearing organisers to assume authority over accessibility decisions, which ultimately diminished both professional standards and practical judgment.





Eurovision Song Contest 2025 – Accessible Broadcasting in Greece

Context

The **69th Eurovision Song Contest** took place in **Basel, Switzerland, in May 2025**. For Greek audiences, the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT) ensured that the contest was accessible through **ERTFLIX**, offering a dedicated stream with **Greek Sign Language interpretation**. This initiative was delivered in collaboration with **Atlas E.P.**, a leading accessibility provider.

Accessibility Measures

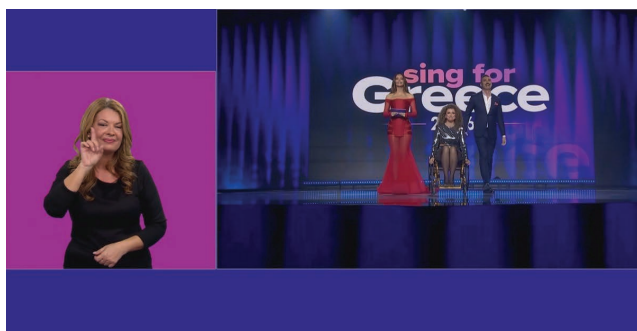
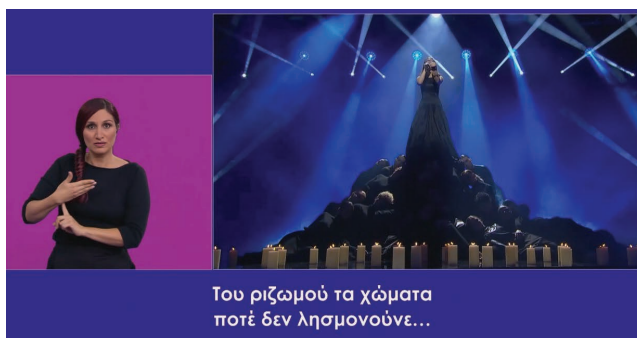
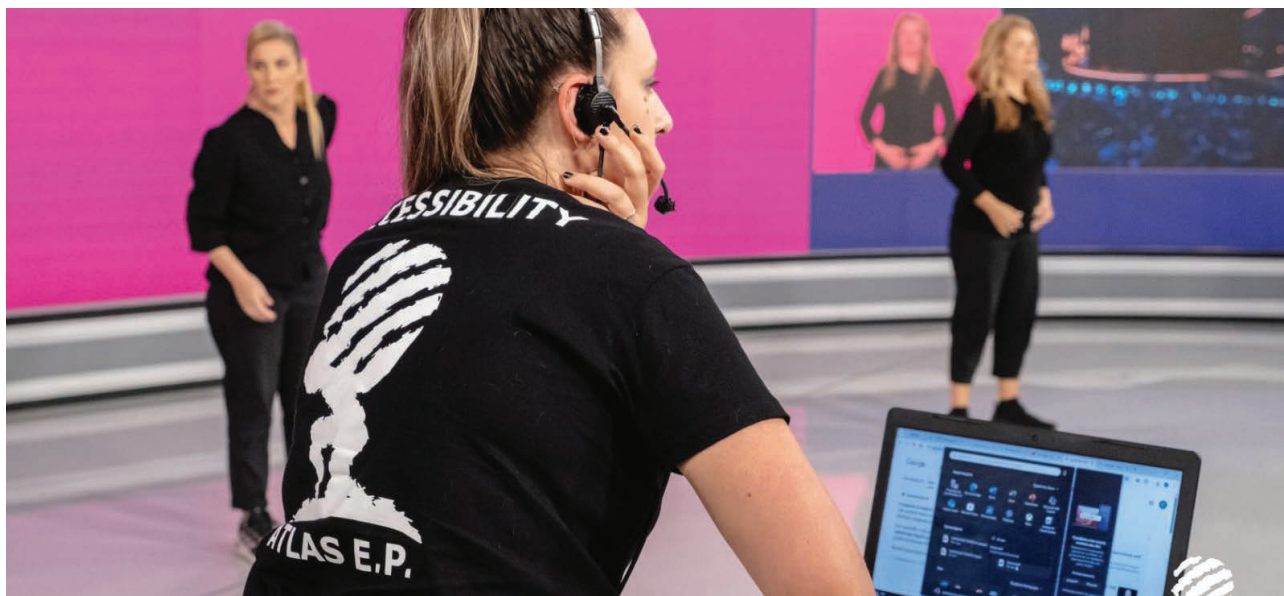
- > **Greek Sign Language (GSL) Interpretation:** Atlas E.P. provided live interpretation of the contest, including performances, commentary, and voting segments.
- > **ERTFLIX Integration:** A parallel stream was available on ERTFLIX, allowing Deaf audiences to watch the contest with GSL interpretation in real time.
- > **Visibility and Continuity:** Interpreters were consistently visible throughout the broadcast, ensuring uninterrupted access to lyrics, spoken segments, and announcements.
- > **Inclusive Promotion:** ERT highlighted the availability of the GSL stream in its communication campaign, raising awareness among Deaf communities and reinforcing the broadcaster's commitment to accessibility.

Community Impact

- > **Historic Milestone:** This was the **first time the Eurovision Song Contest was made fully accessible in GSL for Greek audiences**, setting a precedent for future large scale cultural broadcasts.
- > **Positive Feedback:** Deaf viewers expressed enthusiasm and gratitude, noting that Eurovision — one of Europe's most celebrated cultural events — finally reflected their right to equal participation.
- > **Institutional Significance:** The collaboration between ERT and Atlas E.P. demonstrated how national broadcasters can embed accessibility into international productions, strengthening trust with Deaf communities.
- > **Symbolic Value:** By making Eurovision accessible, organisers reinforced the principle that **universal accessibility is integral to cultural life, not optional**.

This case study complements the **Deafestival 2025 concert example** by showing accessibility in a **mainstream European broadcast**, illustrating how both live events and televised productions can embed Sign Language access.







Concerts Accessibility Checklists for Deaf audience

Accessibility Booking Form Template (Public Use)

ACCESS REQUEST FORM – CULTURAL EVENT BOOKING

Name: _____
Email: _____ @ _____ Phone SMS: _____
Event / Performance / Concert: _____
Date of Visit: _____

Please select any access services you require:

- ☐ Sign Language interpretation
- ☐ National Sign Language
- ☐ International Sign Language
- ☐ Accessible seating (clear sightlines to interpreters and captions)
- ☐ Real time captioning
- ☐ Hearing loop / assistive listening devices
- ☐ Other: _____

Preferred language for communication:

- ☐ National Sign Language
- ☐ SMS / Messaging ☐ Email

*Submit this form at least 5 working days before your visit.
We will confirm your arrangements by email or SMS.*

Interpreter Coordination Protocol (Internal Use)

INTERPRETER BRIEFING CHECKLIST

Before the event, provide interpreters with:

- ✓ Full script / running order
- ✓ Song lyrics (if applicable)
- ✓ Character list and speaker notes
- ✓ Slide presentations
- ✓ Lighting details and stage plan
- ✓ Costume / staging notes (where relevant)
- ✓ Placement map for interpreter visibility
- ✓ Contact person for technical or program changes

DO NOT: – Ask interpreters to translate without preparation.
– Place interpreters in poorly lit or obstructed areas.
– Position interpreters behind speakers, props, or equipment.



Staff Emergency Communication Checklist (Internal Use)

EMERGENCY ACCESS CHECKLIST

In case of evacuation:

- ☐ Use clear visual gestures and point directly to exits
- ☐ Show exit pathways physically; do not rely on speech alone
- ☐ Notify Deaf visitors by tapping on the shoulder or waving within their visual field
- ☐ Lead calmly and clearly; avoid rushing or shouting from a distance

Ensure:

- ☐ Flashing alarms are functional
- ☐ Emergency subtitles or scrolling text is available on screens
- ☐ Assistive technology users (hearing loops, ALDs) are accounted for

Staff Summary Checklist (Quick Reference for Printing)

DEAF ACCESS QUICK CHECK

- ☐ Interpreters and captioning confirmed
- ☐ Interpreter visible, well lit, and wearing appropriate dress code
- ☐ Captions readable, synchronised with sound cues
- ☐ Deaf accessible seating marked and reserved
- ☐ All videos captioned by default
- ☐ Hearing loops tested and signage displayed
- ☐ Front of house staff informed of accessibility measures
- ☐ Emergency procedures tested with visual alerts
- ☐ Accessibility signage with icons visible throughout venue
- ☐ Staff prepared to greet visitors with basic Sign Language

Glossary of Accessibility Terms

Sign Language Interpretation

Professional hearing interpreters who translate spoken language into Sign Language during concerts, ensuring Deaf audiences can follow lyrics, announcements, and dialogue.

Deaf Interpreters

Interpreters who are themselves Deaf and work alongside feeder interpreters to provide nuanced, culturally accurate Sign Language interpretation for Deaf audiences. Feeder Interpreters **Hearing interpreters who support Deaf interpreters by relaying spoken language** into Sign Language, enabling Deaf interpreters to adapt the message with cultural and linguistic precision.

National Sign Language (NSL)

The officially recognised Sign Language of a country, used by its Deaf community for everyday communication, education, and cultural expression. Each nation's Sign Language is distinct, with its own grammar, vocabulary, and cultural context. For example, **Greek Sign Language (GSL)** is the national Sign Language of Greece, **Polish Sign Language (PSL)** is the national Sign Language of Poland, etc.

International Sign (IS)

A simplified, shared Sign system used at international events to bridge communication across different

national Sign Languages. IS is comparable to English in spoken contexts, which often functions as the official international language for global communication. While IS is not a fully standardised language, it is an important tool for inclusion at conferences, festivals, and competitions, enabling Deaf participants from diverse countries to understand each other.

D/HoH

(Deaf and Hard of Hearing)

A widely used abbreviation that refers collectively to people who are **Deaf** (those who primarily use Sign Language and identify culturally with the Deaf community) and those who are **Hard of Hearing** (individuals with partial hearing loss who may use spoken language, hearing aids, or assistive devices). The term is inclusive, recognising the diversity of communication preferences and identities within the broader community.

Captioning / Subtitling

Real time or pre prepared text displayed on screens that provides the spoken or sung content of a performance. Captions may also include sound effects or audience reactions.

Hearing Loop

(Induction Loop)

A sound system that transmits audio directly to hearing aids equipped with telecoils, reducing background noise and improving clarity.

Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)

Portable systems (headsets, receivers) that amplify sound for individuals with hearing loss, often used alongside or instead of hearing loops.

Visual Sound Technology

Tools that translate music into visual or tactile experiences, such as LED light systems, vibration platforms, or haptic devices.

Sightlines

Clear lines of vision to interpreters, captions, and stage. Good sightlines ensure Deaf audiences can see both the performance and accessibility services without obstruction.

Accessibility Icons / Pictograms

Standardised symbols that indicate available services (e.g., Sign Language, captions, wheelchair access). Used on signage, websites, and programs.

Real Time Text (RTT)

Instant written communication displayed on screens or devices, used for announcements, schedule changes, or emergency alerts.

Access Requests

Specific accommodations requested by audience members (e.g., reserved seating near interpreters, captioning devices, tactile equipment).

Annual Access Statement

A published report summarising accessibility measures, statistics, and feedback from audiences, demonstrating accountability and progress.

Deaf Led Programming

Events created, performed, or directed by Deaf artists, ensuring authentic representation and cultural leadership.

Emergency Visual Alerts

Flashing lights, text notifications, or other visual signals used to communicate urgent safety information during concerts.



Chapter 4

Complex event – European Capital of Culture





Introduction

The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) is one of the most complex cultural frameworks in Europe. It is not a single festival or a collection of isolated events, but a long-term cultural process that reshapes how culture is produced, communicated, governed, and experienced across a city and beyond. An ECoC brings together artists, cultural institutions, civil society, public authorities, and international partners, with the ambition of generating lasting cultural, social, and urban impact.

Since its launch in 1985, the ECoC initiative has evolved from a symbolic celebration of European culture into a strategic policy instrument. Contemporary ECoCs are expected to demonstrate sustainability, participation, social cohesion, and legacy. **Accessibility and inclusion are now central to these expectations, reflecting European and international frameworks that frame access to culture as a right and a key dimension of democratic cultural life.**

From the perspective of D/HoH audiences, the scale and complexity of an ECoC present specific challenges. Participation in an ECoC involves engagement with information, public debate, education, governance processes, and informal cultural life across an extended period of time. Accessibility must, therefore, be understood as a continuous condition that enables sustained participation throughout the entire ECoC process.

This chapter focuses on how Deaf accessibility can be embedded into the organisational structures, workflows, and decision-making processes of a European Capital of Culture, at the candidacy, implementation, and legacy years.





Legal and Policy Framework

Before discussing methods, it is important to clarify that accessibility is rooted in legal frameworks and major European policy priorities, for example (the table below): >>

For organisers, the practical implication is clear: accessibility commitments must be written into all stages of preparing a cultural event of an ECoC’s scale, including:

- > Contracts
- > Funding criteria
- > Procurement procedures
- > Public communication

Treating Deaf accessibility as optional increases legal and reputational risks, as well as the risk of programme failure. Treating it as a core professional standard stabilises delivery and increases trust.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)	> Recognises the right of persons with disabilities to participate in cultural life on an equal basis with others. > Requires access to cultural materials, events, and venues in accessible formats, including Sign Languages.
At an EU level	> Accessibility is established as a horizontal principle across public policy and cultural funding. > Implications include requirements for accessible public procurement, digital environments, communication standards, and public services.
Implications for ECoCs	> Accessibility must be embedded in contracts, funding criteria, procurement procedures, and public communication.



Accessibility as an Organising Principle



European Capitals of Culture operate as interconnected cultural systems rather than closed programmes. Activities span multiple years and sectors, linking artistic production with education, tourism, urban planning, social inclusion, and international cooperation. Cultural experiences take place across a wide range of settings, including cultural venues, public space, neighbourhoods, heritage sites, and temporary locations.

For Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences, barriers often emerge cumulatively rather than through a single moment of exclusion. Limited access to information may prevent initial engagement; inaccessible public discussions can restrict participation in decision-making; inconsistent provision of Sign Language interpretation or captioning across events creates uncertainty and fatigue. When accessibility is fragmented, trust in the programme as a whole is undermined.

Because an ECoC functions as a living system, accessibility cannot be addressed through isolated services

delivered on request. While access services such as Sign Language interpretation and captioning are essential, treating accessibility solely as a service positions Deaf participants as exceptions rather than integral contributors to cultural life.

A more sustainable approach is to treat accessibility as an **organising principle**. This means that accessibility shapes programme design, scheduling, budgeting, communication, and teamwork from the outset. Sign Language and visual communication are understood as default elements rather than adaptations, and Deaf participants are recognised as cultural agents rather than passive beneficiaries.

When accessibility functions as an organising principle, it is closely linked to artistic quality. Clear visual structures, thoughtful pacing, and inclusive formats tend to enhance cultural experiences for all audiences. Accessibility therefore expands creative possibilities rather than constraining them.

Accessibility
as an organising principle affects:

- > **Scheduling:** early booking of interpreters, rehearsal time, and predictable access provision.
- > **Budgeting:** accessibility as a standard cost line, supported by central and project-level resources.
- > **Communication:** access information available from the first public announcement, using visual and Sign Language formats.



ACCESSIBILITY AS AN ISOLATED SERVICE VS AN ORGANISING PRINCIPLE		
AREA	ACCESSIBILITY AS AN ISOLATED SERVICE	ACCESSIBILITY AS AN ORGANISING PRINCIPLE
Scheduling	Interpreters or captioning added late, often after programmes are fixed.	Access needs integrated into scheduling from the start, including early booking of interpreters and rehearsal time.
	Access depends on ad hoc requests or last-minute decisions.	Access provision is predictable and consistent across the programme.
Budgeting	Accessibility treated as an extra or exceptional cost.	Accessibility included as a standard budget line at both central and project levels.
	Access services funded unevenly or only when problems arise.	Dedicated resources and clear funding responsibilities support reliable delivery.
Communication	Access information added after promotion is launched, if at all.	Access information visible from the first announcement and across all channels.
	Reliance on text-only or sound-based communication.	Systematic use of visual formats and Sign Language as professional norms.





Building an ECoC Accessibility Strategy

At the scale of a European Capital of Culture, accessibility requires an explicit, shared, and resourced strategy. This helps hundreds of events and dozens of partners work with a common understanding.

A SAMPLE OF AN ECOC ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY:	
1. Purpose and language	> A clear statement recognising Deaf people and Sign Language. > Accessibility framed as a programme quality, not a side policy.
2. Coordination	> Appointment of an accessibility coordinator. > Establishment of an Accessibility Working Group, including Deaf advisors.
3. Co-creation	> Formal partnerships with Deaf organisations and community representatives from the beginning. > Deaf involvement in planning, delivery, and evaluation.
4. Standards and Tools	> A shared Accessibility Toolkit for all partners. > Guidance on interpretation, captioning, visibility, and communication.
5. Budget	> A dedicated accessibility budget or central access fund. > Mandatory accessibility planning within individual project budgets.

ECoc Accessibility Strategy 5 key steps				
1	2	3	4	5
Purpose and language	Coordination	Co-creation	Standards and Tools	Budget
A clear statement recognising deaf people and sign language. Accessibility framed as a programme quality, not a side policy.	Appointment of an accessibility coordinator. Establishment of an Accessibility Working Group, including Deaf advisors.	Formal partnerships with Deaf organisations and community representatives from the beginning. Deaf involvement in planning, delivery, and evaluation.	A shared Accessibility Toolkit for all partners. Guidance on interpretation, captioning, visibility, and communication.	A dedicated accessibility budget or central access fund. Mandatory accessibility planning within individual project budgets.



Co-Creating with Deaf Communities



Co-creation is often referenced in cultural policy, but it becomes meaningful only when it is operationalised. In an ECoC, co-creation with Deaf communities should begin before the programme exists, during the bid and concept development stages. Organisers can convene a Deaf-led consultation round that is framed as a creative conversation: what kinds of cultural experiences feel welcoming, what barriers are most exhausting, and what kind of visibility matters. As the programme develops, organisers can establish an **accessibility team** that includes Deaf Advisors and Sign Language Interpreters, meeting on a regular basis (for example, monthly during preparation and more frequently during peak delivery). The function of this team is not to correct mistakes at the end, but to shape decisions upstream. When the team is integrated early, it can influence choices such as which flagship projects must be accessible by default, which access services should be standard across the programme, and which communication formats should be prioritised.

Workshops and labs offer another pathway. An ECoC can host an annual or seasonal Accessibility Lab where Deaf artists, interpreters, technical staff, and producers experiment with formats such as visual sound, Sign Language performance, caption aesthetics, and interpreter integration. The value of such a lab is that it shifts accessibility from compliance to innovation. It also builds relationships and trust, which are essential at the ECoC scale.

Co-creation also means creating access to **decision-making** spaces. If public debates, civic meetings, or co-design sessions are part of the ECoC methodology, they must also be accessible. Otherwise, Deaf participation remains confined to the audience role. Ensuring Sign Language and captions in these spaces is therefore not a technical detail, but a condition for cultural democracy.

What this means in practice:

- Deaf people must be involved before formats are finalised.
- Consultation should be continuous, not symbolic.
- Co-creation strengthens both access and artistic quality.



Municipalities as Partners



Municipalities are central actors in any European Capital of Culture. They manage public space, permits, transport, signage, safety systems, and communication channels that shape everyday cultural experience. For Deaf accessibility, collaboration with municipal technical and cultural services is essential. A joint municipal–ECoC accessibility protocol can clarify standards for public-space events, visual emergency communication, staff training, and accessible information.

Accessibility walk-throughs of key venues and public spaces, conducted with Deaf advisors and municipal staff, also help identify barriers related to lighting, sightlines, signage, and crowd management before events take place. The aim is to prevent accessibility problems before they appear.



Organisational Responsibility and Internal Coordination



Clear responsibility is essential in complex organisational structures. Establishing a dedicated **accessibility coordination role** prevents the diffusion of responsibility and ensures continuity and institutional memory. At the same time, accessibility must be shared across departments. Programme managers, communication teams, technical staff, and partners all contribute to accessibility outcomes. Regular internal communication and training help embed accessibility into everyday workflows.

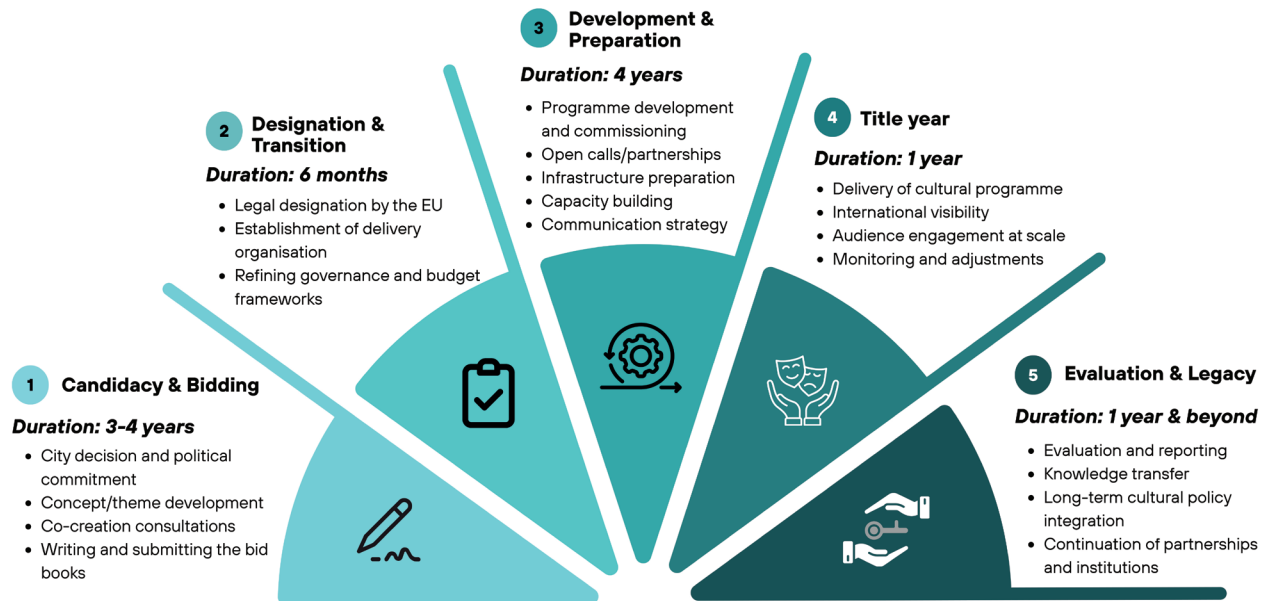
Deaf advisors play a crucial role by bringing experiential knowledge that cannot be replaced by guidelines alone. Their ongoing involvement helps identify subtle barriers related to pacing, visual overload, or communication practices.



Accessibility Across the Full Programme Timeline



A European Capital of Culture evolves through several distinct phases, each with implications for accessibility.



During the **Candidacy & bidding phase**, accessibility should be embedded in the programme's overarching vision and values. This is also the stage where organisers can map the Deaf community structure: local Deaf organisations, Deaf artists, interpreter services, accessibility technology providers, Deaf schools, and relevant NGOs. Mapping is practical because it identifies partners, resource gaps, and realistic capacities early.

As the programme enters its **Development & Preparation phase**, all the way to the Title year, accessibility must be translated into requirements for partners and collaborators. Open calls can include accessibility expectations written in plain language: what access services are expected, what information applicants must provide, and what support the ECoC will offer. A practical approach is to run short “accessibility sessions” for applicants – short sessions where organisers explain access expectations and answer questions.

During this period, accessibility becomes a matter of logistics, coordination, and timing. Sign Language interpretation, captioning, and visual information require advanced planning and professional collaboration. A useful practice is to require that every funded project submit a short accessibility delivery plan as part of its production timeline, specifying who is responsible, what services are booked, and how they will be communicated to audiences.

Finally, the **Evaluation & Legacy phase** offer an opportunity to reflect on what has been learned. Documenting successes and challenges help build institutional knowledge and supports future cultural initiatives. For Deaf accessibility, this phase is crucial in ensuring that progress made during the ECoC is not lost once the title year ends.

What this means in practice:

- > Accessibility planning must begin early.
- > Every funded project in the artistic programme should submit an accessibility delivery plan.
- > Learning should be documented and shared.



Communication, Information, and the Experience of Belonging



For D/HoH audiences, accessibility begins with communication. The way information is communicated shapes expectations and influences whether participation feels possible or welcoming.

In a European Capital of Culture, communication flows through many channels: websites, social media, printed materials, press coverage, and informal networks. An accessible ECoC communication strategy integrates Sign Language videos, captions, and visual clarity across all these channels. Accessibility information should be visible at the point of booking, without requiring personal disclosure.

One effective practice is to create a short **Sign Language “welcome to the ECoC” video** series that introduces the programme, explains how to find access information, and presents Deaf-visible faces as part of the ECoC community. This can be updated seasonally and used across channels.

Another practical step is to ensure that **ticketing and booking processes** do not exclude Deaf users. Access services should be visible at the point of booking, and audiences should not have to make personal disclosure to obtain basic access. If access requires advance requests, the process should be simple, visual, and available via SMS or messaging.

Because ECoCs attract **international visitors**, the use of International Sign can extend accessibility beyond national borders. Providing International Sign at selected conferences, debates, and flagship events supports cross-cultural exchange among Deaf participants and strengthens the European dimension of the programme.



Public Space, Safety, and the Reality of Urban Events



Public-space events are central to many ECoCs but pose specific challenges for Deaf participants. Sound-based announcements, changing environments, and large crowds can limit access.

Visual safety communication, trained staff, clear signage, and accessible emergency protocols are essential. Attention must also be paid to lighting, smoke effects, and stage design, which directly affect visual access to interpreters and captions.



The Case of Larnaka 2030



Larnaka 2030 has developed an accessibility and inclusion strategy conceived as a core governance tool rather than a supplementary policy. The strategy operates across three interconnected levels:

1. Community Outreach and Participation

This level focuses on co-creation, shared governance, and active involvement of disability communities.

- > Formal co-design processes with Deaf organisations and disability NGOs.
- > Establishment of a permanent Inclusion Committee, composed of disabled and Deaf artists, accessibility experts, disability organisations, and cultural professionals.
- > Continuous involvement of lived experience in planning, delivery, and evaluation.
- > Partnerships with local and European networks to support advocacy, exchange, and visibility.

2. Capacity Building and Sector Development

This level strengthens institutions' and professionals' ability to consistently deliver accessibility.

- > Training for cultural professionals, municipal staff, and event organisers.
- > Support mechanisms for Deaf and disabled artists (residencies, commissioned projects, mentoring).
- > Emphasis on legacy and ensuring that acquired skills and knowledge remains in the city/region beyond the title year.

3. Inclusive and Accessible Cultural Programming

This level focuses on access as a core quality of cultural content and experience.

- > Systematic integration of Sign Language, captioning, and visual communication across the programme.

- Adaptation of venues and public spaces in collaboration with municipal services.
- Visibility and representation of disabled artists in flagship projects.

Across all levels, accessibility is framed as a condition for cultural democracy, supported by shared responsibility and strong municipal collaboration.



Examples of other ECoCs



European Capitals of Culture rarely achieve Deaf accessibility through a single initiative. Successful approaches usually combine several consistent practices, such as embedding Deaf-led work within

flagship programming or building structured partnerships with Deaf organisations. Below is a list of previous ECoCs where focused was carefully placed upon accessibility:

EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE	KEY ACCESSIBILITY FOCUS
Liverpool 2008	Long-term co-creation with Deaf and disability organisations through community-based projects and education programmes.
Marseille–Provence 2013	Accessibility linked to public space and large-scale outdoor programming; highlighting lessons learnt from uneven coordination and delivery across partners.
Aarhus 2017	Integration of accessibility in rethining cultural formats and institutional roles; projects co-created with disabled people.
Leeuwarden–Fryslân 2018	Use of Language and identity as a starting point for recognising sign language as part of cultural diversity.
Matera 2019	Accessibility in heritage sites and non-standard venues.
Kaunas 2022	Visual storytelling combined with capacity building for local cultural operators.

Across these examples,
several shared observations
emerge:

- Successful inclusion of Deaf people tends to occur when accessibility is linked to artistic concepts such as participation, visibility, language, and community engagement.
- Where accessibility is embedded early and supported institutionally, it becomes more coherent and visible.
- Conversely, when accessibility is left to individual organisers without coordination, it remains uneven and fragile.



Learning, Capacity Building, and Legacy



As mentioned above, one of the most valuable outcomes of a European Capital of Culture is **long-term capacity building within the cultural sector**. Accessibility work carried out during the ECoC should strengthen local cultural ecosystems beyond the title year.

Training staff, artists, and technicians in Deaf awareness and accessible practices builds confidence and competence that extend beyond the title year. Partnerships with Deaf organisations and interpreter networks strengthen local infrastructures and create opportunities for continued collaboration. In this way, accessibility becomes part of the ECoC's legacy, shaping cultural practice well into the future.

A practical legacy approach is to publish an **annual accessibility report** or “access statement” that documents what was delivered, what was learned, and what will continue after the current year. When such reporting includes Deaf voices – through Sign Language video reflections or Deaf-authored commentary – it strengthens accountability and institutional learning.



Learning, Capacity Building, and Legacy



Effective promotion of cultural events addressed to Deaf communities is not a matter of simply “translating” promotional materials. It requires early planning, close cooperation with Deaf people, and the use of visual and community-based communication channels that are natural and trusted within Deaf culture.

1. Cooperation as the starting point

The fundamental condition for effective promotion is **establishing cooperation with Deaf people at the earliest stage of planning communication activities**. Deaf community members are best placed to advise on how to reach their audience, which channels are effective, and what types of content build trust and interest. In practice, this means:

- > consulting Deaf people on promotional content,
- > jointly planning communication strategies and channels,

- > involving Deaf people directly in promotional materials (videos, reels, announcements).

2. Channels for reaching Deaf communities

The most effective approach is to work simultaneously across several communication channels, including:

- > cooperation with Deaf Role Models (vloggers, content creators, community broadcasters),
- > active engagement with local Deaf communities (foundations, associations, sports clubs, religious groups),
- > collaboration with Deaf and hearing sign language interpreters,
- > regular publication of information on institutional channels in visually accessible formats (captions and sign language interpretation).

Consistent accessible communication encourages Deaf audiences to follow institutional channels long-term, rather than engage only with single events.

3. Format and visual communication

Promotion aimed at Deaf audiences should be based on visual content, such as:

- > short videos,
- > reels,
- > animations,
- > graphics.

Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are particularly effective. Content should be short, dynamic, and visually clear, as long promotional videos are generally less engaging for Deaf audiences. It is also important to:

- > use appropriate hashtags,
- > tag Deaf community groups and leaders,
- > maintain consistent visual identity across materials.

4. Credibility and trust

Within Deaf communities, peer leaders and content creators are significantly more trusted than formal institutional communication. Cooperation with them enables direct access to audiences and increases genuine interest in cultural events.

Including Deaf people in promotional videos (e.g. reels announcing events) substantially enhances authenticity. Positive and light elements—such as natural facial expressions, sign language gestures, humour, and visual expressiveness—also contribute to higher engagement.

5. Timing and continuity

Promotional activities should begin well in advance of the event and be repeated regularly. One-off announcements are insufficient. Effective promotion is an ongoing process that:

- > builds anticipation,
- > reminds audiences of upcoming events,
- > reinforces the message that the event is genuinely accessible.

6. Complementary outreach activities

Before major cultural events, it is beneficial to organise:

- > workshops,
- > introductory meetings,
- > information sessions,

developed in cooperation with Deaf people. Such activities help reach individuals who may have limited access to the internet or social media.

Printed materials and small giveaways (leaflets, promotional items) should not be overlooked, as they can also serve as effective tools for outreach and positive engagement.

7. Making accessibility visible

Accessibility should be clearly communicated already at the promotional stage, including information about:

- the presence of sign language interpreters,
- opportunities for visual communication (e.g. video-based interaction),
- contact options via WhatsApp or Messenger,
- clear signage and appropriate lighting of the venue,
- the use of plain and accessible language in posters and materials.



Box: Common mistakes in promoting events to Deaf audiences

- starting promotional activities too late,
- lack of consultation with Deaf people,
- publishing materials without captions or sign language interpretation,
- relying on a single communication channel,
- producing long, information-heavy videos,
- declaring accessibility without visually demonstrating it,
- treating promotion as a one-off activity.

Checklist for promotion and communication teams

- ☐ Were Deaf people involved in planning the promotional activities?
- ☐ Do promotional materials include captions and/or sign language interpretation?
- ☐ Are short-form visual materials used (reels, animations)?
- ☐ Was cooperation established with Deaf influencers or community leaders?
- ☐ Did promotion start sufficiently early?
- ☐ Is accessibility clearly and visually communicated?
- ☐ Is plain, accessible language and clear visual design used?





Checklist

Deaf Accessibility in a European Capital of Culture

A. Vision & Responsibility

- ☐ Deaf accessibility explicitly stated as a right and programme quality
- ☐ Deaf / D/HoH audiences explicitly named (not only “diverse audiences”)
- ☐ Accessibility embedded in contracts, funding criteria, procurement, and communication
- ☐ Designated accessibility coordinator with decision-making authority

B. Accessibility as an Organising Principle

- ☐ Accessibility planned together with artistic content
- ☐ Sign Language and visual communication treated as default (where relevant)
- ☐ Accessibility integrated into:
 - ☐ scheduling
 - ☐ budgeting
 - ☐ communication

C. Governance & Co-Creation

- ☐ Deaf organisations involved from candidacy & bidding phase
- ☐ Deaf advisors involved before formats are finalised
- ☐ Accessibility Working Group / Inclusion Committee in place

D. Strategy, Standards & Budget

- ☐ ECoC Accessibility Strategy Developed
- ☐ Accessibility Toolkit available to project leaders/curators
- ☐ Dedicated accessibility budget or central access fund
- ☐ Accessibility included as a standard cost line in project budgets

E. Programme Development & Delivery

- ☐ Accessibility requirements included in open calls and commissions
- ☐ Accessibility support offered to applicants
- ☐ Every funded project submits an accessibility delivery plan
- ☐ Interpreters and captioning booked early, with rehearsal time
- ☐ Access provision is predictable and consistent across events

F. Communication & Audience Engagement

- ☐ Sign Language videos and captions used across communication channels
- ☐ Ticketing and booking accessible without personal disclosure
- ☐ SMS / messaging options available for access communication
- ☐ International Sign used for selected international events

G. Reaching Deaf Audiences

- ☐ Promotion through Deaf organisations and networks
- ☐ Sign Language video invitations used
- ☐ Deaf ambassadors or mediators engaged
- ☐ Accessible formats predictable enough to encourage repeat attendance

H. Public Space & Safety

- ☐ Visual safety and emergency communication in public-space events
- ☐ Staff trained to communicate visually and clearly
- ☐ Accessibility walk-throughs conducted with Deaf advisors
- ☐ Lighting, sightlines, smoke, and stage design assessed for visual access

I. Evaluation & Legacy

- ☐ Accessibility monitored throughout the programme
- ☐ Deaf participants involved in evaluation and feedback
- ☐ Learning documented and shared
- ☐ Accessibility knowledge and partnerships retained beyond title year



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Count me In (Increasing the participation of Deaf people in the perception of culture)
Project Number – 101173224



Panos

REPORT:

Culture Accessibility for Deaf People

Manual for Cultural Organizers

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