



NZSL Interpreter Workforce Coordination Final Project Report

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Commissioned by the New Zealand Office for Disability Issues

July 2022

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Executive Summary

This project investigated overseas models of interpreter workforce and service coordination in three countries that have similarities to New Zealand in size, government infrastructure, and history of interpreting services: Norway, Ireland, and the Netherlands. All three have service providers supported by the state to operate. The report identifies features of their service models that might inform national provision of interpreting services in New Zealand.

Norway's population size and density are similar to New Zealand and Ireland. The ratio of interpreters to Deaf service users is the highest of the three countries, with an estimated 3.5 Deaf per interpreter, and a workforce close to 700. The core mode of service provision is salaried interpreter positions in a national network of Assistive Technology Centres (ATC), under the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV). In this model, geographical coverage across the country is achieved. In many ATCs, more than one interpreter is employed, providing a collegial environment. Norwegian Sign Language gained legal status as an official language in 2021, but rights to interpreting are supported mainly by accessibility provisions under the National Insurance Act, which has been in place for many years. Interpreters are qualified by a Bachelor's degree, and no Registry exists.

The Netherlands population is almost four times that of New Zealand and its small size creates high population density. The ratio of interpreters per Deaf is between the other two countries, with an estimated 12-15 service users per interpreter. Informants report that demand exceeds supply. The service provision model is a central referral agency relying on freelancers; Tolkcontact is a commercial entity contracted under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Funding for interpreting, which is sourced from three key Ministries, is managed by a government agency, with interpreters invoicing directly to the government funding stream(s). While some private interpreting agencies exist, the largest proportion of requests and bookings go through Tolkcontact. Nederlandse Gebarentaal (NGT) was legally recognised in 2020, but rights to interpreting were legally supported earlier through education and accessibility provisions. Interpreters are qualified by a Bachelor's degree, and a Registry of Sign Language Interpreting (SLI) regulates qualifications, while a professional association supports advocacy and development of the profession; both bodies employ administrators and policy developers.

Ireland's population size and density are similar to New Zealand and Norway. The ratio of interpreters per Deaf persons is similar to the Netherlands, with an estimated 14 Deaf service users per interpreter. The state supported service model is a central referral agency, Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS), which is funded (indirectly) under the Department of Social Protection. Private interpreting agencies also exist, and service requests made to SLIS are referred directly to individual freelancers and sometimes to other agencies. Arrangements and payment are negotiated directly between interpreter and agency or users. SLIS runs the national video Irish Remote Interpreting Service, (IRIS), which employs interpreters on staff. Interpreting demand exceeds workforce capacity and is a challenge in lower population areas and after hours.

Irish Sign Language (ISL) gained legal recognition in 2017 (effective from 2020), introducing a requirement for interpreters in public service settings to be qualified and registered. Rights

to interpreting are also supported by provisions of the Equal Status Act and were boosted by the National Disability Strategy from 2017. Interpreters are qualified by a Bachelor's degree, and the Registry of SLI was established via state funding managed by SLIS.

Key features of these service provision models which have potential relevance to New Zealand are identified as follows:

1. An **efficient digital interface** (accessed online and as an app) handles user requests, booking arrangements and invoicing for interpreters in the Netherlands. This platform affords Deaf individuals' more autonomy in monitoring their interpreting entitlement and making service requests, and streamlines booking, client verification, and invoicing for interpreters – reducing their administrative workload.
2. In Ireland and the Netherlands, the state has supported the **establishment of a Registry** of sign language interpreters to regulate qualifications, manage a complaints process, and to monitor PD requirements. In Ireland, for example, the Irish Sign Language Act mandates that SLIs working in the public sector are registered, resulting in establishment of a Registry to implement this requirement.
3. **Salaried positions** (as per public service employment conditions) and clusters of staff interpreters in Norway provide attractive employment and career conditions, including collegial support and mentoring in the workplace. This contributes to workforce retention. Employment of interpreters by a government agency with offices across the country ensures wider geographical service availability and coverage of short assignments that tend to be less attractive to freelancers.
4. **Interpreter shortage** and uneven distribution is being addressed in Ireland by expanding home-based **video remote interpreting** to better utilise interpreters living outside the capital city, and to serve a wider area. Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) also affords more access to Deaf people unable to book an onsite interpreter due to time or place restrictions. **Condensed training** of heritage (or CODA) signers is also being considered as a short-term approach to expanding the workforce in Ireland.
5. **Freelance rates** in Norway and Netherlands are largely set by the government via their centralised service provision model, whereas in Ireland freelancer fees are determined by individual interpreters and/or the paying user. In the Netherlands and Norway, remuneration is considered comparable with other professions (such as teaching), and interpreters can earn a decent living.
6. **Choice**: the Norwegian model of employed interpreters (and a large number of interpreters) offers Deaf users some scope to express preference between members of a local team of interpreters, although less so in smaller areas. Conversely, salaried interpreters have less choice over which assignments they undertake, since they are required to cover any requests during their scheduled hours. In the Netherlands, an app which mediates bookings allows Deaf consumers to either submit a booking request to the agency, or to directly contact a preferred interpreter listed with Tolkcontact. Similarly, the app allows interpreters to select their assignments.
7. **Governance and stakeholder input**: regular consultation with Deaf community and interpreter representatives regarding policy, service development, and governance of service (at local and national levels) was identified as important and seems to be most formalised in Norway and Ireland. In the Netherlands, the SLI Association and the Registry are well-established and appear to have strong role in advocacy and policy relating to SLI on a wider level.

Introduction and scope

The purpose of this project was to investigate and describe international models of interpreter workforce and service coordination in countries that are comparable to New Zealand in population, government infrastructure, and history of professional interpreting services. The report identifies features of such national service models that might inform and improve national provision of interpreting services and working conditions for interpreters in New Zealand.

This work follows from previous investigations concerning interpreting commissioned by Office for Disability Issues (ODI) including a Review of NZSL Interpreter Standards¹, Development of a Registry of NZSL Interpreters², and Developing NZSL Interpreter Standards³.

Norway, the Netherlands, and the Republic of Ireland were selected as national case studies. The Netherlands has a considerably larger and more dense population than New Zealand, while Norway and Ireland are similar to New Zealand. The models of service provision in these countries differ in terms of how government infrastructure supports interpreting provision and how interpreters are coordinated and contracted.

Information was collected by interviews with key informants and examination of documents and websites in each of these countries (see Appendix 1).

Based on the information gathered, this report will

1. provide an overview of workforce and service delivery systems in each country;
2. highlight their respective strengths and challenges in relation to coverage and coordination of SLI service provision and the provision of professional development, mentoring and career pathways for interpreter;
3. note points of potential relevance to interpreter service design in New Zealand

Out of scope for this project was to capture service user experiences of the systems in the case study countries. Key informants (who are professionals associated with interpreting services) have offered observations about strengths and weaknesses of their systems, however we cannot provide any formal evaluation of the systems reported. Also out of scope was detailed comparison with the current New Zealand service model.

¹Fitzgerald and Associates. 2017. "A Review of NZSL Interpreting Standards." Report commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development.

²Fitzgerald and Associates. 2017. "A Review of NZSL Interpreting Standards." Report commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development.

³ Vale, M. and R. McKee. 2020. "Developing NZSL Interpreting Standards Project Report." Report commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development.

Methodology

This report describes and compares how interpreter provisions are managed in three different European countries in terms of characteristics such as ease of access to the service, deaf user entitlements, interpreter qualification requirements, funding, and how interpreters are engaged.

Information was gathered from a variety of sources from each country - Norway, the Netherlands, and Republic of Ireland. The main source of information was interviews with nine individuals involved in or closely familiar with the operation of the SLI system in their country (see Appendix 1). The interviewees included managers of the booking or referral agencies (Norway, Ireland), those involved in policy development (Ireland, the Netherlands), interpreters (Norway, the Netherlands), and interpreter education and registration providers (Ireland, the Netherlands). Overall, five interview sessions were conducted (most were interviewed in pairs) and interviewees were asked to fact check our summaries of interviews for accuracy.

Other sources of information included official reports and PowerPoints that informants felt comfortable to share. Among these official documents are an evaluation of the performance of the remote interpreting service IRIS in Ireland from 2019 as well as PowerPoints that illustrate the structure and scope of operations of the Norwegian government department NAV that were written for an international audience. Background information such as the year of sign language laws, national demographics, and details on informants' backgrounds were gathered using online internet searches. A comprehensive survey report on sign language interpreting in 45 countries of Europe was also consulted for factual information⁴.

Throughout this report, we use the abbreviation 'SLI' for 'sign language interpreting'. In the field, SLTI is often used to include translation, however this report focuses primarily on interpreting.

We note that interviews were conducted in spoken English, which is not the native language of our informants in Norway and Netherlands. Quotes are in their own words.

⁴ De Wit, Maya. 2020. A comprehensive guide to Sign Language Interpreting in Europe, 2020 Edition. Self published.

Norway

Facts about the national context of Norway

Population size	5,467,439
Density of population	15 per km ²
Size of the Deaf community	5,000
Deaf who use interpreters	2,400 bookers (includes deafblind and HoH)
Workforce size	Approx. 700: 200 interpreters employed by NAV + 500 freelancers
Interpreter to Deaf user ratio	3.5 Deaf clients per interpreter ⁵
Interpreter qualifications	University degree in SLI (includes speech to text & interpreting for deafblind and hard of hearing)
Main mode of work	50% salaried positions, 50% freelance
Registration system	No register
Year SLI association established	1978
Legal basis for interpreter provision	National Insurance Act - everyone has a right to an interpreter to participate in all situations of daily life. Norwegian Sign Language gained legal status as an official language of Norway in 2021.
Name of SLI interpreting service	NAV Tolketjeneste (NAV interpreting service)

Norway's population size and density are similar to New Zealand and Ireland. The ratio of interpreters per Deaf persons is by far the highest of the three countries we looked at, with an estimated 3.5 Deaf individuals per interpreter (based on figures supplied for interpreters and Deaf interpreter users). The main model of interpreting service provision is salaried interpreter positions based within a national network of Assistive Technology Centres, under the government agency NAV (which has a similar range of responsibilities as Ministry of Social Development). In this model, geographical service coverage is achieved, even in lower population areas. In many ATCs, more than one interpreter is employed, providing a collegial work environment. Norwegian Sign Language gained legal status as an official language in 2021, but rights to interpreting are supported mainly by accessibility provisions under the National Insurance Act. Interpreters are qualified by a Bachelor's degree, and no

⁵ Ratios were calculated using the number of Deaf interpreter users divided by the number of available interpreters

Registry of SLI exists. A professional association of SLI actively supports professional development opportunities.

Informants

The information presented in this section on Norway is based on official documents from NAV (such as PowerPoint presentations) and interviews with four informants:

Linda Stadshaug and *Berit Søgård* are national co-managers of the sign language interpreter booking service at NAV (The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service). Both are qualified interpreters and have worked for NAV for many years as interpreters and in managerial and coordinating positions. Their relatively recent appointments as national co-managers represent the first time the service has been managed at a high level by trained interpreters.

Linn Froyna and *Ina Rostrup* are two interpreters who are employed in salaried positions with NAV, in different regions (one metropolitan, one regional). Ina started at NAV right after graduating 10 years ago and Linn worked as a freelance interpreter for six years before taking a full-time position at NAV.

Interpreter workforce situation

Sign Language interpreters must hold a Bachelor's degree in SLI to be employed at NAV. The degree was established 20 years ago. Before that, interpreters completed a one-year course which was later extended to two years. The degree covers Norwegian Sign Language (NSL) interpreting, interpreting for deafblind, support for hard of hearing as well as notetaking and transcription. The degree is offered at 3 universities across the country: Trondheim, Oslo, and Bergen. (Reportedly, there is some difficulty with staffing all three programmes.) On average, each year, about 60 students start the degree and 40 complete it, with some graduates finding jobs outside the interpreting field.

NAV currently employs about 200 interpreters on staff and has about 500 freelance interpreters on the books - 400 of these were paid by NAV in 2020. NAV is the only provider of NSL interpreters and while some interpreters may work directly for private companies, the majority of interpreters work for NAV either as an employee or a freelancer. Employed and freelance interpreters are paid from different budgets, which means there is a limit to how many interpreters can be employed. Staff interpreters enable NAV to ensure interpreting provision is covered in accordance with strict rules around maximum working hours for public service employees, while freelancers are engaged to cover additional assignments that staffers cannot cover.

Freelancers enjoy the flexibility that allows them to control their working hours and select the jobs they take. Linn, who had worked as a freelance interpreter for 7 years before taking up a full-time position at NAV, highlighted this as a benefit.

...you have more ability to not necessarily decide when you want to work, but you can decide when you want to have time off. So I used to have two

months of summer vacation, maybe three, but then I had to save up money because when I didn't work, I don't get paid. (Linn)

As the quote indicates, one drawback of freelancing is that it does not include sick or holiday pay, which NAV employees receive. Employment laws further cover 9 months maternity leave at full income, senior days for older staff members in the form of extra holiday days to allow them to rest more and keep working for longer, as well as the ability to negotiate a reduction of work hours (e.g., 50%). On the downside, employees cannot take 2 months off over summer and have limited control of their work schedule and assignments.

PD and supervision for interpreters

Norwegian sign language interpreters do not have a Registry which regulates qualifications and there is no formal requirement for interpreters to engage in a set number of professional development hours to continue to work. Instead, decisions about what kind of professional development is appropriate for NAV staff interpreters are made at a local level. Management at each SLI unit identifies needs for their region, be it in speech-to-text, deafblind interpreting, or any other field, and determines who should engage in the relevant courses offered.

For employed interpreters, professional development or mentoring also happens informally at their assistive technology centre. Thus, Ina mentioned that her immediate managers are both interpreters themselves and that they would sometimes accompany them on assignments to provide support and feedback.

In my service, like the two people that are in charge of - the middle, not the boss, but the two other people [...] They sometimes come out with us on assignments. [...] and guide us and see if we can improve something or if I want them to look at something specific in my sign language or whatever they can come. But that is not like, 'I want you to see how good I am' sort of situation ... it is to develop myself. (Ina)

Linn described how the interpreters at her centre try to get together regularly to practice relevant seasonal vocabulary.

So each month we have a focus. Like in December, we had December signs and we went to how to translate songs like the typical Christmas songs into sign language. And we talked about what other religions celebrate, you know, not Christmas, but Hanukkah and stuff. Then what are the signs for that? But sadly, we don't get to do that as much as we would like to, because, yeah, the assignments always come first.[...] Once a week, we have the staff meeting and once a month we try to have the more specific sign language or like, um, meeting. (Linn)

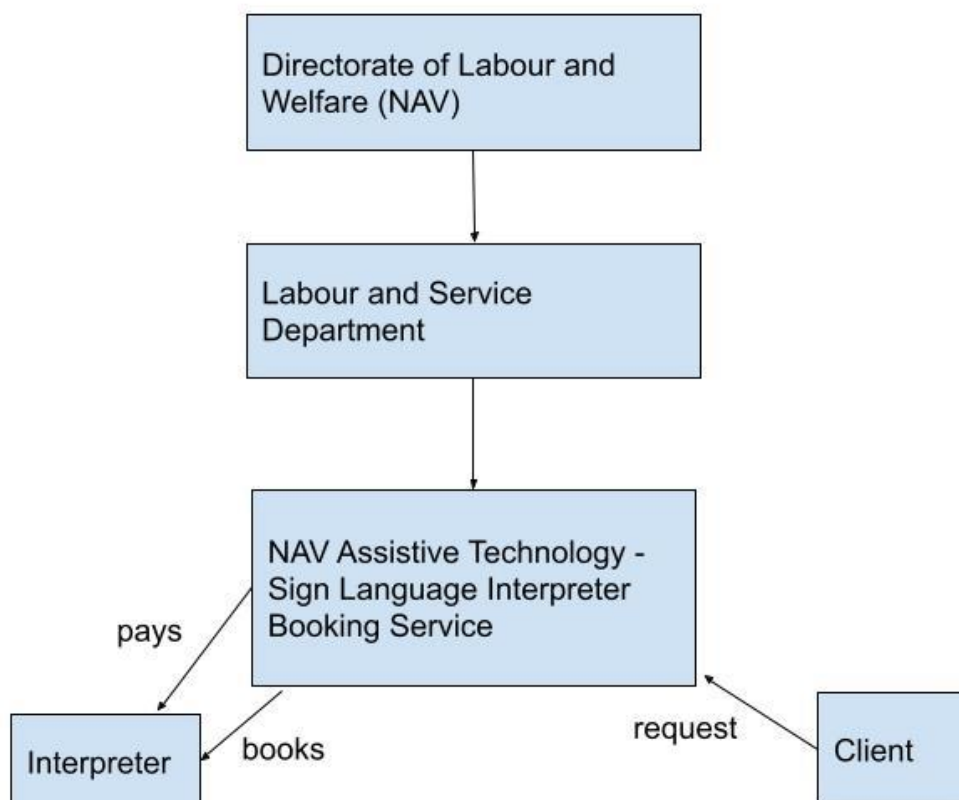
As Linn's comment indicates, there is an issue with this approach, though, as these types of activities are often neglected when there are too many assignments to attend.

Other ways in which interpreters keep their skills up, especially over the summer months where there is not much work, is through self-study. This can involve reading relevant research articles or watching Norwegian Deaf TV or movies with signing to learn new signs.

National Interpreter booking service

Structure of the organisation

The sign language interpreter booking service NAV Tolketjenesten ('The interpreting service'), locally referred to as NAV, belongs to the Assistive Technology Centres which are part of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV). The National Insurance Act ensures that everyone whose functional capacity is permanently impaired has a right to receive suitable support (assistive devices) that allows them to work and engage in public life and that the services offered are the same across the country. Assistive devices can include anything from wheelchairs to hearing aids as well as sign language interpreters. The provision of assistive devices and human services are managed by Assistive Technology Centres (ATCs). There are 17 ATCs, one in each county, and each ATC has a Norwegian Sign Language (NSL) Interpreter office. These offices consist of management (who are not necessarily interpreters), interpreters, and the booking agents. Some larger centres may have 17 or more interpreters (e.g. county Rogaland) while in some smaller centres there may only be 7 interpreters (e.g. county Agder).



Organisational structure of interpreting provisions in Norway

As this simplified chart indicates, the booking service is part of the NAV Assistive Technology services, which belongs to the Labour and Service Department, and is managed by the Directorate of Labour and Welfare. The Directorate of Labour and Welfare reports to three ministries, namely the Ministry of Children, Equality, and Social Inclusion, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and Research.

The service is paid for by different bodies depending on the area of interpreting. Thus, the National Insurance covers outpatient medical services, work, higher education, and daily life; municipalities and counties cover primary and secondary schooling; the health trust covers interpreters for hospital stays; the court covers court proceedings; and the police covers all interpreting needed by them. If an assignment is not covered by any of these funds, NAV invoices the organisation who made the booking.

The Directorate of Labour and Welfare recently conducted a review into the SLI service and as a result of their inquiry they decided to employ 39 extra interpreters at their centres. Thus, 4 new staff started at Ina's centre (in county Rogaland), increasing the staff number to 17; and 3 new interpreters started at Linn's centre (in county Agder). As a result, there are now 7 interpreters working in county Agder serving about 35 Deaf and hard of hearing clients.

Governance

Involvement of interpreters

Interpreters are able to have input on the organisation of the service on a local, national and governmental level:

Locally interpreters interact directly with management. They have regular staff meetings where organisational issues are discussed, and managers are also directly accessible when needed. Moreover, interpreters can take over some additional tasks for their office. For instance, Ina related that she was in charge of creating content for her centre's Facebook page. Interpreters' level of input is more informal at this level but also more direct.

Nationally, interpreters have different organisations (e.g., for freelance interpreters) that cooperate with the co-managers. Here, ideas from the interpreters are heard and then taken up by higher management. The co-managers commented that this has generated many useful ideas and as a result, various working groups involving interpreters from different counties have been established to work on some of these ideas.

it's usually that in the Norwegian model at work [...] that competence and the ideas, they grow from below, it's so important that the leaders listen to the staff [...] because there are so many ideas and so much involvement and so much - suggestions, how to do things better [...] The people who work, who have their every day with the interpreting or coordinating and having the dialogs with the users they say: Couldn't we do this instead? And so, yeah, maybe. And then we grow on these ideas. (Berit)

On a governmental level, the interpreter organisations negotiate pay rates with the Department of Labour and Social Welfare but are not directly consulted on policy issues. Three times a year, the co-managers of the NAV interpreting service also submit a formal report featuring relevant statistics and any relevant issues that may have occurred to their governmental managers.

Involvement of the Deaf community

There are four user associations - the Deaf Association, an association for hearing impaired, and two associations for the deafblind - that collaborate and work with NAV in the forms of advisory boards. This happens on three levels of governance, local, national, and governmental.

On the local level, individual booking centres also consult with local advisory boards and visit each other. Here, issues are discussed, such as complaints about services, but they also work together to improve collaboration. Thus, since the Covid pandemic, online interpreting has become more prevalent and so local centres would run information and training sessions for their Deaf clients.

On a national level, the co-managers formally meet with the national advisory boards of the above organisations about four times a year. In this case, it helps that the co-managers are fluent in Norwegian Sign Language as they can communicate directly. They also communicate personally and via email if there are specific issues to discuss.

On a governmental level, these consumer associations also meet two to three times a year with the manager of the Directorate of Labour and Welfare to consult and provide advice.

Services provided

NAV Tolketjenesten serves Deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind clients. Tolketjenesten has about 200 employed interpreters on staff who are distributed across the 17 ATCs. Staffing numbers vary, depending on location and client population. The service offers scheduled and emergency face-to-face interpreters as well as scheduled and spontaneous video interpreting (for calls under 30 minutes long). Interpreters can also be booked to compile notes and transcriptions (e.g., of conversations or university lectures). Interpreters are trained as sign language interpreters, deafblind interpreters, and transcribers. Some interpreters also work between English ↔ NSL or other languages but interpreting into other languages is not part of their official training.

Bookings for interpreters are made centrally via either a website or via the emergency booking service. Requests are then processed in the corresponding ATC by the local booking team. The booking team is familiar with the individual profiles of the interpreting staff at their centres and the profiles of at least some freelance interpreters on their books, meaning that they can choose the most appropriate interpreter for a particular job and client. Interpreters and booking staff discuss assignments or scheduling preferences and accommodations are made where possible.

How interpreters are contracted

Assignments are distributed across employed staff where possible but national employment guidelines that strictly regulate work and rest hours means that some jobs are offered to freelancers. Thus, employed interpreters are only allowed to work a set number of hours per week and are required to rest for 10 hours between finishing work and starting again the next day. This means the staff cannot cover a late assignment and an early one the next day. When no employee is available, jobs are offered to freelancers, who have the right to select which assignments they accept. The general employment regulations do not apply to freelancers, who can work as much as they want. Often, freelancers prefer to work long assignments, e.g., weekend seminars and deafblind jobs, rather than short assignments, which is more financially worthwhile for them, while staff interpreters cover the short assignments.

The situation is that the freelance interpreters cover most of the hours, and what we see is that they often interpret for deafblind people because deafblind people have the right to both have interpreters and also guiding. And they will need guiding if they go to a course where ... for example, they will need an interpreter from eight in the morning till ten in the night.
(Linda)

These are some of the patterns observed by management and the type of factors booking managers take into consideration when organising the schedule.

Demand and supply issues

On average, the service fields about 100,000 bookings a year (including face-to-face, note taking and transcriptions, as well as interpreting for Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing). Of these, 90% could get serviced and 10% were declined. The main reason why a booking cannot be fulfilled is because they cannot find an interpreter to take the assignment or because the assigned interpreter had to take a more urgent job. Thus, a booking for a family celebration may have to be cancelled on short notice if the interpreter had to attend a medical emergency at that time and no other interpreter could be found. Especially in more rural areas it can be difficult to find freelance interpreters on short notice - if possible, those assignments are then covered by video interpreters.

Deaf entitlement and access to service

Once a person's deafness has been medically confirmed they have unlimited access to interpreting hours in all settings. The National Insurance Act states that people with permanent disabilities have a right to support to allow them to work, study, and participate in everyday life. Thus, interpreting provisions cover education, employment, the judicial system, and social settings. In order to make a booking, clients need to fill in a form on the Tolketjenesten website and provide their client number. This applies to both face-to-face and video interpreting. Short video calls do not require a booking and emergency bookings have a separate site.

Thus, the system allows Deaf clients easy access to requesting interpreters. Moreover, since Deaf clients mostly work with the interpreters employed or freelancing in their local county, they become familiar with the staff, fostering easy and direct communication between the client and the service providers as well as allowing the providers to ensure that the same interpreter can cover follow up appointments, allowing for good continuity of communication.

While the service provision is good overall, there are some issues with finding interpreters in rural areas, especially for long engagements. The main reason is that there are fewer freelance interpreters available in rural areas and that the national work guidelines restrict the number of hours employed interpreters are allowed to work.

Challenges, current issues, or gaps in Norway

All interviewees agreed that in Norway, Deaf people have very good rights and that the provision of interpreters is generous. However, there are limits to this as NAV cannot provide an interpreter for every engagement. These gaps in the provision are the main cause of complaints, which are usually dealt with locally.

Another challenge are requests in the far North of the country where interpreters would have to travel for hours to get there. These assignments are often done online. Similarly, the provision of interpreting from or into Sami languages does not seem to be regulated or promoted much yet and activists would like to see more interest in Sami sign language; the informants did not know if there was actually a distinct sign language. Interpreting from or

into other spoken languages, e.g., English, is not covered in the degree offered but seems entirely self-taught.

Highlights/Points of interest

It is of note that the national co-managers of SLI services both have an extensive interpreting background. They commented that NAV hired them specifically because of their background as they wanted to strengthen the interpreting field. They have initiated cross-national working groups aimed at exploring ways to improve the service NAV provides.

The two staff interpreters commented on the benefits of having interpreters as their immediate managers in their centres as this fosters mentoring and professional development, which might ultimately also impact their chances for a pay increase. Comments about centre management indicate that staff members could work their way up the ranks and transition into management. This could possibly make working for NAV as an interpreter even more attractive. Ina indicated that there are two tiers of management - more senior interpreters are the immediate managers of the interpreters, and then there is the centre management role, which in some cases is covered by someone with an interpreting background.

Another important benefit of being employed as an interpreter by NAV is the collegiality and the mutual emotional support that working in an office setting can bring. Linn expressed it as follows:

When I was a freelancer, I felt quite alone. If something happened at an assignment that was disturbing or problematic, I didn't have anybody to talk to afterwards. And it was difficult to get feedback on my sign language and on my translating skills. But when I worked as an employed interpreter, you have more of the professional collaboration and also the possibility, if you have like an assignment as being quite to say traumatic, and you have someone to talk about, you have someone to give you guidance. Somebody just like to vent to get out your emotions and you can get guidance and mentoring. It's a much, it's much safer. I feel more social because as a freelance interpreter, I wasn't even sure like, am I a good interpreter or am I doing a horrible job?

In this sense, the collegiality fostered by the office environment provides important mental health support for the interpreters as it offers them an environment to discuss their work professionally (within the confines of maintaining confidentiality) that they may not have outside of work.

Netherlands

Facts about the national context of the Netherlands

Population	17,000,000
Density	508 per km ²
Size of the Deaf community	30,000
Deaf who use interpreters	7-9,000 (?)
Workforce size	563 sign language interpreters
Interpreter to Deaf user ratio	12-15 Deaf clients per interpreter
Interpreter qualifications	Degree in SLI
Main mode of work	Freelance
Registration system	Yes - registration is required to work. Conditions are to hold a degree in SLI and complete 60 hours of PD over a 4 year period.
Year SLI association established	1988
Legal basis	NGT (Nederlandse Gebarentaal) recognised as official language Oct 13 2020, law came into effect March 16 2021. Prior to this, the law provides that individuals have the right to a sign language interpreter in education (100%), in work settings (15%) and in private life (30 hours).
Name of SLI interpreting service	Tolkcontact

The Netherlands population is almost four times that of New Zealand and its small size creates high population density. The ratio of interpreters per Deaf persons is between the other two countries we looked at, with an estimated 12-15 Deaf per interpreter (based on figures supplied for interpreters and Deaf interpreter users). The model of interpreting service provision is that freelancers are coordinated via a central referral agency, Tolkcontact - a commercial entity contracted under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, with funding streams for interpreting from three key Ministries. While some private interpreting agencies exist, most requests and bookings go through Tolkcontact. A feature of the Netherlands model is the use of an efficient online interface which supports user requests, for interpreters, and booking arrangements and invoicing for interpreters. NGT was legally recognised in 2020, but rights to interpreting were legally supported prior through education and accessibility provisions. Interpreters are qualified by a Bachelor's degree, and a Registry of SLI regulates qualifications and continuing professional education,

while a professional association of SLI supports advocacy and development of the profession (both bodies employ administrators and policy developers).

Informants

This section on the Netherlands is based on information gained from an interview with two very experienced interpreters who have been involved in the profession in the Netherlands for many years: Maya de Wit and Markell Gremmen.

Maya de Wit is a qualified Dutch and International Sign Language interpreter, has been involved in developing SLI policy, practice and research in the Netherlands and Europe for the past twenty years, and is also working in NGT interpreter education.

Markell Gremmen is a qualified NGT interpreter and has been involved in the management of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters, including as a policy officer, and of Tolknet, the precursor of the current NGT interpreter referral service Tolkcontact. She is currently the director of the national NGT Interpreter Register.

Interpreter workforce situation

In order to be able to work as an interpreter, a degree in NGT interpreting is required. There is currently one four-year Bachelor programme at the college of Utrecht, which also offers a degree in speech to text interpreting. The number of students who complete the degree and enter the workforce each year varies, but generally the course produces about 20 new interpreters annually. Once students have completed their degree, they need to register with the Register Tolken Gebarentaal (RTGS), which is responsible for accrediting both sign language and speech to text interpreters. The register is an independent entity paid by annual registration fees. In order to maintain registration, interpreters need to engage in continuous professional development, namely 60 hours over 4 years. As of June 2021, there are 661 interpreters registered, including 514 NGT interpreters, 103 speech to text interpreters, and 42 who do both.

The majority of interpreters in the Netherlands are freelancers and are therefore responsible for their own scheduling, invoicing, and taxes. In early 2022, interpreter pay rates were increased by the government. Overall, our informants believe interpreters earn reasonably well. Hourly rates include preparation time but interpreters can also claim for travel costs in between jobs. Different allowances are made for certain times (after hours) and settings (see details in Appendix 3). In the recent pay increase, community assignments have been given a bigger boost compared to education as these assignments tend to be shorter and therefore less attractive to interpreters.

Overall, the working conditions seem good in the Netherlands - both informants agreed that the pay is good and that there is plenty of work for all, making NGT interpreting a viable full-time job. The new electronic invoicing system also means that interpreters are paid faster. These automated systems of booking work and organising pay substantially cut down interpreters' administrative work as freelancers. Thus, Tolkcontact has facilitated some of

the administrative tasks associated with interpreting work as it has streamlined online processes. However, based on the informants' comments, Tolkcontact often struggles to manage unusual requests or situations that are more complicated as their staff does not have first-hand experience in the field at this point after 2.5 years in the business.

Professional development and supervision for working interpreters

In the Netherlands, professional development (PD) is run by the national register of sign language interpreters. Only NGT interpreters who are in the register can get work through Tolkcontact and be paid by UWV. The conditions to be added to the register are having completed a degree in NGT interpreting or a degree in speech to text interpreting, paying an annual fee, and engaging in 60 hours of PD over a period of 4 years. All PD courses offered through the register are provided by recognised and accredited education providers to ensure the quality of the course. Supervision, mentorship, or any other form of professional development is not offered by Tolkcontact. As Maya de Wit commented, this is appropriate since the service does not have the expertise or mandate to provide PD. Just as it may not be appropriate for interpreters to be directly involved in the decision making at Tolkcontact, it would also not be appropriate for the commercial interpreter referral agency to be in charge of professional development for interpreters. In both cases, there are real concerns about conflicts of interest as well as a lack of expertise in business management and interpreter education respectively.

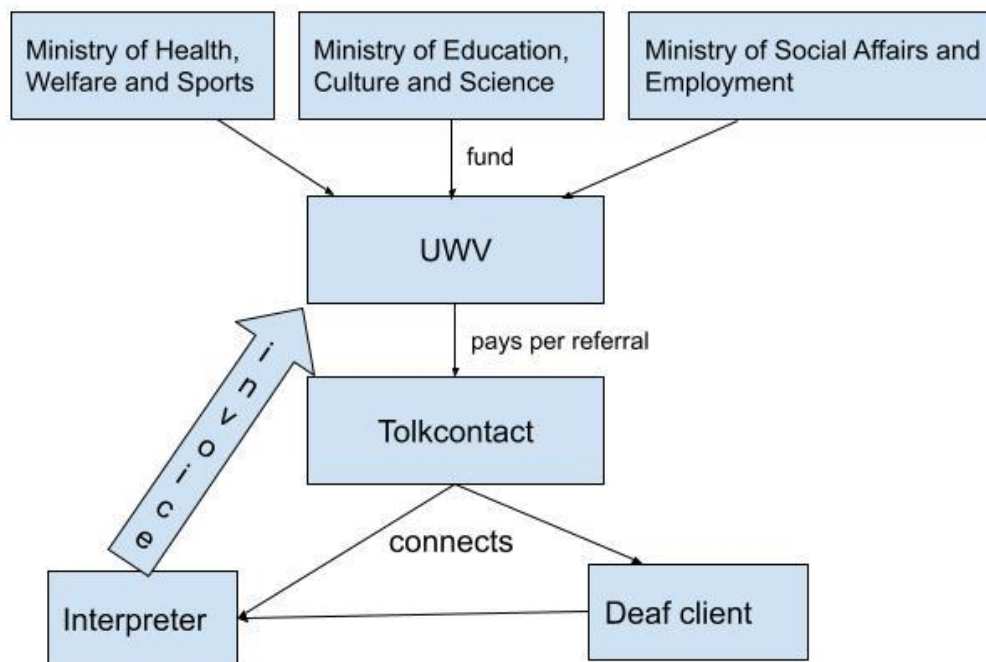
National Interpreter booking service

Structure of the organisation

The only government funded interpreter booking service in the Netherlands is a referral agency called Tolkcontact. Tolkcontact belongs to a larger organisation, the Berengroep, that specialises in facilitating communication and access for people who are Deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have a speech impairment. The organisation manages the interpreting service Tolkcontact and also produces accessible media (online videos and print press) and offers assistance with making phone calls and other telecommunication options (e.g. online interpreting).

Since 2019, the interpreting service Tolkcontact is contracted by UWV (Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen), a semi-government agency related to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment that manages social insurance issues such as benefits and employment as well as support to people with disabilities. Interpreting services are paid out of funds provided by three ministries: the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Court assignments are often booked not through Tolkcontact, but via a separate online database of spoken and signed language interpreters specific for judicial assignments.

Tolkcontact is a national service that helps clients connect with interpreters anywhere in the Netherlands. However, while it is the main provider, it is not the only available agency and clients can also book interpreters directly. Tolkcontact itself is paid per referral and the interpreters are not employees but freelancers who are paid directly by UWV.



Organisational structure of interpreting provisions in the Netherlands

Tolkcontact is part of a larger business and is itself run as a business by people who may be affiliated with the Deaf community but are not interpreters themselves.

Governance

Tolkcontact won a government contract to manage interpreter referrals in 2019. While its predecessor was a non-profit organisation formed by interpreters working together to improve the process of connecting Deaf with interpreters, Tolkcontact is a commercial business that did not have established links to either the Deaf or interpreting communities before it started its work. At this point, no clear structures have been established to allow community regular input into the running of the company. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that individual members of the Deaf and interpreting communities are working at Tolkcontact, there are no official groups, such as an advisory board, where representatives of the interpreting or Deaf associations work with representatives of the company. Instead, meetings with the management are only organised by the associations when specific issues arise.

Markell, who was the director of the non-profit agency that preceded Tolkcontact, commented that there was some concern by members of the community regarding the overlap of her roles as an interpreter and manager.

I experienced myself when I started at Tolknnet [previous non-profit referral agency] and there a lot of people were very critical. Is it the right word critical about an interpreter there who is working somewhere which influences also her, his or her own work? [...] So a conflict of interest .

When asked if experienced interpreters should be involved in management decisions at Tolkncontact, Markell indicated that an involvement of interpreters in the governance of the agency could be perceived as a conflict of interest. Instead, the SLI Association is heavily involved in policy development and lobbying to promote their interests to relevant government and private agencies. For instance, that team interpreting is now paid for or that those Deaf professionals who need it have access to extra employment-related interpreting hours is the result of extended lobbying by the SLI Association.

Services provided

Tolkncontact refers interpreters to support Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing clients. The services offered include face-to-face as well as video interpreting and emergency interpreting. Notetaking and transcription services are provided by other agencies.

Mode of coordination

Tolkncontact is strictly a referral service; thus, they only seek to find an interpreter with the relevant qualifications but are not in a position to gauge an interpreter's suitability for a particular assignment or their compatibility with the client. For instance, the informants believed that it would be difficult for Tolkncontact to help clients find a suitable interpreter for an educational setting for their child as there is not a specific certificate that qualifies an interpreter to work in this setting but is entirely personality or experience based.

I think the there is a lot more distance between Tolkncontact and the interpreters [...] And so they don't have the connection with the interpreter, so I don't know if they can give parents information about which interpreter fits into an educational setting, for example, because I think they don't know by themselves. (Markell)

(In the Netherlands, parents rather than the school system are responsible for organising interpreting for their deaf child, although the cost is covered by government.)

How are interpreters contracted

As mentioned, notwithstanding a few exceptions, SLIs in the Netherlands are freelancers who pay their own taxes. Interpreters can be referred to a client via an agency like Tolkncontact or clients can contact the interpreter directly. When using Tolkncontact, clients have three options: (1) to let the agency find an interpreter for them - in these cases, Tolkncontact tends to contact interpreters on their files that are nearby who fit the requirements with a brief message. The interpreter then has a short amount of time to respond before the job is offered to the next suitable interpreter until a taker is found. In this setting, the Deaf client has no influence on which interpreter they get. (2) to post a job on a virtual pinboard on the Tolkncontact site where interpreters can then put their hand up for the

jobs they would like and the client ultimately decides who gets the job. (3) clients can go through a list of interpreters on the Tolkcontact website and offer a job to interpreters directly.

Tolkcontact gets paid for any referral where Tolkcontact was involved. However, clients may also establish their own circle of preferred interpreters and offer them work directly. Similarly, other clients such as events or conferences can also offer interpreters work directly. In these cases, interpreters can negotiate different pay rates from the government mandated ones.

Once a job has been completed, the client electronically signs a job sheet, which then allows the interpreters to submit an invoice directly to UWV. All this can be done via an App on their phones. With this system, the interpreter now gets paid within 3-4 days rather than a month or more as was previously the case. Tolkcontact is thus not responsible for ensuring interpreters are paid, only for referring an interpreter to a job.

Demand and supply issues

The authors have not been able to find out the numbers of jobs logged and the numbers of jobs fulfilled and not fulfilled per annum. Maya de Wit commented that interpreters have not had difficulties finding enough work, which suggests that there is a growing demand.

Yeah. It's incredible. I mean, I don't remember the time where interpreters were looking for work. I don't know, when was that Markell? [...] But now that the rules are, you know, well in place, an interpreter or a deaf people can request interpreters and the number of interpreters is only increased over the years. But there is never enough interpreters. I mean, we could work every day – three or four times.

Markell further suggests that there are not enough interpreters at the moment and that it can be difficult to find interpreters for assignments such as funerals that occur at short notice.

Deaf entitlement and access to services

Deaf people need to apply for an account with UWV to access free interpreting provisions. This requires the provision of audiological evidence that the applicant is indeed deaf and then UWV determines allotments on a needs basis. Interpreter provisions are split into three categories: life hours, education hours, and work hours. Thus, once a client has set up an account, they receive 30 interpreting hours a year for social occasions such as parties or funerals - anything that is not work or education. These hours are automatically renewed every year.

If the client goes to school, university or completes a vocational course and are under 30 years of age they also have a right to an interpreter for the length of their qualification. These hours are automatically renewed while the course or training is ongoing. A tertiary degree receives 1,000 interpreter hours while a vocational course gets 1,600 hours to cover work placements. When a Deaf client needs access to an interpreter for work, they can apply to have an interpreter for 15% of their work hours. This allowance is also automatically

renewed while the employment is ongoing. Clients can also apply for more hours if the 15% are not enough. The hours awarded to a client by UWV are loaded to their online profile, allowing the client to view their balance and thereby be able to manage their entitlement.

There are different ways for Deaf people to book an interpreter. Clients can either leave it up to Tolkcontact to find a suitable interpreter, place an ad on a virtual noticeboard and select from those interpreters who expressed an interest, or they can actively choose who to work with. This last option requires Deaf clients to look for and book interpreters themselves so that they do not have to merely accept whoever is available at the time. However, this option can also be very time consuming. One of the main strengths of the system in place is that Deaf clients have full control over their entitlement through their online account and that they can choose who their interpreters are if they want to.

I think what is really important for that, too, is you have your choice, you can take any interpreter, so I can take this int- preferred interpreter to the doctor and this to my education, because this is, I think, the positive side, because it's an individual right, the deaf person gets to decide who is actually interpreting. [...] So in that sense, it gives the deaf person quite an empowerment to make their own decision. (Maya)

The informants believed that having this degree of control was rather important to many members of the Deaf community who often prefer to bring an interpreter they trust to an event rather than deal with whoever is provided by the agency.

However, the downside of giving the client responsibility to book interpreters themselves is the sheer amount of time and effort that goes into having to organise everything. The process of booking may require writing various messages between those involved and possibly move appointments to accommodate all involved. This effort required from the Deaf client is illustrated by Markell's story of a full-time Deaf employee in the excerpt below.

I heard of somebody working six hours a week, spending time and searching for an interpreter, but they work full-time - 36 hours a week, I think, because it's healthcare. And then six hours spent on searching (for) interpreters (Markell)

Challenges, current issues, or gaps in the Netherlands

The main issue the SLI Association is working on is to ensure that Deaf people over 30 who want to return to university or retrain in a different field also have access to the usual interpretation hours for education. Under current policy, this group is excluded from free interpreter provision.

Another issue discussed was that hearing parents of Deaf children often struggle to negotiate the system at first and find it hard to ensure that their child has a suitable interpreter by their side to support their learning. The organising of interpreters is not managed by the education system or even the school, but rather by the family. Maya pointed

out that even the Association of Parents with Deaf Children do not always provide useful or accurate advice, and Tolkcontact is not well equipped to make specific recommendations for this setting.

Other issues mentioned above, such as the potential burden on Deaf clients to book their interpreter, sorting out who is responsible for booking interpreters for official meetings, or different Deaf clients booking different interpreters for the same event, probably will not be resolved as those involved are generally happy with how the system works.

Highlights/Points of interest

Based on the accounts of the two informants, the establishment of the **Policy Officer position** by the SLI association marked a turning point for the profession in the Netherlands as since then, working conditions and interpreter provisions have improved and the profession overall has grown. The position was funded through an increase in annual membership fees and started off with only 2 hours a week but has been expanded to 20 hours now due to the success of the model.

Another important institution is the **complaints committee** that deals with complaints against individual interpreters. It is an independent body that consists of members of the associations of interpreters, the organisation of Deaf people, and an independent chairperson. They are currently looking into integrating the complaints committee into the register. Tolkcontact also has a complaints process, but that is only for complaints about Tolkcontact's operation rather than interpreter conduct or service quality.

Finally, the need to interpret into NGT from **languages other than Dutch** can also be an issue, e.g., from English or French into NGT. Finding interpreters who are confident enough to do that can be difficult as the competencies are not necessarily well developed.

One of the main things that seems to make the system so easy to use is that **all important information related to interpreter provision are accessible online to all parties**. Thus, Deaf clients have an online account where they can check their hours and make new bookings and interpreters have an online account that allows them to turn a worksheet into an invoice and submit it directly to UWV. This seems to facilitate efficient service provision and workflow.

Ireland

Facts about the national context of Ireland

Population size	5,500,000
Density	15 per km ²
Size of the Deaf community	5,000
Deaf who use interpreters	1,500 (includes deafblind and hoh)
Workforce size	109 interpreters, including 23 Deaf interpreters
Interpreter to Deaf user ratio	14 Deaf clients per interpreter De Wit 2020 report says 75
Interpreter qualifications	University degree in SLI
Main mode of work	Freelance (+ some Video Interpreting staff)
Registration system	Yes - the establishment of a register (RISLI) was mandated by the Irish Sign Language Act. Conditions are a degree in SLI or equivalent
Year SLI association established	1987 - 2007
Legal basis for interpreter provision	Irish Sign Language Act (2017, took effect Dec 2020), Equal Status Act, and the National Disability Strategy 2017-2021. Irish Sign Language has become an official language of Ireland on 14.12.2017
Name of SLI interpreting service	SLIS (Sign Language Interpreting Service)
Name of Sign Language	Irish Sign Language (ISL)

Ireland's population size and density are similar to New Zealand and Norway. The ratio of interpreters per Deaf persons is similar to the Netherlands, with an estimated 14 Deaf individuals per interpreter (based on figures supplied for interpreters and Deaf interpreter users). The main service model is a brokerage: freelancers are connected with user requests via a central referral agency, Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS), which is contracted (indirectly) under the Department of Social Protection. Some private interpreting agencies also exist, and service requests made to SLIS are referred directly to individual interpreters and sometimes to agencies. Arrangements and payment are then negotiated directly between interpreter or agency and users. An exception to this is specific funding that SLIS administers for funerals. SLIS also runs a national video remote interpreting service, IRIS, which employs interpreters on staff. Interpreting demand exceeds workforce capacity and availability is especially a challenge in lower population areas and after hours. Irish Sign Language gained legal recognition in 2017 (effective from 2020), introducing a requirement

for interpreters working in the public sector to be qualified. Rights to interpreting are also supported by provisions of the Equal Status Act and were boosted by the National Disability Strategy from 2017. Interpreters are qualified by a Bachelor's degree, and the Registry of SLI was funded with the establishment SLIS, to regulate qualifications and complaints processes, although financial and operational independence of the Registry are under development. A professional association of sign language interpreters is also active.

Informants

Information for this section was gathered from an official report on the Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS) written by SLIS for their stakeholders as well as interviews with:

Interviewees are (1) Dr Lorraine Leeson, Professor in Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin, University of Dublin. Professor Leeson has had long involvement in SLI training, research, policy and the formation of the register of sign language interpreters (RISLI - Register of Irish Sign Language Interpreters) and is considered a national authority in this field. (2) Haaris Sheikh is vice-chair of the SLIS board and involved with Bridge (another referral/ booking agency). Haaris also works in ISL policy and consultancy and has long involvement with Deaf community research initiatives. (3) John Stewart, manager of SLIS.

Interpreter workforce situation

With the establishment of the ISL interpreter registry, interpreters in Ireland are now required to have a BA degree in ISL interpreting or equivalent to work. The Irish Sign Language Act mandates that any interpreter for the Deaf or deafblind providing service in publicly funded entities must be registered with RISLI. So it is now illegal for an interpreter who is not qualified to provide a service in the public sector. Members are required to work in interpreting for a set number of hours per year as well as engage in a certain number of hours of PD; however, recent funding cuts, which also affected courses to train more deafblind interpreters, have severely limited the scope of PD courses available. Moreover, RISLI has established a process and a panel that includes Deaf, interpreters, and international experts to handle complaints and other issues related to the development of the profession.

At the moment, there are 109 registered ISL interpreters in Ireland, including about 21 Deaf interpreters and a small pool of interpreters who can also work with deafblind clients. Both the BA in ISL interpreting and the Deaf interpreter courses are only offered at Trinity College, Dublin. The Deaf interpreter course is a relatively new degree funded by the Citizens Information Board (CIB) and SLIS. Before the launch of the course in 2021, there were only about 5 Deaf interpreters who worked regularly in the field. This means that Deaf interpreters are still a new concept that people are still becoming aware of, with the result that there is not much work for them available yet. Especially during the height of the Covid pandemic work was scarce. Thus, Deaf interpreters would find it hard to make a living at this point and instead have to earn a living elsewhere, but be available to interpret when needed.

Hearing ISL interpreters have experienced an upturn in demand with an increase in the Deaf community's confidence and awareness of their rights since the passing of the ISL Act. This has led to gaps in coverage as jobs cannot always be fulfilled, including emergencies. According to John Stewart, appointments need to be booked two weeks in advance to ensure an interpreter can be available.

Many interpreters who now find themselves in high demand have previously struggled to make a living and had to have other means to support themselves. As a result, not all available ISL interpreters work full-time at the moment, which exacerbates the need to increase the number of new interpreters entering the profession each year. John Stewart's hope is that through targeted lobbying by the registry, the working conditions and financial stability for interpreters might improve, thereby strengthening the profession and the service.

Hopefully as the register promotes the quality and the profession those interpreters would say, yeah, I can make a living from this profession and they can give up the receptionist job in the hotel or whatever else they do, you know. (John)

While many interpreters enjoy the autonomy of freelancing, interpreters also need to maintain a steady income. As mentioned above, as a consequence of the ISL Act's requirement for public bodies to provide ISL interpreting and with the growth of IRIS, more salaried contract positions are being developed. However, these are mostly suitable for interpreters living in large urban centres. Even with overall booking numbers going up, interpreters in smaller areas often struggle to make a living. The rise of online interpreting from home during the pandemic, however, demonstrated that location is less crucial, and IRIS has since made a point of hiring a new employee who lives and works remotely.

SLIS manager John Stewart emphasised the agency's responsibility to support work opportunities for interpreters and improve work conditions by becoming more flexible in recruiting interpreters who live outside the main centres to fill jobs that can be done remotely. A complication for Ireland with regard to the development of IRIS is that the funding contract will end by the end of 2022 with no guarantee of renewal. This lack of certainty impedes IRIS's ability to plan ahead.

PD and supervision for working interpreters

The ISL Act required the development of a registry for interpreters to implement quality assurance. Membership with the registry, which is now compulsory for interpreters working in the public sector, certifies that their training complies with the national standards and requires interpreters to engage in regular professional development.

Professional development is organised by RISLI together with other stakeholder organisations. The professional development requirement covered a range of different types of PD, including structured (a course with a clear goal), which is supposed to cover the majority of the PD undertaken, unstructured (reflective practices), and Deaf community engagement. The number of PD hours registrants are expected to complete a year increases with the length of registration. Thus, in the first year, interpreters are expected to do 12 hours of PD, 18 in the second year, and 24 hours from then on out. Funding for the

professional development scheme has been cut recently; however, at this stage it is uncertain how this will affect PD provision.

There is currently no established mentoring or supervision system for interpreters; however, a process is currently being developed. Lorraine Leeson points out that SLIS has very good working relationships with other agencies and that together they are committed to supporting interpreters:

because we're small there's also very, very good joined up systems, so the likes of SLIS, the private agencies are very, very good in terms of supporting students and newcomers into the field and that's a very positive thing you know. There really is that symbiotic relationship, and we feel a communal responsibility for the support of interpreters. (Lorraine)

How exactly newcomers and students are supported was not described in detail, but the next section features some examples of how SLIS management supports their interpreters.

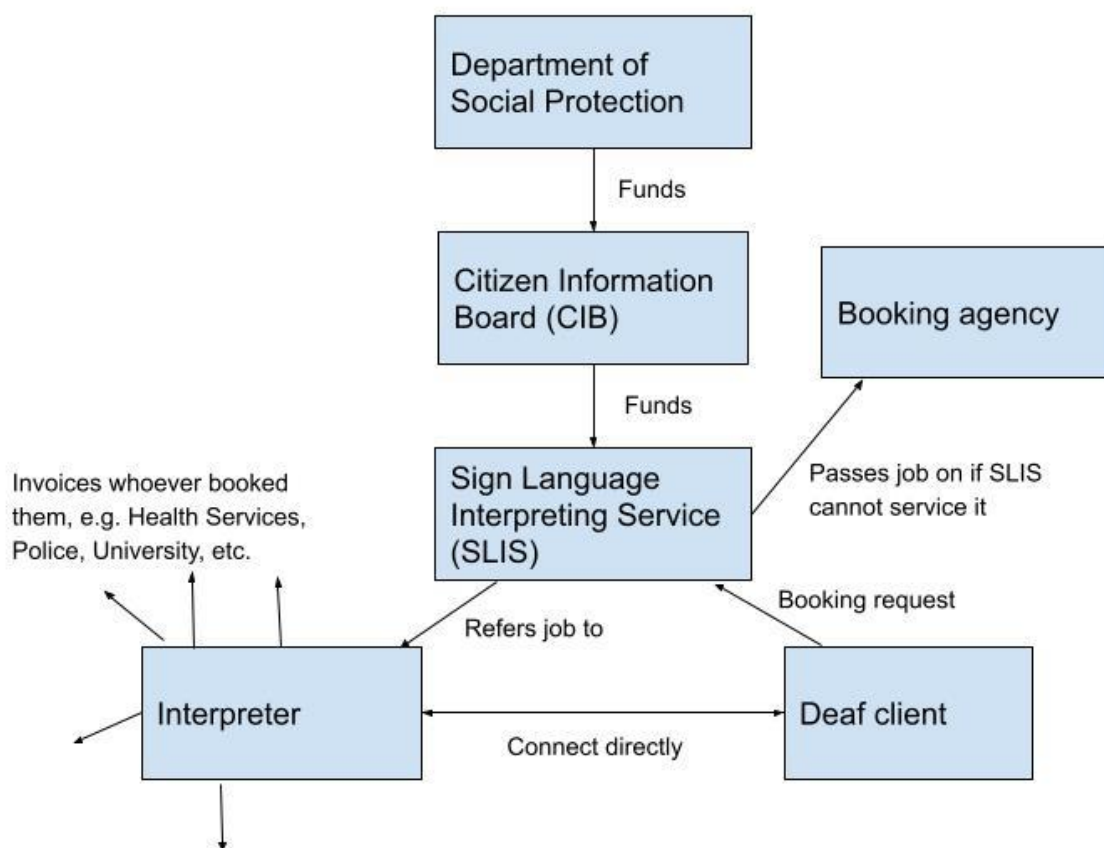
National Interpreter booking service

Structure of the organisation

SLIS⁶ is an independent interpreter referral service established in 2007 with government funding via the Citizens Information Board (CIB)⁷. The CIB is an independent company that has a service agreement with the Ministry of Social Protection to provide information, advice, and advocacy with regard to social services as well as financial advice. This means that SLIS reports to and needs to take direction from the CIB, who does not have specific experience in interpreting management and Deaf support. Informants indicated that this can cause tension as the two entities approach problems from different perspectives - a disability/medical model vs a language access model.

⁶ <https://slis.ie/>

⁷ <https://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/en/services/>



Organisational structure of Interpreting provisions in Ireland

As a referral service, SLIS only connects clients with interpreters but does not manage payment to interpreters. Interpreters directly invoice the paying organisation which has requested interpreting. The only exception to this is a funeral fund, which has a budget of €5,000 a year and is managed by SLIS directly. Other interpreting funds are managed in a variety of ways. Thus, there is a fund hosted by the Health Service Executive (HSE) that covers interpreting for certain medical services, such as GPs and hospitals, that interpreters invoice directly. 2021 also saw the trial of a new ‘social inclusion voucher scheme’ that aimed at increasing Deaf participation in cultural and social events. The management of this fund was tendered to a separate booking agency who would pay the interpreter and SLIS would book interpreters under this scheme through that agency. Since a number of Covid-related restrictions were in place during the run of the trial, the results may not be representative of an actual uptake, and it remains to be seen if the scheme will be turned into a permanent fixture.

According to the ISL Act, public bodies, which includes entities such as public hospitals, courts of law, police, or schools, are required to provide interpreting. Private businesses, however, do not have such an obligation and can only be encouraged to help pay for interpreters by appealing to their commitment to equality and customer service.

SLIS itself consists of 6 staff, including the manager, a financial manager, and administration staff. In addition, 10 interpreters are employed for the remote interpreting service, IRIS, but none of them work full-time for the service. SLIS is located in Deaf Village Ireland.⁸

Governance

Governance of the organisation is by a board of directors that includes members of the Deaf community, interpreters, and other professional members. Moreover, as John Stewart points out, SLIS regularly meets with representatives of the Deaf and the interpreting community to inform their direction:

we have a deaf-led board of directors, and we have very good consultative forums with the deaf community. And the interpreting community. It is really important to us that we are informed by the deaf community and the entire community. (John)

Services provided

SLIS is a government funded referral agency with an advocacy mandate. The two main services they provide are referring interpreters to face-to-face assignments (referral) for Deaf or deafblind clients and providing access to interpreters to Deaf clients through advocacy (access). Furthermore, SLIS administers a programme called 'The GP Access scheme' that involves SLIS coordinating with the Deaf client, a GP, and an interpreter to find a suitable time for all involved to ensure the client receives appropriate medical support. In 2021, the most commonly used scheme was the GP access scheme with 1,623 completed requests, followed by referrals with over 600 completed jobs, and over 400 requests for the Access category. Requests for services in all categories increased substantially in 2021.

SLIS also manages the Irish Remote Interpreting Service (IRIS), which provides interpreting in situations where the Deaf client, hearing interactant, and interpreter cannot be in the same space. The service was set up to improve interpreting provision in rural areas where it is more difficult to find interpreters. IRIS works in three different ways: 1) via a video conference call (VRI) - this scenario requires some pre-planning; 2) via a video application like Skype (VRS) - this option is used when a video link is not accessible. The interpreter then calls the hearing participant to relay the conversation to each participant in real time; 3) via phone (TRS) when the Deaf person is in the same room with the interpreter.

Notetaking services are handled by different organisations.

How are interpreters contracted

SLIS is purely a referral agency, which means that they receive a request for an interpreter and then try to find an available interpreter that best suits the request. When they cannot find a suitable interpreter, they pass the request on to other booking services (private interpreting agencies). Since SLIS is a service funded by the government they do not charge for their

⁸ <https://www.deafvillageireland>

services and do not pay interpreters directly. The only exception to this is the remote interpreting service where employed interpreters offer interpretation via video link.

Interpreters in Ireland are mostly freelancers. As such, they are the ones responsible to invoice clients, chase up late payments, and pay tax on their income. Interpreters can work for different agencies as they are not bound to a particular service. This gives the interpreters the opportunity to pick and choose the jobs they want to do and control their own schedule.

When a job comes in, SLIS aims to find the interpreter who is best suited for that assignment and offers the job to them. The interpreter has the right to decline. When an interpreter has accepted a job, SLIS connects them with the service requester. Once the assignment has been completed, the interpreter sends their invoice to the relevant organisation requiring the interpreter.

There is also a growing number of employed interpreters who earn a salary and who are accessible on demand at certain hours. The IRIS remote interpreting service employs 10 interpreting staff; however, none of them are working full-time but do a set number of hours per week. This allows the interpreters to enjoy the benefits of both freelancing and employment. More public bodies such as Parliament, universities, or health boards have also started adding interpreters to their staff to make their services more accessible to the Deaf community.

Demand and supply issues

Demand for interpreting has increased substantially in recent years, in part in response to requirements of the ISL Act. Thus, when IRIS services were extended by having more staff interpreters and video link stations available, the demand also increased. Between 2017 and 2021 service requests have doubled and 2021 was the busiest year on record with 9,507 completed assignments.

The same applies to other interpreting services offered by SLIS. Thus, in 2021, 3,041 service requests were received for the Referral, Access, and GP scheme categories, which represents a marked increase compared to previous years (2020: 1,975; 2019: 2,128). The largest category was the GP Access scheme with over 1,700 requests, including emergency and out of hours, which represents an increase of over 60% from 2020. General referral requests have also increased by 34% since 2020 to 849 requests. Access support requests increased 50% to 460. Considering that these recent data cover a period marked by restrictions imposed due to the COVID pandemic, it remains to be seen how demand will develop with public life going back to normal.

According to John Stewart, the main reason why a request could not be fulfilled was a shortage of available interpreters. Thus, while 94% of all GP Referral requests could be fulfilled, only 74% of all general referral requests were completed. It seems that all Access requests were referred, but it is not clear what the outcomes of these were.

Deaf access Deaf and deafblind users in Ireland do not have to register with any service or agency in order to access free interpreting services; in other words, they do not have to

provide evidence of their deafness to make use of their right to an interpreter. Thus, there is no finite list of Deaf people that agencies check bookings against. There is also no limit to a Deaf person's entitlement to interpreting. Service provision is currently mostly limited by interpreter availability and capacity. For instance, John Stewart points out that IRIS only has 16 available appointments per day, which represents a strict limit to clients' access to the service. This limit becomes even more pronounced when it comes to assignments that require special interpreting skills, such as interpreting for deafblind clients, as there are fewer interpreters available who have the skills necessary to take on such jobs.

Due to this restriction on how many jobs can be completed per day, increasing interpreter capacity has become one of the main goals. Strategies involve more immediate measures such as adding another IRIS workspace and employing another interpreter to be able to take on more jobs. IRIS have also extended their services to cover longer workdays during the week as well as weekends (8am-8pm during the week, 10am-4pm on Saturdays, and 12pm-2pm on Sundays). Other proposed strategies are more long term and aim at increasing the number of people who train as interpreters every year as well as improving working conditions for those already working.

One of the strengths of the system in place is that the interpreters who qualify are well trained and thus the quality of interpreting on offer is fairly high. Lorraine Leeson explained it as follows when asked for the benefits of the system in place for the Deaf community:

quality assurance, I think (is a strength) because we do have this this one major track pathway to interpreting provision. And because we've put in place checks and balances around minimum thresholds of competency, and precise language proficiency and interpreting capacity before people progress into an interpreting strand. That reduces the number of available people who are presenting as interpreters, but the quality is better and that's recognized by the system. So I think that this big challenge, this push to have more interpreters will have to be weighed very carefully against what that means in terms of the quality of interpreting available.
(Lorraine)

John Stewart believes that one of the benefits of their booking system is that SLIS offers a central point of contact for the Deaf community and those engaging with it to ask for assistance, relieving some of the burden of self or community-level advocacy:

the experience of the deaf person was, it was such a struggle for them to get the interpreter for tomorrow, to get the interpreter for what they needed now that they were exhausted afterwards, and they didn't have any energy levels left to advocate (...) It's a struggle. So therefore, having some sort of a service that they can contact you know, I need an I need a GP appointment and my brother has died. I need an interpreter and we can take all of that from the and arrange the interpreter and do it. (John)

Educators and management of Deaf led organisations are also putting energy into developing community engagement in their own advocacy through training Deaf interpreters and involving Deaf individuals in the governance of organisations such as SLIS. While these measures are only starting to be implemented, they indicate a strong commitment to increase community involvement in advocacy for their own community.

Challenges, current issues, or gaps in Ireland

Seeing that the ISL Act has only been in effect since December 2020, there are still many issues to deal with to improve interpreting provisions. One of the issues raised by informants was that many staff of public services have not been trained on provider's obligations in terms of ensuring Deaf access and language equity. For instance, interpreters are rarely asked for credentials even though it would be illegal for someone without credentials to be used, which can lead to negative outcomes for all involved.

Another issue is a lack of obligation for private businesses, including those in education and health, to pay for interpreters, meaning that Deaf community members cannot easily access these services. While interpreting in public health services is covered, access to private healthcare remains difficult to negotiate. One problem noted was that some financial institutions would refuse to engage an interpreter to discuss their Deaf client's situation as the interpreter represents a third party and thereby poses a privacy concern. The video interpreting service IRIS has set up a consent form that allows the Deaf client to formally agree to have the interpreter present, but issues around this persist.

A real concern in this ongoing process of implementing and fine-tuning Deaf rights is also the involvement of the Deaf community in key planning and governance roles in a non-tokenistic way. SLIS's board, for instance, includes Deaf members, but according to all informants, the pool of Deaf community members who have the skills to engage in governance positions at this level and are willing to do this in their free time is very limited. Therefore, developing these skills to take over central policy and planning positions is a key goal to future-proof "where we want to be in five years or 10 years' time" (Lorraine Leeson).

As mentioned throughout the section, a key problem service provision faces is a shortage of qualified interpreters who can fulfil the increasing demand. While the training programmes ensure that those who graduate are equipped with appropriate language and interpreting skills, the thresholds means that the number of new graduates who then seek to work as interpreters each year is relatively small - according to John Stewart only 2 graduates started work in 2021. Instead of sacrificing the high standards of the interpreter training that is in place, educators are currently looking at other alternatives to boost numbers, such as fast-tracking CODAs or heritage signers in a condensed course. Other strategies would involve improving employment security and conditions for existing interpreters to attract them to work in the field full time rather than just part time.

Summary: points of relevance to New Zealand

The state in each of these three countries has mandated and resourced a national interpreting service in different ways, and provided support for quality assurance - via a Register in Ireland and Netherlands, and via internal employment processes in Norway. Interpreting provision and standards have been mandated by policy or legislation on inclusion/ accessibility and reinforced by laws that recognise the respective national sign languages.

Advocacy for Deaf access rights is a main point of difference between the SLI systems in Norway, the Netherlands, and Ireland: in Ireland, the state funded referral agency has taken on this responsibility alongside Deaf organisations. This role seems non-existent in Norway where laws and funding provisions have ensured Deaf people access for many years (there is currently no cap on individual interpreting entitlement). In the Netherlands, the professional interpreter association has taken on advocacy on a policy level, lobbying for better access for Deaf people as well as better working conditions for interpreters. In Ireland, advocacy for Deaf access remains a core focus of SLIS and associated organisations.

Workforce capacity is noted as a challenge in Ireland (as in New Zealand) but was less highlighted by informants in Norway and Netherlands, which may reflect their relatively better developed employment conditions and service delivery models. Strengthening workforce capacity requires increasing the number of qualified interpreters and making work conditions and career pathways more attractive to retain them. Following the pandemic, expanding the use of online interpreting is a strategy currently being pursued in all countries to maximise opportunities for interpreters in various locations to undertake more work. A proposal to offer condensed training that allows heritage (or CODA) signers to focus mainly on interpreting skills rather than working through foundation courses in language skills is not yet funded but may be a promising approach.

In Ireland, **strong relationships** between the university **training provider, Registry of SLI, and the service provider (SLIS)** are evident in supporting common aims to strengthen the size, quality, and deployment of workforce and to advocate for wider use of interpreters in society. In Ireland, SLIS maintains a necessary role in advocating for the use of interpreting services, in the context of a relatively less developed history of interpreter use and a Deaf community that has similar challenges to those in New Zealand (i.e. around education levels, leadership capacity, multiple roles and demands).

Management of interpreter funding is a point of contrast between Ireland and the other case studies. In both Norway and the Netherlands, funding streams for SLI are centralised by a few key government ministries, and the avenues for interpreters to claim remuneration are clear. In Ireland, there are various pots of funding available that are managed by different entities. Hospital visits and GP appointments, for instance, are paid out of a fund that is hosted by the state health service (HSE), while money for the voucher system trial was administered by a private booking agency, and the funeral fund sits with SLIS. None of the informants in Ireland expressed the view that this made things more difficult for the interpreters, but the referral system and funding complexity does put the onus of finding out

who to invoice and chasing up payments solely on individual interpreters, which is likely to increase their administrative workload.

Salaried employment of interpreters, as in Norway, creates favourable employment conditions and career benefits for interpreters - such as nationally regulated leave entitlements, professional support and a salary progression structure. The availability of on-staff interpreters also creates a high level of service coverage for the Deaf community. Having more than one interpreter based in a local service centre (in larger centres) and across centres within a national organisation enables collegial support and informal quality assurance through peer mentoring and benchmarking of individual practice with colleagues.

Freelance rates in Norway and Netherlands are largely set by the government through their centralised service provision models, whereas in Ireland, fees are quite variable, determined by the individual interpreter and/or the paying user (de Wit 2020). In the Netherlands and Norway, remuneration is considered reasonable in relation to other professions (such as teaching), and interpreters can earn a decent living from their profession. In Ireland, informants indicated that many freelancers struggle to maintain an adequate income from interpreting alone, which negatively impacts retention and recruitment of workforce. Anecdotally, this parallels the New Zealand situation. De Wit's (2020) survey describes work conditions in Ireland having improved over the four years prior to 2020, "due to the work of the national interpreting organisation with the support of deaf organisations and academic institutions. There has been an increase in the number of employed positions for interpreters. This has helped add stability to the profession however some still feel it is an unstable profession to fully commit to. As ISL has been officially recognized this will hopefully lead to improved working conditions for interpreters" (p. 121).

Deaf clients' ability to directly make requests for service varies between countries; a survey of 45 European countries (de Wit, 2020) reports that a Deaf person can request an interpreter directly in 34 of those countries, through various routes including a deaf service organisation, health service, public bodies, and cultural organisations. Netherlands and Ireland are listed among these. Direct requests by a Deaf person are possible for some settings in Norway, while in others, a public service provider normally initiates the request.

Consumer choice of interpreters was raised in Norway and Netherlands: while the Norwegian model of employed interpreters offers some possibility for expressing a preference between members of a local team of interpreters (with no guarantee that scheduling will allow preference to be met), this may not be possible in smaller areas where only one is available. Conversely, the Norwegian model gives salaried interpreters less control over which assignments they undertake, since they are required to be available for any jobs during their set working hours. In the Netherlands, the Tolcontact booking app allows Deaf consumers to directly contact a preferred interpreter if they wish, or to set a preferred list, and similarly allows interpreters to choose their assignments.

In a referral or brokerage model which relies on freelancers being paid by various funding streams, as seen in the Netherlands, the **use of an efficient, user-friendly online interface** which can handle user requests, booking, scheduling, and invoicing offers ease of administration to interpreters and greater autonomy to Deaf clients and other users.

The participation of Deaf service users and interpreter representatives in providing **governance, advice and feedback regarding service provision** (at local and national levels) was identified as important in the three countries. Norway and Ireland described more formalised structures for this purpose. Ireland noted the challenge of filling designated governance board roles from within a small and generally over-committed Deaf community.

Europe, in general, is a more plurilingual context than New Zealand. Ireland has two official spoken languages (the indigenous Irish Gaelic and English), and a high proportion of people in Netherlands and Norway speak English as an additional language. Yet none of the three countries we investigated had formal training or qualification for **interpreters who work in more than one spoken language** in combination with their national sign language. This provides a comparison with discussion in New Zealand about the feasibility of formal assessment of trilingual NZSL/ te Reo/ English interpreters who are extremely few in number compared to the large number of SLIs in Europe who work in more than one spoken language, but train and qualify only in the national spoken language. In practice, it is assumed that interpreting skills transfer across proficiency in different languages.

Establishing a Registry that is independent of the professional SLI association and of the service provider provides regulation of minimum qualifications to practise and enables independent management of complaints processes. Professional SLI associations focus on providing professional development, mentoring and advocacy. In the Netherlands and Ireland, the establishment of SLI Registries was supported by public funding. In Ireland, a mandate in the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) 2017- 2021 and in the ISL Act (2020) for public bodies to use registered interpreters motivated the recent establishment of a Registry. This could be a useful precedent for New Zealand, given similarities of scale and history. Amendment of the NZSL Act could be an opportunity to consider this provision (as per the ISL Act).

Appendices

Appendix 1. Sources of information

Interviewees

Norway

- Linda Stadshaug and Berit Søgård, national co-managers of the sign language interpreter booking service at NAV (The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service).
- Linn Froyna and Ina Rostrup are NSL interpreters employed by NAV

Netherlands

- Maya de Wit is a qualified NGT and International Sign interpreter, researcher, and educator
- Markell Gremmen is a qualified NGT interpreter, currently Director of the National NGT Interpreter Register.

Ireland

- Dr Lorraine Leeson is Professor in Deaf Studies, Trinity College Dublin, University of Dublin (ISL interpreter educator and researcher)
- Haaris Sheikh is vice-chair of the SLIS board (with long involvement in policy and advocacy)
- John Stewart is the National Manager of SLIS

Documents

- De Wit, Maya. 2020. *A comprehensive guide to Sign Language Interpreting in Europe, 2020 Edition*. Self-published.
- NAV. 2017. *NAV in 2017 – Facts and figures* [unpublished PowerPoint slides provided by NAV managers].
- Martin, Tom. 2019. *Evaluation of IRIS 2017-2018 – Final report presented to Sign Language Interpreting Service* [unpublished Report]. Sign Language Interpreting Service.
- Stølen, Berit. *Assistive technology: The Norwegian experience* [unpublished PowerPoint slides],
- Sund, Terje. 2016. *Assistive technology in Norway – a part of a larger system* [Report]. Department of Assistive Technology.

Websites of services

1. NAV (Norway): <https://www.nav.no/need-an-interpreter>
2. Tolkcontact (the Netherlands): <https://www.tolkcontact.nl/> In translation: <https://www-tolkcontact-nl.translate.goog/ik-zoek-een-tolk/vergoeding-en-tarieven/? x tr sl=nl& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc>
3. Sign Language Interpreting Services (Ireland): <https://slis.ie/>

Appendix 2: Comparison between Norway, the Netherlands, and Ireland

	Norway	The Netherlands	Ireland
Population	5,467,000	17,000,000	5,500,000
Population Density	15 per km2	508 per km2	15 per km2
Deaf Population	5,000	30,000	5,000
Deaf who use Interpreters	2,400	Ca 7-9,000?	1,500
Number of Interpreters	700	563	109 (incl. 23 Deaf interpreters)
Interpreter to Deaf client ratio	3.5 Deaf clients/ interpreter	12-15 Deaf clients / interpreter	14 Deaf clients / interpreter
Local name of sign language	Norsk Tegnspråk (NTS)	Nederlandse Gebarentaal (NGT)	Irish Sign Language (ISL)
Legal recognition of sign language	01.01.2022	13.10.2020	14.12.2017
Name of government funded agency	NAV Tolketjenesten	Tolkcontact	Sign Language Interpreting Service
Type of agency	Booking	Referral	Referral
Coverage	F-2-F, online, speech-to-text, deafblind	F-2-F, online, speech-to-text, deafblind	F-2-F, online, deafblind
Registry	No	Yes, membership compulsory	Yes, membership compulsory
PD	Not an individual requirement, PD is available, training needs identified locally by managers	Compulsory, 60 hours over 4 years, PD quality assurance managed by registry	Compulsory, 12 hours in the first year, 18 in the second, and 24 hours a year from there on.
Access to interpreting	Unlimited	Individual allowances: Set hours for categories work, education, social occasions.	Unlimited
Interpreter employment type	200 employed, 500 freelancers	Mostly freelancers	Mostly freelancers (+ VIS staff)

Appendix 3: Pay rates for freelancers

In the Netherlands (in Euro), government rates for freelancers are currently set as follows:

€66 per hour for Employment and Community interpreting (up from €56 in 2020)

€57 per hour for Education

€0.73 per km for travel time and costs.

Remote interpreting gets 30% more (but no travel time or costs)

Higher percentage for after hours, weekends – as shown below:

Monday - Friday		Saturday	
06.00 - 08.00	120%	06.00 - 22.00	140%
08.00 - 18.00	100%	22.00 - 24.00	145%
18.00 - 22.00	120%	00.00 - 06.00	145%
22.00 - 24.00	145%	Sunday / holidays	
00.00 - 06.00	145%	00.00 - 24.00	155%

In Norway, we do not have current freelance rates, but de Wit's (2020) EU survey reported minimum freelance fees as €28 per hour (+ €8.26 for travel time), and an average annual salary for an employed interpreter as €41,300.

Ireland's minimum freelance fee was reported as €45 per hour in de Wit (2020), with fixed rates for half and full day bookings through some agencies.

Among EU countries, the highest (minimum) freelance fees reported in the de Wit (2020) survey are in Switzerland at €110 p hr and Iceland at €93 p hr. The lowest is €3 p hr in Russia, Armenia, and Georgia, followed by €9 per hour in Slovakia. The UK rate was €33 per hour.