

The Job Profile of Sign Language Interpreters in Ecuador: Collaborative Development and Current Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the job profile of sign language interpreters in Ecuador, a document built through the collective efforts of civil society organizations, academic institutions, and state entities. The contributions of the National Federation of Deaf People of Ecuador (FENASEC), the National Council for Disability Equality (CONADIS), the National Association of Sign Language Interpreters of Ecuador (ANILSEC), the Ombudsman's Office, the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE), and the CRE-SER Institute are highlighted, with the latter playing a mentoring and formative role. The impact of this profile on the professionalization of interpreters is examined, as well as the challenges the country faces in meeting inclusion demands, considering the existence of approximately 76,000 deaf people in Ecuador and the growing need for certified interpreters.

Keywords:

Sign language interpreter, professional profile, inclusion, Ecuador, Deaf community.

INTRODUCTION

Sign language interpreting constitutes a fundamental pillar for inclusion, civic participation, access to rights, and the autonomous life of Deaf individuals. According to the Organic Law on Disabilities of Ecuador, the State guarantees the right to communication and information under equal conditions, recognizing Ecuadorian Sign Language as an official means of communication of the Deaf community. This recognition supports the need for professional interpreting services.

In Ecuador, the legal recognition of Ecuadorian Sign Language (LSEc) has promoted the development of regulatory frameworks and occupational profiles aimed at ensuring quality and ethical standards in interpreting services (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2008; Ley Orgánica de Discapacidades, 2012).

The development of the job profile for sign language interpreters was not an isolated process, but rather the result of collaboration among various stakeholders: Deaf community organizations, interpreter associations, academic institutions, and

state entities. Among them, the Ombudsman's Office has played a key role in safeguarding rights, the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE) has contributed from the academic field, and the CRE-SER Institute has served as a mentor and training reference within the dialogue among participants.

THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Framework and Background

Sign language interpreting is grounded in a human rights-based approach, social inclusion, and communicative accessibility. At the international level, various regulatory frameworks, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, recognize sign language as a legitimate means of communication and establish the obligation of States to ensure its use in order to guarantee the full participation of Deaf individuals in society.

In the Ecuadorian context, the Constitution of the Republic and the Organic Law on Disabilities recognize Ecuadorian Sign Language as a language of the Deaf community, supporting the need for

trained professional interpreters. This recognition has fostered the development of occupational profiles aimed at regulating professional practice, ensuring quality standards, and promoting equitable access to information.

From a theoretical perspective, sign language interpreting is not limited to linguistic translation, but rather involves a process of intercultural mediation. The interpreter acts as a bridge between two distinct linguistic and cultural communities, requiring not only technical mastery of the language but also ethical, sociocultural, and communicative competencies.

Regarding background, the development of the sign language interpreter profile in Ecuador has been the result of a collaborative process among multiple stakeholders. Organizations such as the National Federation of Deaf People of Ecuador (FENASEC), the National Council for Disability Equality (CONADIS), the National Association of Sign Language Interpreters of Ecuador (ANILSEC), the Ombudsman's Office, the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE), and the CRE-SER

Higher Technological Institute have played a fundamental role in defining this profile.

This process responds to the need to professionalize interpreting, establish clear performance guidelines, and ensure that the services provided are aligned with the real needs of the Deaf community. It also aligns with international trends that emphasize the importance of academic training, professional certification, and the regulation of interpreting practice as key elements in ensuring service quality.

In this sense, the development of the professional profile in Ecuador represents a significant step toward inclusion, while also presenting new challenges related to training, service coverage, and the full recognition of interpreters as essential actors in guaranteeing linguistic rights.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach with an exploratory-descriptive design, aimed at analyzing the process of developing the sign language interpreter profile in Ecuador and its impact on the professionalization of the

sector. This approach made it possible to understand the interaction among institutional, social, and academic actors involved in this process.

Documentary analysis was used as the primary technique, examining national regulations such as the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador and the Organic Law on Disabilities, as well as institutional reports and documents produced by key organizations such as FENASEC, CONADIS, ANILSEC, the Ombudsman's Office, the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE), and the CRE-SER Higher Technological Institute.

The procedure consisted of the collection, systematization, and critical analysis of secondary information, identifying categories such as stakeholders involved, impact of the professional profile, academic training, and current challenges. Additionally, a comparative review of international experiences in countries such as the United States, Finland, Germany, Brazil, and the Netherlands was incorporated in order to contextualize the development of the Ecuadorian profile within global trends (see Figure 1).



Figure 1

Institutional representatives and intercultural communication professionals working on the development of the sign language interpreter profile in Ecuador.

Note. Image created by the *Mente Abierta* editorial team (2025).

The analysis was conducted through the thematic organization of information, allowing for the establishment of relationships between the regulatory framework, the national context, and the demands of the Deaf community. This process facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study and enabled the identification of progress, limitations, and future projections of the professional profile of sign language interpreters in Ecuador.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The professional profile of sign language interpreters has generated a structural shift

in how the interpreter's role is conceived in Ecuador. On the one hand, it has strengthened legitimacy and professional recognition by establishing ethical and technical standards. On the other hand, it has revealed a training gap: the number of professional interpreters remains insufficient in relation to the Deaf population, a situation that aligns with international challenges, where the World Federation of the Deaf highlights the need to strengthen training and professional certification as key pillars to ensure the quality of interpreting (WFD, 2019).

The definition of the professional profile has enabled:

Clarity in functions and competencies of interpreters across educational, legal, community, institutional, and media contexts. The characterization of sign language interpreters, particularly in legal settings, underscores the importance of specialized training to ensure high-quality interpreting services (García Henao et al., 2024).

Social and professional recognition of the interpreter's role as a key figure for inclusion. Academic training for

interpreters is increasingly recognized within higher education, transforming the labor landscape and responding to new social and educational demands (Burad, 2009).

Requirement of formal qualifications in various public and private institutions to ensure service quality. In Ecuador, services for Deaf individuals must be guaranteed through certified interpreters who ensure access to information in their own language, in compliance with the right to be informed established in the Organic Law on Disabilities (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2012).

This legislation explicitly recognizes the need to provide accessible communication services for individuals with hearing impairments, promoting inclusion and full participation in society.

Similarly, the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador establishes that all individuals have the right to communicate and receive information in their own language, guaranteeing the protection of national languages and linguistic rights as part of fundamental rights (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2008). Therefore, the

requirement for certified professional interpreters not only supports service quality but also constitutes a legal requirement to ensure equality, autonomy, and effective access to information for the Deaf community.

Strengthening of academic training through the participation of higher education institutions such as PUCE and CRE-SER.

The provision of sign language interpreting services by all institutions within the Ecuadorian State is essential to ensure accessibility and quality of care for Deaf individuals across different sectors. However, for this right to be fully effective, services must be provided by interpreters with specialized academic training, capable of ensuring linguistic accuracy, ethical competence, and knowledge of the cultural contexts of the Deaf community, as required by professional standards and current regulations.

Internationally, in the **United States**, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires public services to provide qualified interpreters to ensure effective

communication with Deaf individuals in contexts such as medical consultations, legal proceedings, and educational services (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).

In **Finland**, universities of applied sciences such as Humak and Diaconia offer degree programs in sign language interpreting and augmentative and alternative communication, preparing interpreters to work in public sectors such as education, healthcare, and justice (Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, 2020; Humak University of Applied Sciences, 2021).

In **Germany**, sign language interpreting is recognized as a specialized profession, and interpreters must meet training and certification requirements established by competent authorities, ensuring high-quality services across public contexts (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2019; German Association of Sign Language Interpreters, 2021).

Brazil has made significant progress in training interpreters of Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS). The Federal University of Santa Catarina offers a

higher education program dedicated to interpreter training, aligned with legislation that mandates the inclusion of LIBRAS in educational curricula and accessibility in general education for Deaf students (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2018; Brazilian Law No. 13.146, 2015).

In the **Netherlands**, interpreter training is provided in higher education institutions, and professionals must comply with standards established by national interpreter associations, ensuring high-quality services (Dutch Association of Sign Language Interpreters, 2020; Netherlands Institute for Sign Language Interpreting, 2021).

These international examples highlight the importance of specialized academic training in higher education institutions to ensure quality and professionalism in sign language interpreting. It is imperative that public and private entities in Ecuador follow this example, providing professional interpreting services that guarantee accessibility and quality of care for Deaf individuals in compliance with constitutional and legal frameworks.

Greater protection of rights through the intervention of the Ombudsman's Office, which ensures the application of the professional profile in accordance with constitutional principles defending equality and non-discrimination of the Deaf community (Defensoría del Pueblo del Ecuador, 2021).

Statistics and Current Reality

In Ecuador, it is estimated that there are approximately 76,000 Deaf individuals, reflecting a significant demand for interpreting services. The CRE-SER Institute, a pioneer in the professionalization of the field, has graduated 148 interpreters to date, 22% men and 78% women (CRE-SER, 2025). However, demand far exceeds supply, making it urgent to expand academic programs, strengthen professional development, and increase national coverage.

This situation is not unique to **Ecuador**; internationally, studies have documented that even in countries with more established interpreter training systems, such as the United States, there is a notable shortage of qualified interpreters in

educational and legal settings, forcing institutions to rely on temporary or less effective solutions (Angelelli, 2004).

Current Challenges for the Consolidation of the Professional Profile of Ecuadorian Sign Language Interpreters

Strengthening the professional profile of sign language interpreters in Ecuador requires the implementation of comprehensive strategies that ensure sustainability, quality, and social recognition. The following high-impact strategic challenges are proposed:

Expanding academic programs and interdisciplinary research

It is imperative to expand sign language interpreter training programs at the higher education level, integrating applied research and partnerships with universities and higher education institutions, such as the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador (PUCE) and the CRE-SER Higher Technological Institute, both nationally and internationally.

This initiative will enable the development of innovative curricula, research lines in sign language linguistics, communicative

health, and accessible technologies, following models of academic collaboration observed in countries such as Finland and Brazil, where universities play a key role in professionalization and scientific production (Jokinen & Kuusisto, 2020; Lodi et al., 2021).

Strengthening Interinstitutional Coordination

The creation of a permanent committee involving the State, the Deaf community, interpreter associations, and academic institutions would support the development of inclusive policies, the standardization of certification processes, and the continuous updating of the professional profile. This coordination may draw on experiences such as the National Sign Language Councils in Germany and the Netherlands, which have demonstrated effectiveness in the development of sustainable policies (European Union of the Deaf, 2022).

Garantizar condiciones laborales justas y reglamentadas

It is essential to implement regulations that guarantee job stability, adequate remuneration, and access to social security

for interpreters in both the public and private sectors. International evidence indicates that the regulation of fees and employment with social benefits, as implemented in the United States and Finland, improves service quality and professional retention (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf [RID], 2021; Finnish Association of the Deaf, 2020).

Ensuring Ethics and Service Quality

Practice in critical contexts—such as healthcare, justice, and education—requires strict ethical standards, periodic competency evaluations, and continuous training. The experience of Brazil, with its national certification framework for sign language interpreters, demonstrates that ongoing evaluation increases user trust and protects the linguistic rights of Deaf individuals (Lodi et al., 2021).

Maintaining and Strengthening Oversight by the Ombudsman's Office

Active oversight by the Ombudsman's Office is essential to prevent violations of rights and to ensure that the professional profile is applied consistently with the Constitution of Ecuador (Asamblea Nacional, 2008) and the Organic Law on

Disabilities (Asamblea Nacional, 2012). A monitoring system with annual public reports would allow for the evaluation of compliance with both public and private obligations in the provision of interpreting services.

CONCLUSIONS

The job profile of sign language interpreters in Ecuador represents a significant step toward the consolidation of the profession. Its development, the result of collaborative and cooperative efforts among FENASEC, CONADIS, ANILSEC, the Ombudsman's Office, PUCE, and CRE-SER, reflects the importance of joint work and respect for the distinct roles performed by each stakeholder.

The impact of this profile is already evident in the increasing requirement for formal qualifications and in the growing social recognition of interpreters as linguistic and cultural mediators. Nevertheless, the challenge remains substantial: the Ecuadorian Deaf community requires a greater number of trained professionals with strong

competencies and a firm ethical commitment to inclusion.

The consolidation of this profile responds not only to a technical need but also to a principle of social justice and human rights. In this regard, the continuation of collaborative and cooperative efforts among all organizations of and for Deaf individuals is essential to achieving real and sustainable progress. Only through coordinated efforts and interinstitutional collaboration will it be possible to fully guarantee the right of the Deaf community to access information in their own language, while simultaneously strengthening interpreter training processes in accredited and high-quality institutions.

This shared commitment must also extend to the defense of interpreters' right to decent work, recognizing their fundamental role in building a truly inclusive society that respects linguistic and cultural diversity.

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