

ISER applauds Uganda's move to include sign language interpreters in all general and regional referral hospitals.

The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) welcomes the recent decision by the Ministry of Public Service to include sign language interpreters as part of the administrative support staff in all [general](#) and [regional referral hospitals](#) in Uganda. On March 9, 2023, the Ministry of Public Service shared the new approved structure for general and regional referral hospitals with all district local governments, which includes provisions for sign language interpreters as hospital staff. This decision marks a significant step towards ensuring that all Ugandans, including those with hearing disabilities, have access to quality public healthcare services.

ISER has long advocated for the inclusion of sign language interpreters in healthcare settings. The lack of interpreters in public health facilities has far-reaching consequences, resulting in the exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination of deaf people. In 2017, ISER, the Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD), and other members of the deaf community [challenged](#) the state's failure to provide sign language interpretation at healthcare facilities before the Constitutional Court of Uganda. In February of this year, the Court unfortunately avoided hearing the matter on its merits and [decided](#) that it relates to the enforcement of human rights and should instead have been filed before the High Court. However, the recent action by the government demonstrates that our litigation and advocacy efforts have not gone unnoticed.

Sign language is at the core of deaf people's lives and makes accessibility to healthcare possible. According to the 2016 demographic household survey, persons with disabilities account for 14% of Uganda's 41.5 million population. This segment of the population is significant, and it is the government's responsibility to protect and uphold their fundamental rights and freedoms.

"The government's recognition of the importance of sign language interpretation in public healthcare delivery and taking action to address this issue is commendable. This move will not only improve the quality of healthcare services but also promote inclusivity and diversity in our society," said Atori Elizabeth, legal officer at ISER.

To achieve the desired impact, it is crucial to make sure that this policy is implemented effectively and efficiently. Therefore, we call upon the government to allocate adequate resources and provide

training to healthcare workers to enable them to work effectively with sign language interpreters. We also call upon the Government to extend implementation of this policy to private health facilities.

Access to healthcare is a fundamental right, and we will continue to work towards ensuring that individuals with disabilities are not excluded from this basic human right. We remain committed to advocating for the rights of people with disabilities and will continue to work with the government and other stakeholders to ensure that they are included, and their rights are respected.

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