



# Promotion of Well-Being For Deaf and Hard of Hearing Citizens: Insights After The CORONAVIRUS Pandemic

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## Abstract

Access to information for Deaf people in the face of the CORONAVIRUS pandemic was imperative for promoting the well-being of all the communities, especially of those who are users of minority languages. The Coronavirus pandemic left critics emerging learnings in the Mexican community: access to well-being should be equal, but there are marginal groups that much more lag between the poorest ones. This is the case of the Mexican Deaf and Deafblind, who were aside from understanding the directions for self-care during the coronavirus. Besides, disability was more vulnerable to not having enough income, which promoted violence against people with disability (UNFPA, 2020) [1], and Mexican populations must find mechanisms to receive relevant information for well-being [2,3]. In this regard, the report by Haualand and Allen (2009) [4], identifies that for Deaf people, the principal rights are access to and recognition of Sign Language (LS), including acceptance and respect for the cultural and linguistic identity of Deaf people, bilingual Education, and accessibility to LS interpretation services. This report also identifies that Mexico is at a lag of almost 15 years in reaching these essential rights.

**Keywords:** Deaf; Hard of Hearing; Well-being; Coronavirus; Insights

## Mexico and Other Countries to Guarantee the Right of Citizenship

According to the Council of Europe (2024) [5], "citizenship" is more than a legal construction and relates – amongst other things – to one's sense of belonging, for instance, to a community you can shape and influence directly. The Council of Europe (2024) discuss that such a community can be defined through a variety of elements, for example, a shared moral code, an identical set of rights and obligations, loyalty to a commonly owned civilization, or a sense of identity. Moreover, this Council shed light on fiendish rights and instills the recognize the relationship between the individual and society in four dimensions: the political/legal dimension, the social dimension, the cultural dimension and the economic dimension. From the last framework, the Mexican government must address the need for access to information, especially its signature as a State Party to the UN International Convention on the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) and the policy of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)

[6]. It should be noted that the WFD has a binding nature with Mexico through the Mexican Federation of the Deaf.

Haualand and Allen (2009) [4], collected the voices of Deaf communities in developing countries in their report, claiming the need to avoid inequalities and social gaps and promote quality education and decent employment for Deaf people. In this regard, we believe that the debate and demand for the rights of Deaf citizens must join forces with international instruments that contribute to transforming the world. For this meaning, collaboration with experts, interpreters, and researchers within Deaf Communities in developed and not developed countries is essential to reach the 2030 Goals of Sustainable Development [6].

In this same order of ideas, Mexico is a State Party to this Convention [7], and quality education for all and equality in civic participation are priorities for the 2030 Agenda [8], which focuses on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and,

for each State Party, on planning and implementing a national strategy with specific targets for applying the 2030 Agenda [8], in an integrated and multisectoral way. The Agenda [8], sets three priorities for achieving sustainable development: social inclusion, economic development, and environmental protection. Within this framework, our focus is on social inclusion as a mechanism for achieving sustainable development [7], which was a priority in the 2018 national strategy. However, over the past two decades, legal measures have been adopted to ensure non-discrimination in the exercise of political rights. The progress made is undeniable, but so are the remaining challenges, which must be pointed out (National Council to Prevent Discrimination, 2012).

About Latin American context, In 2020, approximately 85 million people with disabilities lived in Latin America and the Caribbean, representing 14.7% of the region's population. Data show that households with at least one person with a disability tend to be poorer, and that one in every five households living in extreme poverty includes a person with a disability (World Bank, 2023). Regarding policies to address the social debt owed to people with disabilities, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [6], has noted that policies designed to mitigate inequality do not always reflect the real needs of people with disabilities. In Latin America, most people with disabilities live in poverty, a reflection of exclusionary and ineffective policies. The inclusion of these communities must be based on a differentiated approach that recognizes functional diversity and the structural barriers they face.

### Hearing Diversity as Identities

In earlier articles, he explained that Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing persons' identities and specifics need information access [9,10]. As an identity, we recognize three large groups that cannot be grouped as one: Deaf people, people who are Hard of Hearing including people with cochlear implants. Each group has a significant variation and distinct identity that responds to educational and cultural variants [11]. So, it is essential to highlight that within the community of individuals with hearing differences exists an extensive diversity of experiences, requirements, and identities [12]. These particularities include the age at which hearing loss occurred, whether it happened before or after oral language development, whether the individual received assistance from hearing aids or a cochlear implant, and at what age this occurred, as well as the subsequent outcomes or changes over time. A compelling variable in access to language deals with the family's early consciousness about deafness, whether the parents are Deaf or if there is a history of hearing loss in their family [9].

### Lack of accessibility for Deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens

The lack of accessibility for Deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens in Mexico remains a pressing issue. With 1,350,802 Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals nationwide (INEGI, 2021) and approximately 300,000 using Mexican Sign Language (LSM) as

their primary mode of communication (WFD & SNAD, 2008), this population continues to face systemic exclusion from information and education. According to INEGI (2015), 86% of Deaf people aged 3 to 29 lack access to education, even when using hearing aids, resulting in limited literacy—by age fifteen, 97.6% have insufficient reading and writing skills (INEGI, 2015; 2020). Consequently, Deaf Mexicans, predominantly natural LSM signers, advocate for access through professional interpreters and inclusive communication systems. The pandemic highlighted global inequalities in accessibility as video call platforms introduced real-time transcription, initially only in English. Following legal action by the U.S. Hard of Hearing Association, Zoom was required to make this feature freely available, leading to gradual improvements and expansion to more languages. While these tools are imperfect—often challenged by accent recognition—they have become essential for enhancing speech clarity and inclusion. For Spanish-speaking users, the emergence of real-time transcription in their native language marked a milestone: for many hard-of-hearing individuals, it was their first experience of a “natural” linguistic environment, representing a profound step toward empowerment and visibility in a society where both Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities remain largely marginalized.

### Data Collection During the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Inclusion of the Population With Disabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean

According to Pinilla-Roincancio and Rodriguez (2022) [13], there was a lack of data on the population with disabilities in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors investigated the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean through surveys. These surveys included questions about disability during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the period 2020-2021, and from this, studied what actions the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have implemented in educational, health and social protection aspects that have explicitly included the population with disabilities. The authors emphasized that the results show that this population is invisible within the information collection processes, which is associated with the low number of countries that implemented policies to mitigate the impact of the pandemic that explicitly included the population with disabilities.

The following provision analyses the Deaf Community face to face with COVID-19.

### Case of the Mexican Deaf Citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic

Accessability is an historical handicap for the Deaf. During COVID-19, a primary need standed out in social media: the review of the interpretation box less than or equal to 1/6 of the screen. The accessibility provision published by the DOF: 09/17/20187 regulates the telecast message to be accessible in Mexican Sign Language (LSM). The LSM interpreter must occupy one-sixth of

the screen. This interpretation box with correct size is essential so the deaf population can fully understand the message.

In this context, enhancing access to inclusive technology in low—and middle-income countries is crucial. Due to the high costs, there is no access to detection, prevention, rehabilitation, and treatment. The prostheses that people with disabilities require are so expensive. Then, we find another handicap and barrier to well-being: unequal economic development among the Deaf population [14]. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many Mexicans are unable to access the limited healthcare facilities. Even when accessible, doctors must be proficient in sign language to provide care for the Deaf and knowledgeable about augmentative technology to assist the deafblind, a mainly overlooked disability. In the other hand, other essential factors increase the risk of inequalities for this population; for example, the increasing noise pollution causes one of the biggest problems in the quality of life of those who have acquired some level of tinnitus, which can even lead to suicide, becoming additionally hyperacusic.

Consequently, promoting Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Empowerment and Participation Technologies (TEP), and Learning and Knowledge Technologies (TAC) is essential. Accessible technology can be a determining factor in health [15].

In this same line, In Mexico, UNESCO data (2024) reveal an alarming reality: only 46.5% of children with disabilities attend school. This figure highlights systemic educational exclusion, driven by a lack of accessible infrastructure, adequate materials, and trained personnel. In states such as Hidalgo, where 5.42% of the population lives with a disability, challenges are compounded by budgetary constraints and the absence of targeted educational policies. People with disabilities are diverse and experience different opportunities throughout their lives—from birth to death. Each person faces inequality in their own way, yet ultimately, they remain excluded from the social system to which they should belong.

The population with disabilities experiences multiple and simultaneous forms of discrimination due to factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, place of residence, ethnic or racial background, and migration status, among others [16].

According to the 2022 National Survey on Discrimination (ENADIS), 33.8% of people aged 12 and older with disabilities reported experiencing discrimination in the past 12 months. Of these, 49.6% said it was due to having a disability. Inequality becomes visible in the lack of rights afforded to people with disabilities. For example, in education, “among people with disabilities and/or mental or emotional conditions aged 15 and over (6,269,277 individuals), 19% (1.2 million) cannot read or write a short note—almost four times the rate among the population without disabilities (4%, or 3.3 million) [17,18].”

### Case of Mexican Hard of Hearing citizens during COVID-19 pandemic

The case of hard-of-hearing individuals during this pandemic is challenging, as they do not have access to professional services such as captions and experts in educational technologies that are accessible to address their diverse requirements. This situation of invisibility requires the development of tools, as there is a lack of non-invasive hearing health policies in many places on the planet. Hearing devices are a luxury for only a few, and there needs to be more certainty about the proper programming and distribution. Another specific situation caused by the pandemic and the use of masks is the difficulty faced by people who are hard of hearing due to the lack of transparent masks, making lip reading impossible

### Last reflections on guarantees for hearing diversity during the COVID Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need to improve access to information for the deaf population in Mexico, particularly those who use Mexican Sign Language (LSM). Despite existing regulations, such as including LSM interpreters on television, the barriers remain significant due to technological and political limitations. The lack of access to adequate Education for most deaf people aggravates this situation, leaving them without sufficient reading and writing skills and depending almost exclusively on LSM for communication [19,20].

It is crucial that the Mexican government, in collaboration with experts, interpreters, and the Deaf community, adopt measures to ensure that vital information reaches everyone effectively. This collaboration includes reviewing and improving the guidelines on the visibility of LSM interpreters in the media, investing in inclusive technologies, and training health professionals in LSM. Only through a comprehensive and committed approach can it be ensured that the deaf population is not excluded and can fully exercise their rights in times of crisis and beyond.

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