

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO

**SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING  
IN EUROPE**

2026 EDITION

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## Foreword

I am delighted to share with you the outcomes of the seventh European survey, six years after the last edition. As before, I have conducted this as a pro bono project, depending on colleagues across Europe who, like myself, donated their time to advance the profession as a whole. I could not have done this without you. Thank you for contributing to this collaborative achievement.

I especially would like to thank the European Union of the Deaf (EUD) for the reflective exchanges and collaboration and the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli) for their input. Thank you also to all the individual interpreters who provided suggestions for additional questions to the survey. A special thank you goes out to my colleagues Sandra Schügerl for her professional review of the survey questions, and Tina Vrbanic for her thoughtful support in the analysis. Sadly, our colleague and friend Anna Komorova, who was my lifeline to some of the Eastern European countries for the last editions, passed away in October 2022. She is sorely missed. I am incredibly thankful for Victoria Savostenkova, who stepped in and translated the survey into Russian, reached out to our colleagues in Eastern Europe, and translated all the answers back to English.

This edition required an immense investment in time and effort. The survey platform I had used previously deleted my European surveys and all their data, unannounced. I had to find a new platform and rebuild the survey with over 300 questions and the corresponding logic. The patience of the respondents and myself was tested by the new survey platform, which turned out to be less robust than promised. The analysis of the data came also with major setbacks as the new platform was not up to the complexity of the survey. The time needed to fix the errors and finalize the analysis forced me to publish this book later than planned.

That said, I am much pleased to present you now with the latest, most comprehensive data collection on the status of the sign language interpreting profession in Europe.

Maya de Wit, PhD



## Summary

The profession of sign language interpreting has changed significantly since the previous edition of this book was published in 2020. The Covid19 pandemic has resulted in greater awareness among the public due to the increased visibility of sign language interpreters in the media. The pandemic also furthered the use of technology and remote interpreting. In addition, the number, duration, and levels of educational programs for sign language interpreters have increased. New university programs have been established in Slovakia and Poland, and the deaf interpreter program in Sweden has now become permanent. Overall, there are more training and work opportunities for deaf interpreters, which, however, are not yet on par with those for hearing interpreters.

The number of professionally trained sign language interpreters continues to grow, with nearly 11,500 interpreters across the forty-five countries and regions covered in this survey. There are improvements in the working conditions, with adequate agreements and better pay. Still, many countries see a shortage of interpreters, for instance, in remote regions or when interpreters with special skills, such as additional languages, are required.

The lack of professional recognition is one of the major issues that hinder further development of the profession and is often linked to funding. Consequently, deaf signers are faced with interpreting services that are insufficient in terms of quality, quantity, or both. Overall, the profession needs sustainable national infrastructures to match the growing demand for qualified sign language interpreters.

## List of respondents by country or region (N=47)

Albania <sup>3</sup>	Malta <sup>1</sup>
Austria <sup>1</sup>	Moldova <sup>3</sup>
Belgium-Flanders <sup>1</sup>	Montenegro <sup>3</sup>
Belgium-Wallonia <sup>1</sup>	Netherlands <sup>1</sup>
Bosnia-Herzegovina <sup>HI</sup>	Norway <sup>1</sup>
Bulgaria <sup>1</sup>	Poland <sup>1</sup>
Croatia <sup>1</sup>	Portugal <sup>1</sup>
Cyprus <sup>1</sup>	Romania <sup>4</sup>
Czech Republic <sup>1</sup>	Russia <sup>1</sup>
Denmark <sup>1, DI</sup>	Scotland <sup>1</sup>
England, Wales & Northern Ireland(ASLI & NUBSLI) <sup>2</sup>	Serbia <sup>1</sup>
Estonia <sup>1</sup>	Slovakia <sup>1</sup>
Finland <sup>1</sup>	Slovenia <sup>1</sup>
France <sup>1</sup>	Spain <sup>1</sup>
Georgia <sup>3</sup>	Sweden <sup>1</sup>
Germany <sup>1, DI</sup>	Switzerland-French region <sup>1</sup>
Greece <sup>1</sup>	Switzerland-German region <sup>1</sup>
Hungary <sup>1</sup>	Switzerland-Italian region <sup>1</sup>
Iceland <sup>1</sup>	Turkey <sup>HI</sup>
Ireland <sup>1</sup>	Ukraine <sup>HI, 3</sup>
Italy <sup>2</sup> (ANIOS & ANIMU)	
Kosovo <sup>1</sup>	
Latvia <sup>5</sup>	
Lithuania <sup>1</sup>	
Luxembourg <sup>HI</sup>	

<sup>1</sup>National interpreter association

<sup>2</sup>Two national interpreter associations

<sup>3</sup>National deaf association

<sup>5</sup>Interpreting services center

<sup>HI</sup>Individual response (hearing interpreter)

<sup>DI</sup>Individual response (deaf interpreter)

## Introduction

The seventh edition of *Sign Language Interpreting in Europe* provides an overview of the current situation of the sign language interpreting profession. The data in this publication is based on a European survey which was sent out and collected in the autumn of 2025.

A total of forty-seven respondents (two associations from Italy and two from England, Wales and Northern Ireland) covering forty-five regions and countries, responded to the survey. This publication presents responses from nearly all forty-seven members of the Council of Europe (CoE).<sup>1</sup> For the first time, Moldova participated in this European survey.

The European Union of the Deaf (EUD), the European Deafblind Union (EDbU), and the European Union of the Deaf Youth (EUDY), European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli), as well as interpreter associations and individual stakeholders, were asked to provide input for the survey. Back in 2001, when I conducted this survey for the first time, nineteen countries participated. The data from the subsequent surveys (2001, 2004, 2007, 2012, 2016, 2020 and now 2025) show which trends shaped the sign language interpreting profession during these years.

The survey consists of questions concerning the interests of interpreters in areas such as education, employment, remuneration, and legislation. The survey was sent to all national associations of sign language interpreters in the respective countries. In countries which do not have an association for sign language interpreters, or where there was no response from the interpreter association, the survey was answered by the national deaf association or an individual expert in the field. A list of all the respondents can be found on page 8.

For the first time ever, this edition provides a chapter on the development of the profession for deaf interpreters. In addition, the publication focuses on the functioning of the professional associations, and how current developments can impact the profession. New information is also provided on continuing education, specializations, and mentoring of sign language interpreters.

This publication consists of five parts: associations, quality control, deaf interpreters, education, and employment. The appendices provide the full survey and 'Facts and figures per country'. Additional links and information are published on <https://www.mayadewit.nl/european-study>.

The outcome of this survey depends on people volunteering their time to answer many questions, some of which are hard to estimate. Where possible, the survey allows respondents to skip answers by choosing "I do not know." Still, human error in a survey of this scale is unavoidable and at times a data point may be off the mark. That said, the sheer scale of this survey, covering the entire geography over a time span of twenty-five years, should be helpful in identifying leading and emerging trends in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/porta/members-states> (accessed December 2025)



# **PART 1 – ASSOCIATIONS**

## 1.1 Establishment of sign language interpreter associations

National sign language interpreter associations in Europe represent a country or a language region. Most of the respondents indicate that they have a national association for sign language interpreters in their country or region. For an overview of all the associations, please refer to Appendix 1, 'Facts and figures per country.'

Table 1.1 lists the associations that are officially independent interpreter associations and when they were established. Listed are those associations that responded or whose data is known. Some countries or regions are listed more than once, because associations changed their names or folded and a new one was established.

The first national association of sign language interpreters was established in Sweden in 1969. Denmark and Norway followed in 1977 and 1978, respectively. In 1978 France was the first non-Scandinavian country to set up an organization. Estonia was officially registered in 1995 but established in 1994<sup>2</sup>. Since the last publication in 2020 no new national associations have been established.

In Germany there are several regional associations and two national associations, BGSD and tgsd. The BGSD has 11 regional associations.<sup>3</sup> Tgsd, the national organization of deaf interpreters in Germany established by and for deaf interpreters, did not participate in the survey this time, but an individual qualified deaf Interpreter (DI) who is a member of tgsd did. Other countries with an independent interpreter association and regional associations are Spain and Russia.

For the first time NUBSLI (National Union of British Sign Language Interpreters), another national association in England Wales & Northern Ireland,<sup>4</sup> participated in the survey. Romania no longer has a national association of sign language interpreters. An individual representative provided input instead.

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<sup>2</sup> Liivi Liholm, personal communication (7 December 2020)

<sup>3</sup> <https://bgsd.de/de/verband/arbeitsgruppen.html>

<sup>4</sup> For England, Wales & Northern Ireland the abbreviation 'England, W&NI' will be used in this publication.

**Table 1.1 Year of establishment of independent interpreter associations**

Country	Name	Established	Country	Name	Established
Sweden	STTF	1969	Czech Republic	CKTZJ	2000
Denmark	FTT	1977	Spain	FILSE	2000
Norway	TiA <sup>5</sup>	1978	Belgium-Flanders	VVTG	2001 - 2009
France	AFTILS <sup>6</sup>	1978	Slovenia	ZTSZJ	2002
Scotland	SASLI	1981 - 2019	Bulgaria	НАПЖЕБ	2005
Finland	SVT	1982 - 2019	Slovakia	SKTPJ	2007
Belgium-Flanders	BVDT	1983 - 2001	Croatia	HDTPZJG	2008
Belgium-Wallonia	ABILS	1986	Kosovo	KASLI	2008
Switzerland-Fr.	ARILS <sup>7</sup>	1986	Belgium-Flanders	BVGT	2009
Ireland	IASLI	1987 - 2007	Russia	RASLI	2009
England, Wales & NI	ASLI	1987	Lithuania	LGKVA	2009
Italy	ANIOS	1987	Poland	STPJM	2009
Italy	ANIMU	1987	Serbia	ATSZJ	2010
Netherlands	NBTG <sup>8</sup>	1988	Ireland	CISLI	2011
Greece	SDENG	1991	Portugal	ANAPI-LG	2011
Switzerland-Ger.	BGDÜ <sup>9</sup>	1991	Germany	tgsd	2011
Hungary	JOSZ	1994	England, Wales & NI	NUBSLI	2014
Estonia	EVK	1994	Cyprus	ΣΔΚΝΓ	2015
Germany	BGSD	1997	Croatia	CASLIFD	2016
Austria	ÖGSDV	1998	Finland	Kieliasiantun tijat	2019
Switzerland-It.	ILISSI	1998	Scotland	SCOSLI	2020
Iceland	HART	1998	Malta	AILSM	2020

## 1.2 National associations

Some countries have more than one national association, such as Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. Not having a single national association per country is typically caused by difference in language, culture, geography, and regional regulations. For instance, if interpreters do not share the same (spoken) language, communicating and working together in one organization can be challenging.

Switzerland officially has four spoken languages: German, French, Italian, and Rhaeto-Romance. The three associations for sign language interpreters (ARILS, BGDÜ & ILISSI) in

<sup>5</sup> Name change in 2020.

<sup>6</sup> In January 2024, the association changed its name and became AFTILS: French association of sign language translators and interpreters (source: <https://aftils.fr/histoire-de-l-aftils>).

<sup>7</sup> The association 'ARILS' was founded in 1986 under the name AILS (source: <http://arils.ch/historique/>).

<sup>8</sup> In 2000 the name changed from NVTD to NBTG.

<sup>9</sup> Name change in 2024, source: <https://www.bgdu.ch/geschichte>

Switzerland are linked to the regions of Switzerland where German Sign Language (BGDÜ), French Sign Language (ARILS), and Italian Sign Language (ILISSI) are used.

Belgium also has more than one official spoken language, namely French, Dutch, and German. Since there is such a linguistic difference between Flanders and Wallonia, anything pertaining to sign language interpreting is taken care of separately.<sup>10</sup> The sign language interpreters in the Flemish part of Belgium have an organization called BVGT. In Wallonia the interpreter association is named ABILS.

Most national associations for sign language interpreters in Europe are directly linked to a single national sign language rather than to a single European country. If a country has more than one spoken language, it has at least an equivalent number of national sign languages. The exceptions are Scotland and England, Wales & Northern Ireland. They all use British Sign Language, yet Scotland has its own distinct regional organization. Therefore, when referring to the United Kingdom this publication distinguishes Scotland from England, Wales & Northern Ireland.

A country that has a single national sign language and more than one national association, is Portugal. Portugal has two associations which is reported as positive by ANAPI-LG, one of the national associations:

*“Two associations with different objectives and are located in different parts of the country. While one is more focused on providing interpretation services and operates mainly in the north of the country, the second emerged with the purpose of defending professionals in the field and investing in training. Currently, members are divided between the two associations depending on their goals.”*

A similar answer is provided by the respondent from Turkey:

*“Having more than one association can be beneficial for deaf individuals and interpreters, as it allows better response to diverse needs and regional demands. However, without coordination and shared goals, it may lead to fragmentation and inefficiency.”*

Italy is the country with the most national associations, namely seven. This is due to several national laws that passed in 2021<sup>11</sup> and in subsequent years the official recognition of Italian Sign Language (LIS) and the profession of signed language interpreting. Associations of sign language interpreters in Italy are responsible for validating skills and issuing qualification certificates.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence interpreters established associations to issue these validations.

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<sup>10</sup> M. van Herreweghe & M. van Nuffel (2000). RID Journal of Interpretation: Sign (Language) Interpreting in Flanders, Belgium

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2021/05/21/21A03181/sg>

<sup>12</sup> F. Malaspina (2025). Moving Towards Professional Standards: An Investigation into the Role and Quality of the Signed Language Interpreting Profession in Italy. Master Thesis, University of Siena, Italy.

Croatia also has three associations, which is not perceived as advantageous by CASLI:

*"One of the three associations operates exclusively in a single city, while another does not include the term 'sign language interpreter' in its name, instead using 'communication intermediary.'*

*The Croatian Association of Sign Language Interpreters was established by interpreters working within various deaf associations and does not employ interpreters on a full-time basis. Until last year, the Association was unable to employ any SLIs due to the absence of an office. Moreover, to operate under the Ministry of Labor, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, it is necessary to meet demanding and costly requirements."*

Until 2019 sign language interpreters in Finland had an association (SVT) of sign language interpreters only. As of 2019 Finland has a new national association called Kieliasiantuntijat ry (language experts) that includes interpreters, translators and other professionals working in the field of multilingual communications. This includes spoken languages as well as signed languages.

Scotland established their first association (SASLI) in 1981. However, in 2018 the government decided to withdraw funding for SASLI. As SASLI practiced a dual function of register and membership organization, the Scottish government felt that this was a conflict of interest. Through a vote by the SASLI members it was decided that SASLI would become a registering-only body. This new organization was named the SRLPDC (Scottish Register of Language Professionals with the Deaf Community) and was officially confirmed in 2020. It is also referred to as 'The Scottish Register.' In addition, a separate membership organization for sign language interpreters SCOSLI (Scottish Collaborative of Sign Language Interpreters) was established in 2020.

### 1.3 Names of the associations

Most of the independent associations of sign language interpreters are called organization or association of sign language interpreters and have added their nationality to it. For instance, the Dutch association is named 'The Dutch Association of Sign Language Interpreters.'<sup>13</sup> In France the association changed its name from AFILS to AFTILS to include translators in the name. In Finland the association is not exclusively for sign language interpreters, and the umbrella term 'language experts' is used in the name.

In the past the Spanish association FILSE added 'Guide-Interpreters' to their name: 'Spanish Federation of Spanish Sign Language Interpreters and Guide-Interpreters.' AFTILS (France) and ÖGSDV (Austria) refer to both interpreters and translators in their association names. All the other associations refer to their national sign language in the name of the association.

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<sup>13</sup>Nederlandse Beroepsvereniging Tolken Gebarentaal (NBTG).

## 1.4 Countries without an independent national interpreter organization

The countries which do not have an independent national association of sign language interpreters are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Ukraine. Some of these countries, such as Latvia and Ukraine, have a sub-organization or committee for interpreters within or under the national deaf organization. In Ukraine that is the Council of Sign Language Interpreters, an advisory and consultative structural unit of the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf, which does not provide for membership or separate regional branches but is like a labor union for interpreters working for the national association of the deaf. Recently, a new organization was established: the All-Ukrainian Association of Sign Language Interpreters and People with Disabilities. This association does not have a national status nor formal membership criteria and has fewer than fifty members in Ukraine.

North Macedonia did not participate in the survey but some information on this country was available online. According to the national deaf association<sup>14</sup> there are thirty-eight licensed interpreters and there is no national interpreter association.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.5 Membership ratios

One of the questions in the survey concerns the percentage of sign language interpreters in the country or region which are a member of their national association. In total 37 respondents were able to answer this question on behalf of their (national) associations. Romania was not able to answer this question as the total number of sign language interpreters in the country is unknown. In 2016 Romania estimated membership at five percent.

In the surveys in 2007, 2012, and 2016 the three regions in Switzerland had the highest percentage. Most of the interpreters were a member of their affiliated association. This changed in 2020 as Slovenia, Malta and Switzerland-French region now top the list with membership ratios of hundred percent. Greece and Kosovo also moved towards the top of the list.

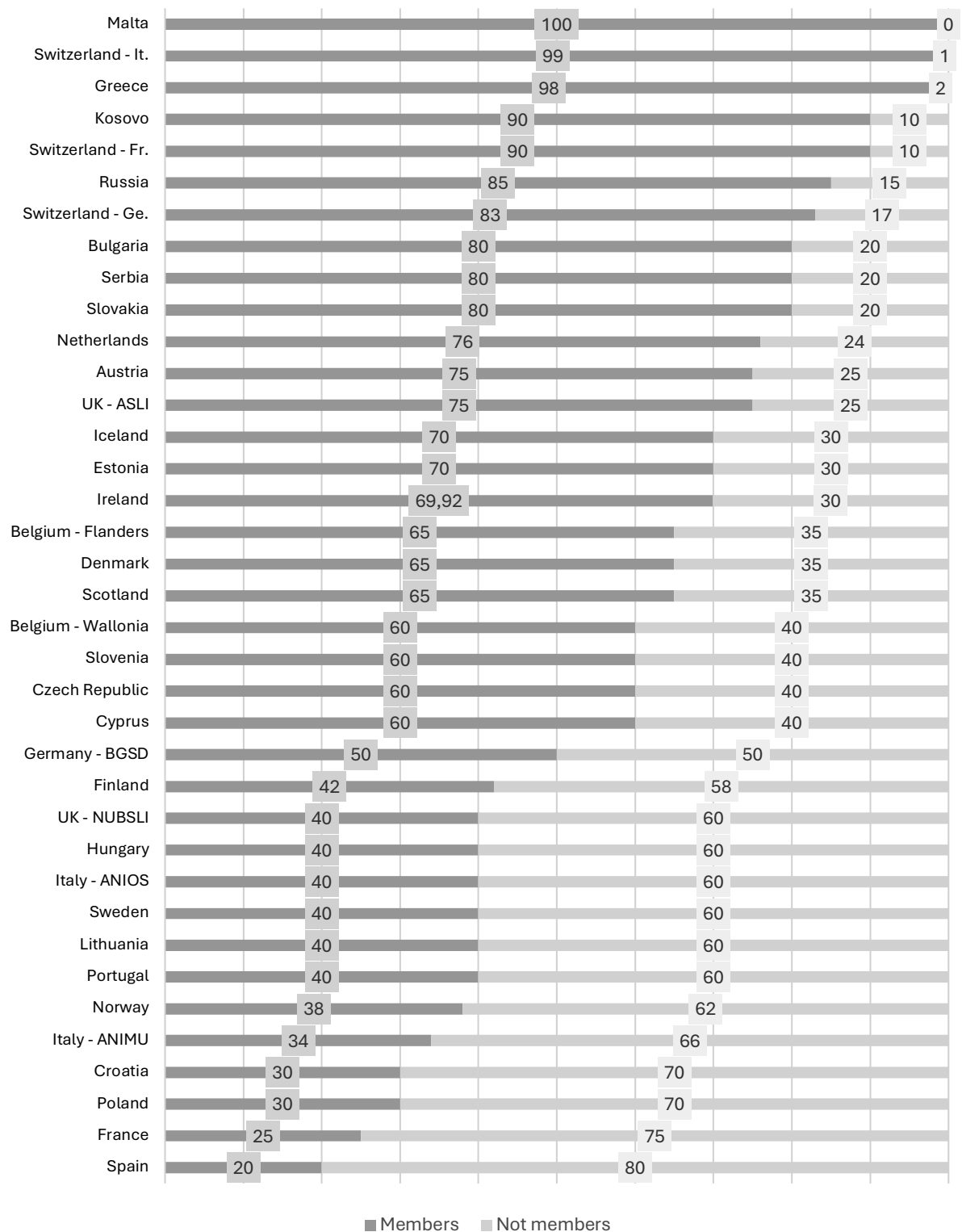
Figure 1.1 indicates the percentage of interpreter members per country or region. The countries that do not have an organization of sign language interpreters or did not have the data are not listed in this figure. Several countries answered with an estimation. If the given estimation was a range, the average was taken to provide an indication of the actual numbers.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://deafmkd.org.mk/en/list-of-interpreters/>

<sup>15</sup> Teuta Rasimi, assistant professor at the State University of Tetovo, North Macedonia, personal communication (28 November 2025)

**Fig. 1.1 Sign language interpreters and national organizations:  
relative membership (%)**

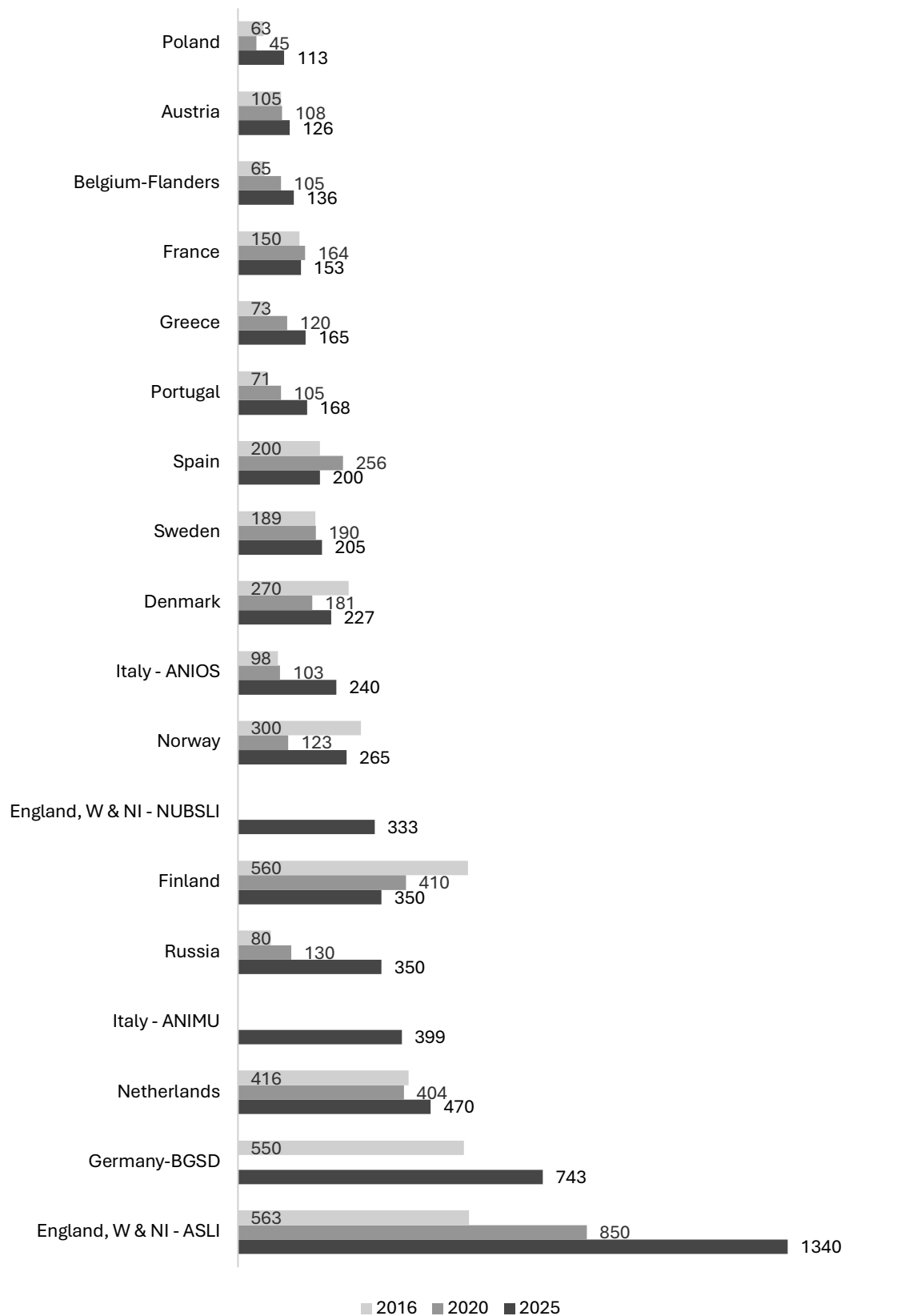


## **1.6 Membership numbers over the years**

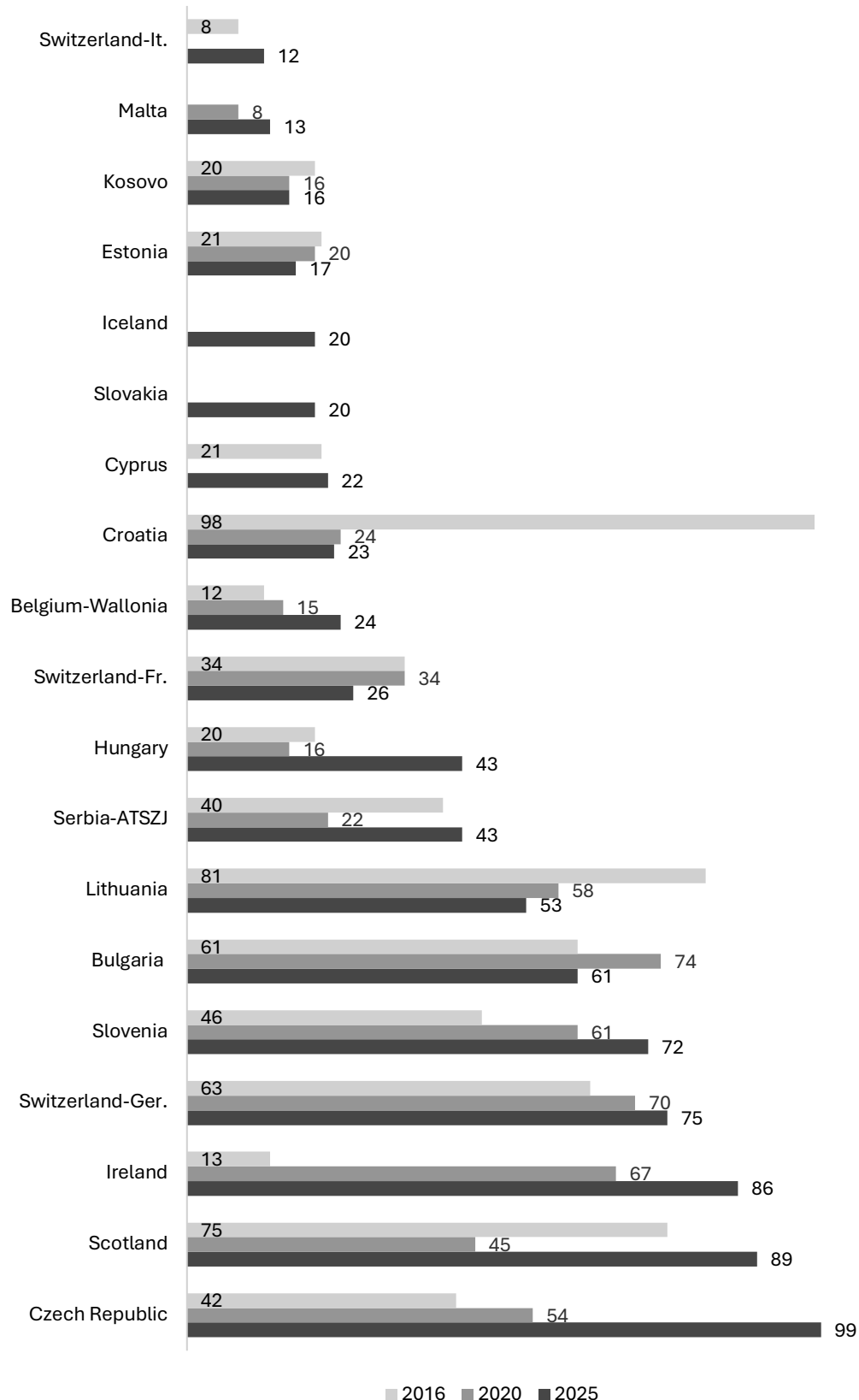
A total of thirty-seven respondents filled out the survey on behalf of their sign language interpreter associations. Figure 1.3 shows the number of members per association in 2016, 2020 and 2025. ASLI in England, Wales & NI has the highest number with 1340 interpreter members and reports the highest increase compared to 2016 and 2020.

The associations in the smaller countries and regions have the least number of interpreter members, such as Cyprus (22), Estonia (17), Malta (13), and Iceland (20). The biggest decrease in membership was for Finland.

**Fig. 1.2a Total membership numbers by national or regional association (100 members >)**

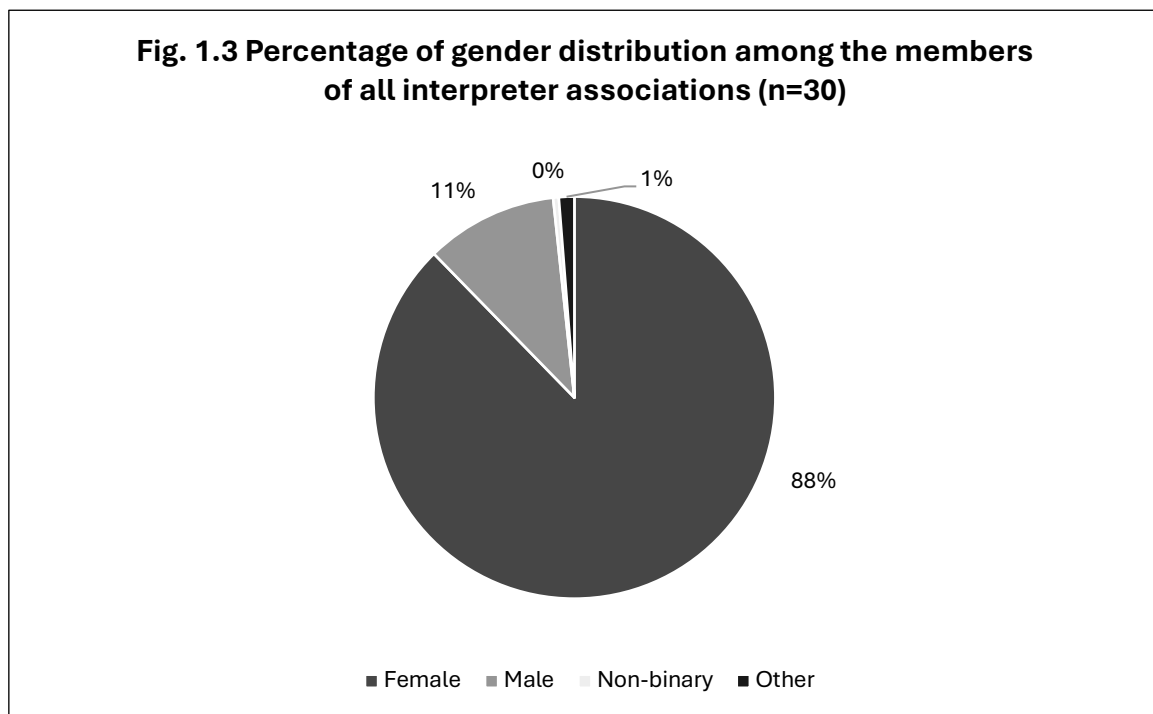


**Fig. 1.2b Total membership numbers by national or regional association (<100 members)**

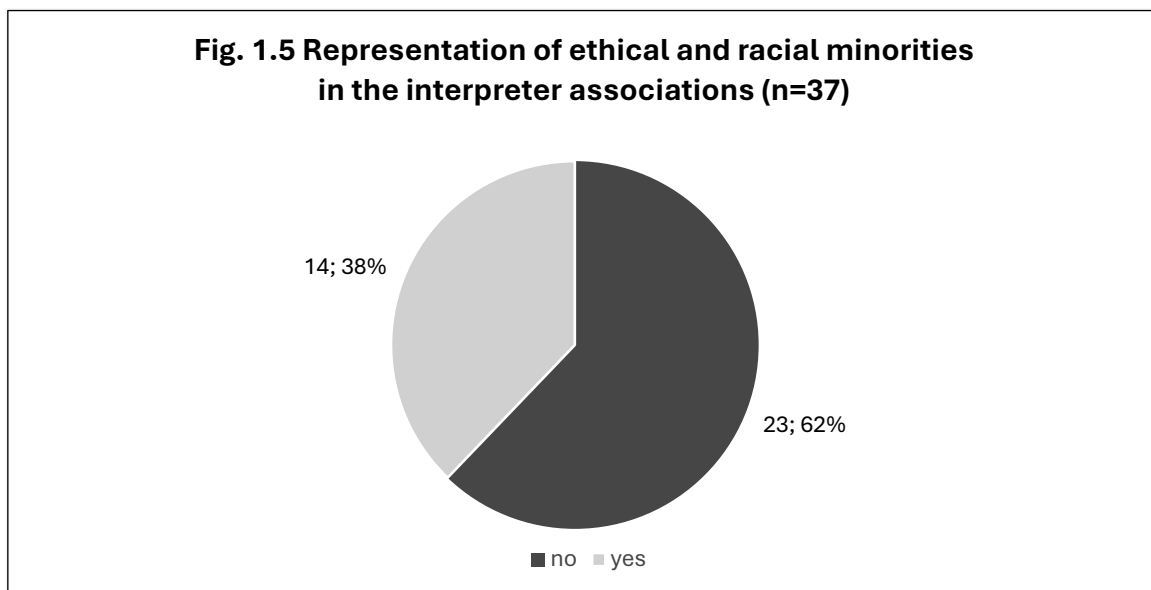
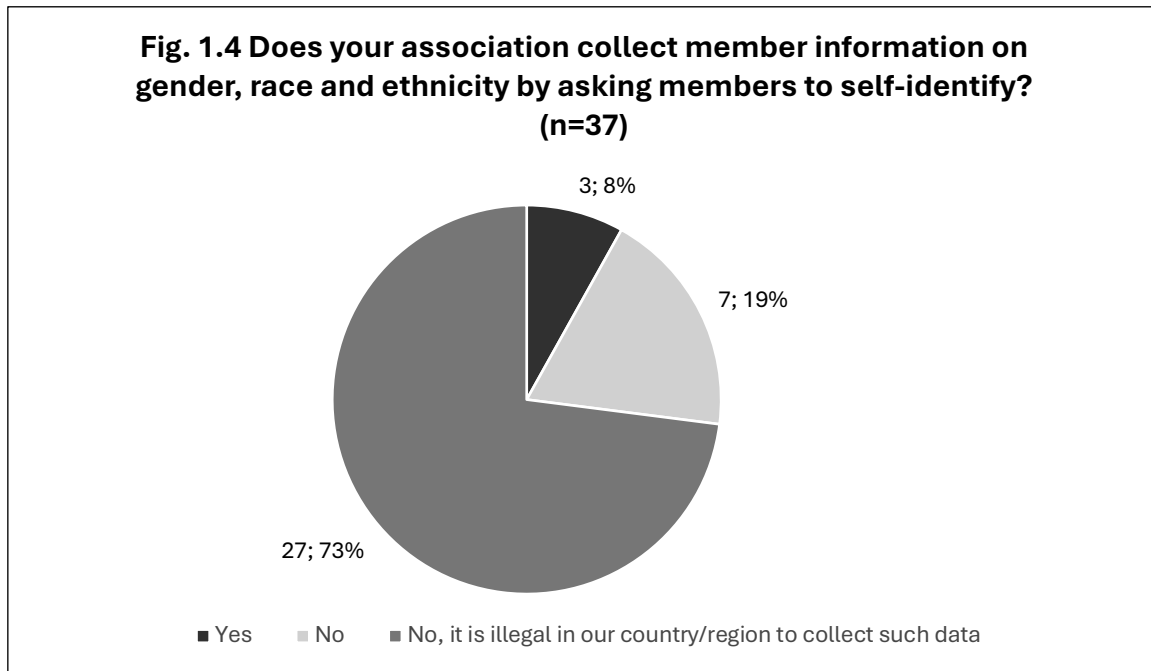


## 1.7 Representation

Out of the thirty-seven national interpreter associations, thirty gave an estimate on the percentage of gender distribution in the association (Fig. 1.3). The percentage of female members has remained approximately the same during the last 10 years and is on average almost ninety percent. The percentage of female members in an association is reported to be at least eighty percent in all the associations.



In this survey for the first time the question was asked if the interpreter association collects data on gender and representation of ethnic and racial minorities in their association by asking members to self-identify. Figure 1.4 shows that most of the associations do not collect this information. When asked if they believe that racial and ethnic minorities are represented in their interpreter association, the majority (62%) indicates that this is not the case (Fig. 1.5).



AFTILS (France) reports that in France, institutional statistics about ethnic and racial minorities are not collected, because of the mainstream perspective of universalism. Therefore, AFTILS does not have any data in in their association, nor specific board or working group for representation.

The BGSD (Germany) state that all are members:

*“It is a topic we need to consider more strongly. We would like to represent all working SLI. What will make them feel represented?”*