



NATIONELL KVINNOJOUR  
OCH STÖD PÅ TECKENSPRÅK

## A KAFKAESQUE PROCESS

– a survey of how Swedish authorities treat victims of violence who are Deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind women and young girls as well as non-binary persons.

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## INTRODUCTION

“It feels as if I stand outside what is happening to me” was a recurring quote when the women described their own process for us. A process that is like Kafka because the women do not fully understand what is expected from them in a system in which there is no public service that has accessible knowledge, education and provides support both on their terms and in their language. The victims of violence – in this case, girls, women or non-binary persons who are Deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind - have basically no chance to affect the outcome of the support and aid which they have the right to get because everything is provided in another language. Thus, they are entirely dependent on the benevolence of the people around them regarding their situation.

Supporting the victims of violence, our on-call group has had meetings with different public services. After the meetings, we had to sit down with the woman to explain, look for information and provide knowledge that the woman needs in order for her to be able to take hold of her own process. Our role has been to support the victims of violence as well as trying to cooperate with various public services in order to help them to take hold of their own situation and find their way to a life free from violence.

During our two non-profit active years, which is a part of this survey, we have identified three main problematic issues: how authorities treat victims of violence, a fragmented interpreting service resulting in legal uncertainty and the lack of a sign language environment in sheltered housings. This survey is a first try to compile and describe the problematic issues as well as develop our thoughts on which solutions are needed for each issue.

We would also like to underline that this survey is not the first of its kind, as this has been reported by various non-profit organizations, in essays and in international studies. However, the public has not really understood and discussed this target group and their vulnerability to violence. We also see that the fact that there is no research on and with the target group is a major disadvantage. Neither is there an aggregated knowledge base in Sweden or in the Nordic countries regarding the target group’s specific vulnerability.

Mia Modig, Chairperson

Felicia Ferreira, counselor

Stockholm and Lund 11-18-2021

## ABOUT SWEDISH WOMEN'S SHELTER AND SUPPORT IN SIGN LANGUAGE

Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in Sign language (NKJT) work with supporting Deaf, hard-of-hearing and deaf-blind women and young girls as well as non-binary persons from the age of 15 to take back the power of their lives away from violence and oppression. This organization is the only organization of its kind in Sweden that offers support and aid in Swedish Sign Language, tactile sign language and international signs<sup>1</sup> as well as written Swedish to women in this target group.

The support that our organization provide is provided by women who themselves have experiences of living as a Deaf, hard-of-hearing or deaf-blind person, which is called Deaf competence skills<sup>2</sup> in Sweden. Thanks to the existence of this organization, the target group does not need to put their energy on explaining their language, culture, identity and accommodations. Thus the *burden of explaining*<sup>3</sup> is minimized. By providing support in sign language, our organization can provide support to a very marginalized and invisible group in the society, a group that today has great difficulty to get adequate support and have their rights accommodated by other organizations directed to women who are victims of violence.

Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in Sign Language has a non-profit on-call operations that today provides support directly to the victims of violence with activities such as video calls and chats via the website, physical meetings, providing support with writing letters to authorities and, if needed, accompanying the victims of violence to support them in meetings with authorities.



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1 International Signs – Sign Language is not international. Every country has their own sign language and many countries have similar fingerspelling and signs for example car, drink and sleep. These signs are seen as international signs. ([www.sdr.org](http://www.sdr.org))

2 This competence means understanding deaf people and their ways of living, the sign language and the Deaf culture ([www.sduf.se](http://www.sduf.se)). The term used in Sweden is dövkompetens.

3 Burden of explaining is to at all times have a responsibility to needing to explain for all public services, organizations and authorities about things like language, culture, identity and needs of accommodations.

## BACKGROUND

### AIM

The aim of this survey is to put into light the importance of establishing a women's shelter and a protected housing in sign language as well as highlighting the disadvantages and inaccessibility that our target group face in today's society which can be likened to legal uncertainty. This survey will also highlight how authorities treat our target group and describe how today's system with interpreting services in Sweden can be a major hindrance for women who are victims of violence who come into touch with public services and authorities that determine their needs of support and protection.

### OTHER SERVICES IN SIGN LANGUAGE

In Sweden there are some services, such as Deaf counseling teams and Deaf psychiatry services, who also provide support to the target group that we meet. A Deaf counseling team provides support with community information, advice and support regarding legal issues and economic matters, counseling in case of life crisis, support to handle stress, depression and anxiety, advice and support in the role as a parent among other things. Deaf psychiatry services can provide a limited-of-time treatment program for people with anxiety issues, affective disorders (depression and bipolar conditions), psychotic problems, neuropsychiatric issues and cognitive disabilities. Those services are important for our target group and our organization is a complement to the support that those services provide. However, those services are not available in the whole country but only in some places. Thus, it is not possible for everyone who are in the need of support to get it because they live outside the cities in which these services are available.

### #TURNADAEAFEAR – A PART OF THE #METOO-MOVEMENT

Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in Sign Language has its origins from #metoo 2017 with the hashtag #slådvöratttill (turnadeafear) which had a big impact on our target group and raised the issue of which support and aid that is actually available for them. The activities from the hashtag so clearly highlighted the problems and the various issues that the target groups faced in the community, both structurally and individually. A great deal of those women who were victims of violence have lived with traumas for many years due to shame and the belief that they were alone in what they have been going through. The call for change resulting from this hashtag highlighted the following issues to be fundamental for victims of violence seeking help:

- The need of a Women's Shelter in sign language
- Functional support in Swedish Sign language in the whole country
- The need to break down the culture of silence in the Deaf community

The call for change also highlighted the importance of including our target group in the work of producing knowledge and the need to improve the support provided to the victims of violence. We also highlight those issues in this report.

## **OTHER WOMEN'S SHELTERS IN SWEDEN**

Women's Shelters is a popular movement – where women help women. In this survey we have looked at Roks, the national organization for women's and girls' shelters in Sweden, in order to be able to compare and identify differences and weaknesses. Roks has about 100 shelters that are part of the organization. None of those hundred shelters offer support and aid only in Sign Language. There have been a few earlier trials to start up local shelters in sign language in cooperation with established women's shelters. In Stockholm in 2000 there was a cooperation between Alla Kvinnors hus (All Women's House) and Dövas Kvinnoförening i Stockholm (A Deaf women's organization in Stockholm). They provided support in the form of fixed on-call helpline hours. At this time, text phones was used – which is corresponded to today's chat functions. The fixed on-call helpline hours was every second week in evenings. The initiative was appreciated by many but very few sought help. Afterwards, the fact that very few sought help by calling to this helpline was accounted for the fact that the on-call hours was evenings and that there were limited occasions to seek help. The initiative was closed down after a couple of years with the argument that too few sought help. Another trial was also made in Malmö in 2008 in cooperation with Malmö's women's and girls' shelters. Already at this time there was a need of a women's shelter in sign language but the problems with establishing the shelter was that it occurred entirely on a voluntary basis. It was also difficult to manage a local women's shelter since the target group was small and spread across the country. The trial in Malmö was also closed down. Ever since, Sweden has not had a women's shelter in sign language until 2019 when Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in Sign Language was established.

In the spring of 2021, our organization did a small survey in which we interviewed eight women's shelters in various cities. These shelters did not offer sign language. Most of them have not received a Deaf, deaf-blind or hard-of-hearing woman and therefore lack all knowledge that is needed to be able to work with our target group. This constitutes a language barrier and the issue of interpreters is also a factor that makes it even more difficult to provide support and aid to women who speak sign language. The people interviewed are positive to providing interpreters but do not want to pay for the costs of providing an interpreter. Instead, they refer the cost to the social services. The issue of the financing the costs of interpreters vary across the country, for example who pays and when who pays for what. This is an issue that has been recurring during those two years.

The main difference between women's shelters that do not provide sign language and our national women's shelter and support in sign language (NKJT) is that we do not have the possibility to operate local shelters in every county in Sweden. Our target group lives

across the whole country and the numbers are too few to have local shelters. This leads to that society has no knowledge about Deaf, hard-of-hearing and deaf blind women, their different languages and means of communication and how to receive and support them. Until the establishment of our organization, our target group has had to look for help in various organizations, services and authorities that could not provide support directly in sign language. However, they often fail to get help because they retreat to seek help due to the issues in society explained above.

## METHOD

Before performing this survey, we have had help from an outsider with knowledge in statistics in order to ensure that the survey is carried out correctly and describes the real work as well as highlights issues that the women's shelter has identified. In order to ensure that it is not possible to identify anyone participating, we will not publish the statistics of the victims that has sought help from us in this report. However these statistics will be accessible for authorities by request.

Furthermore, a few words regarding the issue of professional secrecy. It is a very sensitive issue as our target group is classified as a cultural and linguistic minority group. It means that it can be easy to identify a victim that has sought help. In order to ensure that nobody will be able to be identified, all case descriptions and specific examples have been carefully de-identified as well as double-checked by the on-call group.

## DEFINITIONS OF OUR TARGET GROUP

Our target group is Deaf, hard-of-hearing and deaf-blind women, girls and non-binary persons from the age of 15 who have been exposed to some kind of violence. We also have a cooperation with BOUJT, Children's and Youth's On-Call Services in Sign Language, which is operated by Swedish Deaf Youth Association with grants from Childhood. At some occasions such as holidays we also receive calls from children and youth up to the age of 21.

Below we describe every target group. We would like to underline that medicinally a woman can have hearing impairment but still be identified as a Deaf person or as a hearing person who cannot hear well. Regarding Deaf women there can be a wide range from women who can hear and talk but identify themselves as Deaf to women who cannot hear anything and do not speak at all. For the group deaf-blind there is a wide range regarding the woman's sight and hearing. Thus, one needs to accommodate every meeting with a deaf-blind woman from her prerequisites to be able to participate in the conversation.

We also receive girls, women and non-binary persons who has intellectual disability and other disabilities. The common denominator for our target group is the fact that they speak Swedish Sign Language, use Tactile Sign language or international signs.

## **DEAF GIRLS, WOMEN AND NON-BINARY PERSONS**

There are no specific numbers for solely Deaf women but general numbers for the whole group of the Deaf. Swedish Deaf Association (SDR) estimates that there are around 30 000 people in Sweden who speak Swedish Sign Language as their primary language. There are two groups, congenitally deaf, that is people who were born Deaf, and late-deafened who became deaf as adults. Some Deaf people can hear some sounds with for example hearing aids and others cannot hear anything at all. In the Deaf community, the Deaf are seen as a linguistic minority group because of their sign language even if they are not recognized as such (sdr.org). The majority in the society look at the Deaf as people with a disability, which is something that the group cannot identify as such since they consider themselves part of a linguistic and cultural group. It is important to distinguish between those two words: Deaf and deafness. The first constitutes identity, a sense of belonging and community in the linguistic and cultural minority group. Deafness, however, is a medicinal term and focuses on how much you can hear, perceive sound and speak.

In 1981, the Swedish Parliament recognized Swedish Sign Language as a language in education, which meant that the Deaf has the right to Swedish Sign Language as their first language. Until the recognition in 1981, speaking Swedish Sign Language in schools were forbidden. In 2009 the Swedish Sign Language was put in the Swedish Language Act (SFS 2009:600) with the aim to strengthen its status. In the Language Act, Swedish Sign Language is equated with the national minority languages (isof.se).

## **HARD-OF-HEARING GIRLS, WOMEN AND NON-BINARY PERSONS**

There are no specific numbers for solely hard of hearing women but general numbers for the whole group of hard of hearing people. According to Hörsellinjen.se about 1,5 millions of people at all ages in Sweden have various degrees of hearing loss. A part of this group speaks Sign Language or uses simultaneous communication in which they use signs to support speech. As mentioned earlier, some hard of hearing identify themselves as Deaf while others identify as hearing who cannot hear well. However there are also a group of hard of hearing people who do not feel included and belonging in any of the groups. In their annual report "Adjö yxskaft" (Goodbye Axe-handle), Swedish Federation of the Hearing impaired (HRF) highlights that even though hearing loss is one of the biggest health issues in the society there is still a social stigma surrounding it. By which it is meant that the society's views and prejudices result in this group retreating to seeking help with their hearing issues and to tell about it to others. According to the report, two out of three with hearing loss has no contact at all with the hearing care for their hearing issues (HRF, 2008).

## **DEAF-BLIND GIRLS, WOMEN AND NON-BINARY PERSONS**

The Swedish National Knowledge Center on Deaf-Blind issues (NKCDB, Nationellt kunskapscenter för dövblindfrågor), uses a Nordic jointly collective term to describe the combination of visual and hearing impairment, which is deaf-blindness. According to NKCDB deaf-blindness can emerge in all ages but with varying degrees and the consequences that could arise because of this depends on which sense that gets affected first and also at which age it occurs. One of the consequences for this group is the limited opportunities to orient oneself unhindered, due to lack of information. Their opportunities to participate in society and receive help and support in the same way as others are reduced as well.

## **CODA – CHILDREN OF DEAF ADULTS**

The majority of the women in this target group have kids who are hearing. In English, there is a term to describe those kids above the age of 18. The term is Children of Deaf Adults (CODA). Kids who are younger than the age of 18 are called KODA (Kids of Deaf Adults). However, we choose to name all kids in this report as CODA-kids.

CODA-kids has a sign language as their mother tongue. Commonly, CODA-kids develop their spoken language when they come to a speaking environment at the kindergarten or through hearing relatives. For the older generation, it was common to use CODA-kids as interpreters. For example, they could interpret school performance reviews, their parents' doctoral appointments and so on. Today CODA-kids rarely get to interpret as parents are more aware that there are different ways of communicating, for example using digital tools and having access to sign language interpreters. When a non-signing person meets a Deaf person with a CODA-kid, it is common that this person turns around to the kid and asks the kid to interpret to his or her parent what he or she says. It is important that CODA-kids should not have to be a language link between their parents and other non-signing people.

## **LIVING SITUATION**

The structural oppression toward marginalized groups like Deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind women is generally distinguished through its collective expression. As the most important societal functions in Sweden lacks information in sign language except from Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in Sign Language that is largely operated non-profit, it means that our target group, who have been exposed to violence in various degrees, become more vulnerable. Their vulnerability can be explained with general ignorance about this target group and there is no particular research aimed toward them.

In the United States, it is estimated that about 25% Deaf women are victims of violence in close relationships (Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Services, ADWAS). American research

shows that women with disability are generally at greater risk of being victims of domestic violence than women without disability and that the group of Deaf women are particularly at risk due to the lack of information and knowledge about domestic violence and what kind of help and support there is (Teresa V. Crowe, 2013). Research also points out that there is a unrecorded number of cases for this target group – both regarding the number of reports and what kind of help they are provided.

*Audism* is a term that was coined in the United States. Audism can be defined as not only the ignorance of the majority society and societal structural oppression as well as discrimination due to the ability to hear (Audism, Tom Humphries 1975, quoted in Bauman 2004) but oppression toward the linguistic and cultural group in Sweden as well (The Swedish Language Act 2009:600). The stereotypical view of people with hearing impairment is like a subordination to the actual disability.

Therefore there is a wrong perception that if society offers a neutral interpreter that only conveys what is being spoken in the room (no matter which method of interpreting is used) then it automatically solves the whole problem. However, we suggest that it is not enough because too often misunderstandings arise while communicating, due to ignorance both on the part of the professionals providing support and in the women themselves. In order to understand the whole process and find various solutions to a life free from violence on their terms and in their language, the women need to get in touch with people who themselves also are a part of the target group. We describe this more in detail in the Treatment section.

## **DIFFICULTIES TO COMMUNICATE DUE TO LANGUAGE DEPRIVATION**

If a human being first learns a language fluently after the age of three, there will be a form of brain damage due to language deprivation. Language deprivation means an impaired linguistic and cognitive ability that becomes permanent (Gulati, 2007). We have met several women seeking help that have shown signs of language deprivation which ultimately leads to great challenges when communicating with various services and authorities providing help. The group that has a language deprivation is a minority within our target group. Deaf, hard-of-hearing and deaf-blind women and non-binary persons who have got a language early has similar abilities and prerequisites as other hearing people.

The Deaf Counseling Team in Region Skåne describes in their Research and Developmental Report from 2016, that for counselors working at the unit is obvious that it can be difficult for sign language interpreters to interpret people with language deprivation since they do not have a fully developed sign language. For example, if one has not learned how to describe various emotions in sign languages, neither can one understand the impact they can have for their relationships.

*The linguistic deficiencies can manifest themselves in various degrees and in different ways depending on when a person acquired its language and Gulati (2003) mentions some characteristics from his many years of experience in clinical work:*

- *The person shows verbal and cognitive deficiencies despite having a normal intellect.*
- *The person gets confused by the complexity of abstract aspects of everyday life such as how laws are enacted and shape our rights and obligations as citizens.*
- *The person can be perceived as having thought disorders.*
- *The person can be perceived as apathetic or dement without medical or psychological causes.*
- *The person lacks insight in psychological processes.*
- *The person lacks insight in social rules and codes.*
- *The person has a great lack of general life knowledge, for example lacking knowledge on personal health and self-care.*
- *The person shows a great variation of emotional and social deficiencies.*
- *The person can be incapable of answering basic questions about his or her own life.*

There is no clinical diagnosis for language deprivation today. Åsa Henningsson, President of Swedish Deaf Association, emphasizes in an interview that this is a problem (Dövas Tidning, 2021). Without a clinical diagnosis, there is no way that an individual with language deprivation can receive accommodated support that he or she clearly needs. With this, Åsa Henningsson (2021) deems that lack of support combined with ignorance about how to treat and help this group deteriorates their life quality and makes it difficult for them to seek, find and get help and support.

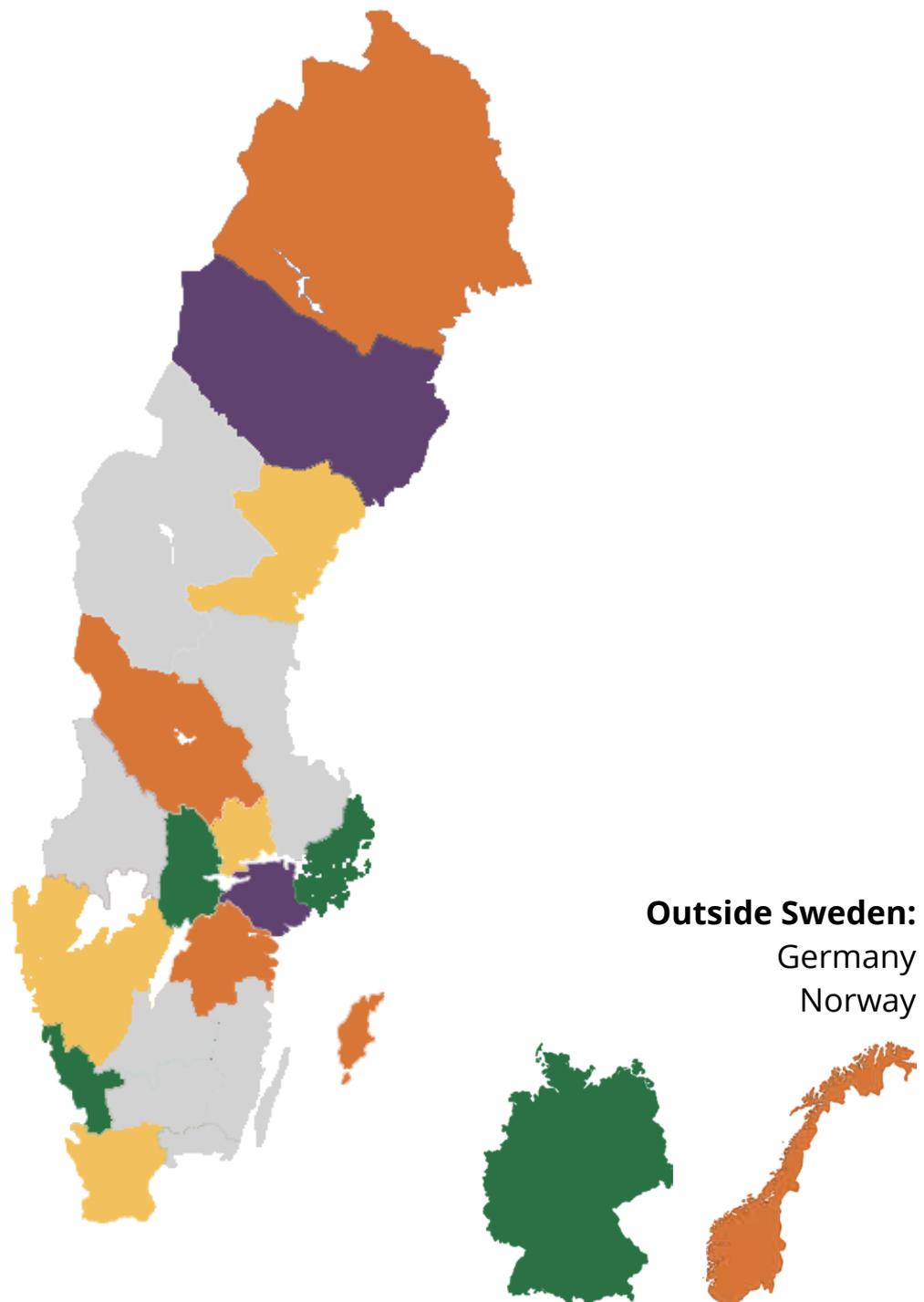
It is of utmost importance that language deprivation becomes a clinical diagnosis. This way our target group will be able to get customized support and be better received – which can be accomplished with knowledge. An example of customized support is to have an interpreter's assistant who has Swedish Sign Language as his or her mother tongue as well as possesses Deaf competence skills, which is something we discuss in the section on the interpreting services.



## REPORT 2019-2021 FOR THE WOMEN'S SHELTER

In the period from the start of the organization (10 November, 2019) until November 2021, we have helped women in the ages ranging from 15 to 82 years. We have also been able to offer support in the following 13 counties in the same period:

Norrbotten  
Västerbotten  
Västernorrland  
Dalarna  
Örebro  
Västmanland  
Stockholm  
Södermanland  
Västra Götaland  
Östergötland  
Gotland  
Halland  
Skåne



**Explanation:**

Skåne, Västra Götaland as well as parts of Norrland are large areas that require more resources in order for us to be able to support all those in need. We have not reached out with information about our organization since we have not had enough resources to meet all the needs across the country. One of our goals is that our support will reach all counties in Sweden. Sweden is the only country in the Nordic that offers an on-call operations in Sign language. Our organization has chosen to offer support calls digitally for women who live in other Nordic countries outside Sweden. A more coordinated work between Nordic countries is needed as well as the recognition that this need has been overlooked earlier. We have also offered support to countries outside the Nordic.

Below we report the extent of cases, examples and contact with authorities and organizations. With the extent reported we mean the actual hours that we have put down to support our target group in various related matters. What is not always counted is all the other work required, for example preparation before a meeting with an authority. Oftentimes we enter late in the process and then we need to put a brake on everything in order to figure out what has happened, which efforts that have been made and which participants have been involved. That we enter late is often due to that authorities do not know about our women's shelter and that the woman seeking help has herself tried to get help first but without any good results. This results in more work for all involved participants and a great deal of those hours boil down to us informing and explaining to the authorities about our target group, their language and culture etcetera.

Usually we begin our first individual meeting with a woman by listening to her story and experiences in order for us to get the whole picture of her situation. That there is someone listening to the woman who also has a sign language as a mother tongue can often be compared with pulling out a plug since the woman has a great need of getting to tell her story in sign language. This is something that authorities have a little difficulty understanding. They do not understand why we put down time on this when they have already talked to the woman earlier. This is why we work in an another way compared with other women's shelters and presently we cannot offer quite enough support in relation to the extent of the need for our support.

**EXAMPLES OF CASES**

Women who contact us do that because they need help and support in their own language, either Swedish Sign Language, tactile sign language or international signs. Their matters cover several different issues. Contact with authorities is one of the issues that constantly comes up and therefore we want to highlight this more. We also explain this more in next section that focuses on the contact with authorities. From the start of the organization on November 11, 2019 until November 2021, we at the Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in Sign language have received cases in the following fields:

Physical and mental abuse

Help with living arrangements

Homelessness

Isolation

Honor-related violence and oppression

Problems with the kid's contact network

Financial abuse

Romance and internet fraud

Suicide thoughts and suicide attempts

Dads get custody

Rape

Incest



Murder attempts on women and kids

Co-dependence on the partner's addiction

Authorities/organizations' psychological abuse

Child custody disputes

Controlling men

The Swedish Act on Care of young people

Persuasion and coercion into surrogacy

Importing a wife

Earlier traumas

The majority has been in the need of extra support in contact with, as well as translating letters from, authorities

## CONTACT WITH AUTHORITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

During the same period as reported above, we have accompanied most of our target group seeking help from us to their various meeting with the following authorities and organizations:

Emergency receptions

Psychologist clinics

Lawyers

Police

The Red Cross

Social services

Schools

Court

The Swedish  
Migration Agency

Support center for  
young victims of crime



## **CHALLENGE 1: HOW AUTHORITIES RECEIVE GIRLS, WOMEN AND NON-BINARY PERSONS WHO ARE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE**

A good relationship between a client and an official is a decisive quality factor that affects how successful the efforts from the authority become. For example, within the social services a case manager meets a lot of people with different backgrounds and life experiences. Therefore it is of outmost importance that the case manager has the ability to receive each client based on their needs, level as well as hires an interpreter if the client speaks another language in order to be able to communicate with the client. It is also crucial for one to be received well since it can affect whether the client dares to seek help and support that the he or she clearly needs. If one is not received well there is a risk for the individual's current living situation. For our target group, not daring to seek help is relatively common. Therefore it is often our target group's wish that we accompany them to their meetings with for example the police, the hospital and other authorities so that we can support them when they communicate with them. The fact that we need to act like a linguistic bridge between one seeking help and an authority is due to ignorance about our target group, their culture and their language. This ignorance exists in the whole society and currently there is no authority that provides help and support related to violence issues in Swedish Sign Language.

We have witnessed that when our help-seeking individuals have a meeting with authorities they often experience minority stress. When being part of a minority group, the individual is vulnerable or needs to be on guard and ready to be vulnerable or questioned. For many, this results in a psychosocial stress. Researchers call this type of stress minority stress (Meyer, 2003). Even in the everyday life, more or less subtle events can contribute to minority stress. These are usually called microaggressions which can be glances, questions and comments which reflects misunderstandings or prejudice but also exotifications. Exotifications are when one is seen as exotic due to one's mother tongue, in this case often Swedish Sign language, tactile sign language or international signs. A recurring example is that after the ending of the meeting, there can be a question about whether sign language is international or not. Minority stress can affect relationships and meetings, most of all meetings with authorities.

Ignorance results in uncertainty which we in the women's shelter have had extra focus on when we have participated in meetings between our target group and the authorities. Ignorance results in a change of shift in which focus is on the woman's hearing impairment or both visual and hearing impairment rather than the issue of the meeting. It is alarming that there are still authorities that use a pathological view when receiving the target group and who think that deafness, hearing impairment or deafblindness is a

disability that causes shortcomings in parenting abilities when it is about raising children.

*We would like to highlight a specific example that we have observed. In a municipality, the social administration has chosen a social secretary who is responsible for cases with clients who need a sign language interpreter or other interpreting methods. This social secretary has taken custody of kids to at least five Deaf or hard of hearing mothers during a period. The social secretary justified this with that the mothers' disability (deafness/hearing impairment) poses a problem in their parenting ability. This social secretary has asked our non-profit counselors to leave the room when they were there to accompany the mothers who needed support in their meeting. This has resulted in even greater anxiety, uncertainty and misunderstanding for our target group and made it more difficult for them to argue and bring forth their words. This is highly detrimental for our target group.*

When focus ends up wrong, our target group feels that they are not received as individuals who seek help in order to, among other things, get out of a violent relationship or help with the children, who in most cases are traumatized. Several individuals who sought help have felt that despite that there was a sign language interpreter at each meeting, their case workers from various authorities have shown a dismissive behavior and do not understand them and enter incorrect things about them in their notes. When the ones seeking help require changes in the documents that they have got after the meetings, the case workers refuse to respond to it and refer to the fact that they have had an interpreter who has translated what they have said.

It is troubling when officials from authorities due to ignorance do not realize three vastly different things: that a neutral interpreter does not always make sure that the communication works in the room, that the quality of interpreting has a decisive significance for how a person gets translated and that there is a linguistic barrier between them. This leads to frustration and anger in our target group. In some cases, authorities view them as aggressive and difficult to cooperate with.

Without proper linguistic support, very large misunderstandings arise with a feeling of not being heard and understood and a feeling of being run over by the authorities. That a sign language interpreter participates in the meeting does not ensure that the communication works without issues. Högberg (2015) argues that the quality of sign language interpreters that professionals meet in their work with our target group has such a great variation that it is of outmost importance that professionals also have Deaf competence skills.

The lack of Deaf competence skills often results in serious consequences for our target group, as it could result in authorities making bad decisions despite human rights and laws supporting their rights. Even though there is a Swedish language act (2009:600) that emphasizes that our target group has the right to use Swedish Sign language, unfortunately this does not automatically mean that they actually have been able to do it. A lot of it is due to the fact that there is a shortage of sign language interpreters and that it is not always possible to get an interpreter for various meetings with authorities (Högberg, 2015).

Authorities can also have too high demands on our target group. For example, that the women have to find a job in order to get their kids back. We have had cases in which the social services in cooperation with the Swedish Public Employment Service have issued an ultimatum: the woman must find an employment within three weeks if she wants to be able to get her children, who have been put in foster care, back home again. However, it is generally known that it is difficult for women with disabilities to enter the labor market. This is confirmed in a report about financial equality for women with disabilities by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency and the Swedish Agency for Participation (2019:5).

## **KIDS WITH SIGN LANGUAGE AS A MOTHER TONGUE**

Today, authorities lack guidelines on how to receive women and kids who have a sign language as their mother tongue. The lack of knowledge about both sign language and bilingualism results in that the best interests of the kid is not always considered. Too often, we have witnessed that kids get separated from their mother due to various absurd reasons and are placed in foster care where nobody speaks sign language. This results in that the kids do not get to develop their sign language. For CODA-kids, one of the consequences is that their spoken language takes over. Olga Svensson Richter (1998) emphasizes the importance for CODA-kids to be able to develop their identity further by seeing other CODA-kids and be allowed to feel a sense of belonging with them, understand and know about their mother tongue and cultural inheritance. This is an important part of a CODA-kid's searching for oneself.

Furthermore, the situation for kids who have some kind of hearing impairment and who have mothers who have been exposed to violence in various forms have other kinds of challenges. It ranges from receiving the kids on their conditions to giving them trauma care in Swedish Sign Language. Also, to offer the kids schooling if they are placed in sheltered housing in municipalities that does not offer sign language in schools. Often the consequences will be far-reaching due to the lack of knowledge about sign language and what bilingualism is. In the end, it becomes a major trauma for all involved.

### **CASE DESCRIPTION 1 – INADEQUATE LINGUISTIC SUPPORT THREATENS WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

In each meeting with the social services, the case worker warns a woman that they will take her kid if she does not do what they say. Due to the inadequate communication between all involved parts, the mother is affected psychologically by the warnings since she does not understand what their demands are as the case worker uses a language that is not adapted to the woman's level. The woman does not have Swedish Sign Language as her first language and the sign language interpreters who participate in the meeting do not always understand her resulting in the translations to both languages not being done adequately. A culture clash regarding parenting and upbringing also occurs. The combination of above problems results in that the mother does not get the help that she really needs.

### **CASE DESCRIPTION 2 – NOT SEEN AS EQUAL**

Two parents meet in a custody dispute. The mother is Deaf and the father is hearing. During meetings, the investigation and the negotiations on court, the father chooses to only speak so that the mother has to get what he says through a sign language interpreter. This is a way to exclude the mother from getting to participate in a discussion on an equal level with others. Since the father can speak for himself, he is in a superior position to the mother and this results in the authorities listening more to the father as he seems more reliable. Despite the circumstances surrounding the kids, this results in that the mother does not get custody and that the kids suffer from this.

### **CASE DESCRIPTION 3 – CODA-KIDS ARE DEPRIVED THEIR SIGN LANGUAGE**

A child of Deaf parents has Swedish Sign Language as its mother tongue. It is of utmost importance that the kid gets access to its mother tongue no matter where the kid lives so that they can maintain their mother tongue and be able to communicate with their biological family.

In a case, the social services have placed a CODA-kid in foster care with a family who does not speak Swedish Sign Language at all. The aim with putting a kid in foster care is usually to reunite the kid with their biological family if possible and there is no danger to the kid. During the time that the kid was placed in foster care, this kid has lost its mother tongue because nobody in the kid's surroundings speaks Swedish Sign Language. This makes it more difficult for a good reunion since the social services think the biological parents and the kid cannot communicate fully with one another.

#### **CASE DESCRIPTION 4 – DOES NOT HIRE A SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER FOR HOME VISITS**

Swedish Sign language is a visual language and this requires eye contact, body language, body contact and facial expressions in order to communicate completely and functionally. A woman gets investigated for her parenting ability and a case worker from the social services visits her in her home. The case worker is only going to observe the mother's interactions with her kids. From an earlier visit in the home, the case worker feels that there is no need of having a sign language interpreter and therefore no interpreter is hired to the second visit. The mother communicates with her kids and do their routines but since there is no interpreter who translates what the mother says, the case worker makes its own assumptions of what is happening between the mother and her kids. A lot of misunderstandings arise and based on their assumptions, the case worker feels that the mother seems to be angry because of her facial expressions and so on. The kids are taken away from their mother with the help of the Swedish Act on Care of young people. This home visit has not been performed adequately and professionally. The fact that an official chooses to deliberately fail to hire a sign language interpreter is directly offensive and unfair to the mother.

#### **A SUMMARY OF HOW AUTHORITIES TREAT GIRLS, WOMEN AND NON-BINARY PERSONS VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE**

In conclusion, we see that society has deficits in how they treat our target group. In some cases, the consequences have been devastating due to the ignorance that exists in today's society. From what our women's shelter has observed during two years, we find that it is urgent and of outmost importance that a cooperation is initiated between authorities and that an insight training package should be provided to all officials within the social services, police, the Migration Agency and so on. The purpose with the insight training package is, among others, to educate authorities on a national level on how to treat girls, women, kids and non-binary persons who are victims of violence and who has Swedish Sign Language as their mother tongue. The aim to educate on a national level is to ensure knowledge about our target group should not be varying and that they will get the same treatment no matter which municipality who receives a victim of violence who speaks Swedish Sign Language as a mother tongue. Through this educational package, the cooperation between our organization and authorities can be strengthened. We believe this can remedy the far-reaching consequences for our target group.

In parallel with this, we also need to develop an action plan for the social services and other authorities who receive clients who speak Swedish Sign Language. It is desirable that we jointly establish a national code for our target group that could help the case

worker to get in touch with our organization quickly and easily. Thus our target group will receive adequate help and support on their terms and in their language. However, it is also important that our target group gets increased knowledge about where and how they can navigate in their process. Regarding the treatment to women whose kids are CODA and who need to be placed outside the biological family, it is also important to try to find families who can give the CODA-kid access to Swedish Sign Language. Alternatively, to offer families who do not speak Swedish Sign Language courses or support from our organization for example with the purpose to let the kid keep its mother tongue as long as possible to facilitate an eventual reunion with their biological family.

We have also observed the lack of an investigation center where staff has Deaf competence skills and speaks Swedish Sign Language. We have become aware that some social services feel a frustration regarding this, since the results are neither good nor fair to women and kids. For example, in order to observe parenting ability and/or the interactions between a mother and a kid who speaks Swedish Sign Language, this requires a prior knowledge about our target group. Also, in order to observe the interactions one needs to hire at least a sign language interpreter and if the situation requires, also a interpreter's assistant who supports the interpreter and both of them need to be there during the whole process. In order for the case workers to make a fair judgment, it would be best if the case workers doing the observation speak and understand Swedish Sign Language fully.

If what is described above do not exist, it would make it difficult for a mother to participate in investigational interviews, planning and implementation of the family's investigation- or caregiving process. This is an issue that we feel needs to be discussed further in order to bring forth a change so that our target group can get a fair investigation by being treated and supported in view of their rights, needs and on their linguistic level.

By establishing Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in Sign language as one of the societal functions in above ways can be a cost-efficient solution and a winning concept for both our target group, our women's shelter and for society at large.

## CHALLENGE 2: A FRAGMENTED INTERPRETING SERVICE RESULTING IN LEGAL UNCERTAINTY

### THE INTERPRETING SERVICES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A VICTIM OF VIOLENCE

A victim of violence who is a girl, woman, non-binary persons or kid can have up to eighteen different points of calls when one is going to break away from a life fringed with violence. For our target group, this is a major problem since they do not have the control over which interpreters they are going to have during the process. In addition to the interpreting services that is offered by the county councils in Sweden, the interpreting services is also organized out of the financing principle. The financing principle means that each sector in society is responsible to make their activities accessible for all, including people with disability (From *Strengthened interpreting service for equality and participation; Förstärkt tolktjänst för jämlikhet och delaktighet* 2020:79).

Authorities has to procure interpreting companies in order to offer a sign language interpreter to the person seeking help who speaks Swedish Sign Language. During those two years, we have observed that there are unclear distinctions for who is responsible to finance the costs of sign language interpreters.

Below we explain the different methods of interpreting and, in order to give you as the reader a view of what it can be like, we will account for the eighteen different points of calls that a victim of violence can meet during their process. Finally, we account for what the county councils' interpreting services have responded to us about what kinds of missions they can provide sign language interpreters for and what kinds they cannot in order to show what the differences are. The data from the county councils' interpreting services was obtained between September and October 2021.

### METHODS OF INTERPRETING

Sign language interpreting, deafblind interpreting, speech-to-text translator, Sim-Com interpreting and interpreter's assistant are the most common methods of interpreting in Sweden.

It is of outmost importance that one hires a certified sign language interpreter, deafblind interpreter or speech-to-text translator to meetings and all other occasions in which at least one of the participants is Deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing. As soon as an official becomes aware that the person seeking help is Deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind, they

must hire an interpreter. The official should discuss with the person seeking help which method of interpreting they wish and also if they have specific wishes about which interpreters they want to use.

An interpreter shall always be impartial while working no matter what the matter is about and works with the aim that the information provided by both the client and the officials are understood by both parts.

### **Sign language interpreting**

Sign language interpreting means interpreting, often simultaneously, between spoken Swedish and Swedish Sign Language. Swedish Sign Language has its own grammar and does not follow the grammar of the spoken Swedish. Many people who are Deaf or hard of hearing in Sweden has Swedish Sign language as their mother tongue and Swedish as their second language.

### **Deafblind interpreting**

Deafblind interpreting is a method of interpreting used for people who has a combination of visual and hearing impairment. Deafblind interpreting means supplying both visual and hearing impressions; therefore, the interpreter interprets what is being said as well as supplying visual information and escorting.

### **Speech-to-text translator**

A speech-to-text translator translates what is being said to written language for people who is late-deafened or has a severe hearing loss at an adult age. The person who is Deaf or hard of hearing can follow what is being said by reading the simultaneously written translations provided by the translator.

### **Sim-Com – Interpreting signs as support**

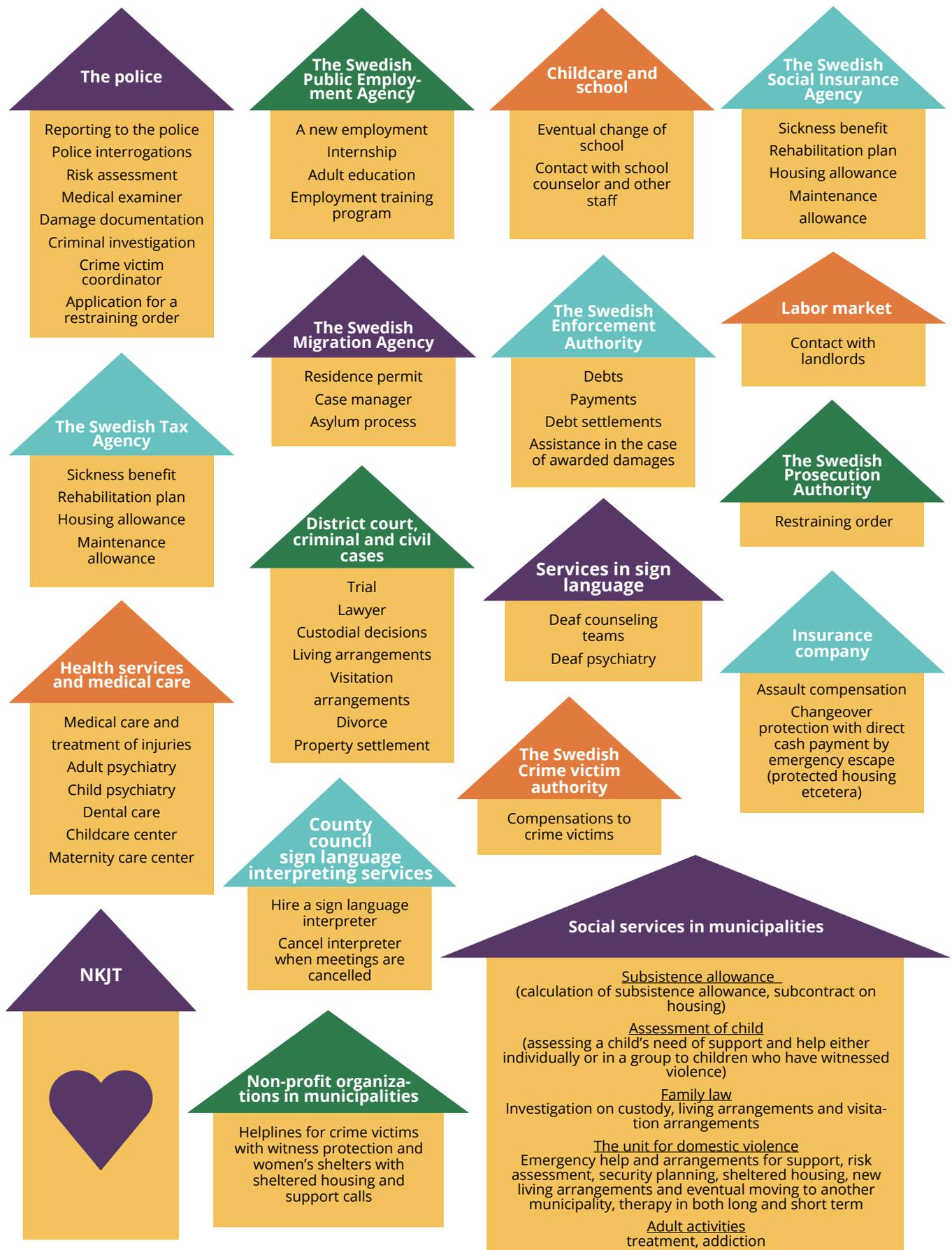
Interpreting Sim-Com means that the interpreter uses signs as a support for lip-reading and listening. This method of interpreting is used by some late-deafened people.

### **Sign language interpreters' assistants**

A sign language interpreter's assistant is a qualified interpreter who not only masters the Swedish Sign Language but also a sign language that is more visually and free from the Swedish spoken language (According to Health services and medical care in the Stockholm County council). This interpreter also has Deaf competence skills obtained by their own experiences as a Deaf or hard of hearing person and what it means. The purpose by using both a sign language interpreter's assistant and a sign language interpreter is that they

supplement one another in their work to make sure that the Deaf client or in our case the Deaf victim of violence gets and understands all the information provided by authorities. The interpreter's assistant makes sure that the translations are at the language level of the person seeking help. According to our on-call group, for people who have been language deprived the interpreter's assistant is truly both belt and suspenders to facilitate communication. The term interpreter's assistant is used by Stockholm County Council among others. However the people working as interpreters' assistants want to change the title to a Deaf sign language interpreter. Non-profit organizations are currently working to change the term. In this survey we have chosen to follow the term that is today being used by county councils and interpreting companies.

## THE 18 POINTS OF CALLS THAT A VICTIM OF VIOLENCE WHO IS A GIRL, WOMAN, NON-BINARY PERSONS OR KID CAN FACE DURING THE PROCESS



## COMPILATION FROM THE COUNTY COUNCILS' INTERPRETING SERVICES REGARDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Below we report the county councils' responses on who is responsible to pay the costs of interpreters with pie charts. This reporting is a snapshot compiled from related county councils' interpreting services and their responses in October-November 2021. Their responses were a part of the Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in Sign Language's survey. Several county councils also state in their responses that they are investigating some areas in order to figure out the financing responsibility and that it could change in the future. What stands fixed is that the Swedish system is divided between so called everyday interpreting which county councils' interpreting services are responsible for and authorities' responsibility to hire interpreters following the financing principle.

Participating county councils' interpreting services in this survey are Västmanland, Örebro, Västra Götaland, Uppsala, Östergötland, Kronoberg, Blekinge, Kalmar, Jämtland/Härjedalen, Stockholm, Gävleborg, Halland, Västernorrland and Sörmland, in total 14 county councils. The responses from Sörmland were however only a couple of generalized lines and thus their responses are excluded from this compilation. This compilation is made of responses from 13 county councils in Sweden.

### Abbreviations used in the pie charts:

|              |  |                 |   |
|--------------|--|-----------------|---|
| <b>A</b>     | Authority  | <b>CCIS</b>     | County council interpreting services  |
| <b>A ...</b> | currently authority but can be changed in the future | <b>CCIS ...</b> | Currently county council interpreting services but can be changed in the future |
| <b>IU</b>    | Interpreter User                                     |                 |   |

For the County council interpreting services we also use the abbreviation CCIS in the explaining text.

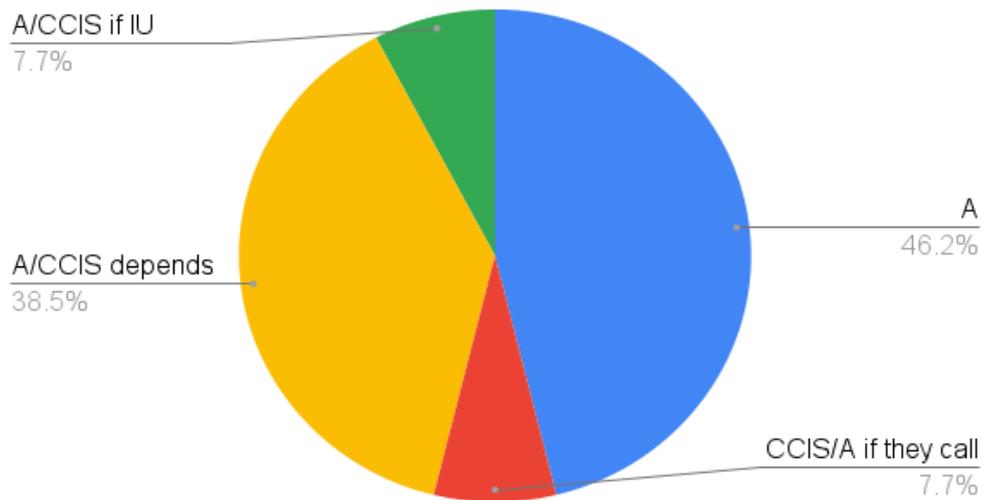
### HOUSING MARKET, HOSPITAL, HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE CENTER, CHILDCARE CENTER, MATERNITY CENTER, DENTIST

All county councils interpreting services state that they are responsible to finance the costs of interpreters in these situations.

### INSURANCE COMPANY (PRIVATE)

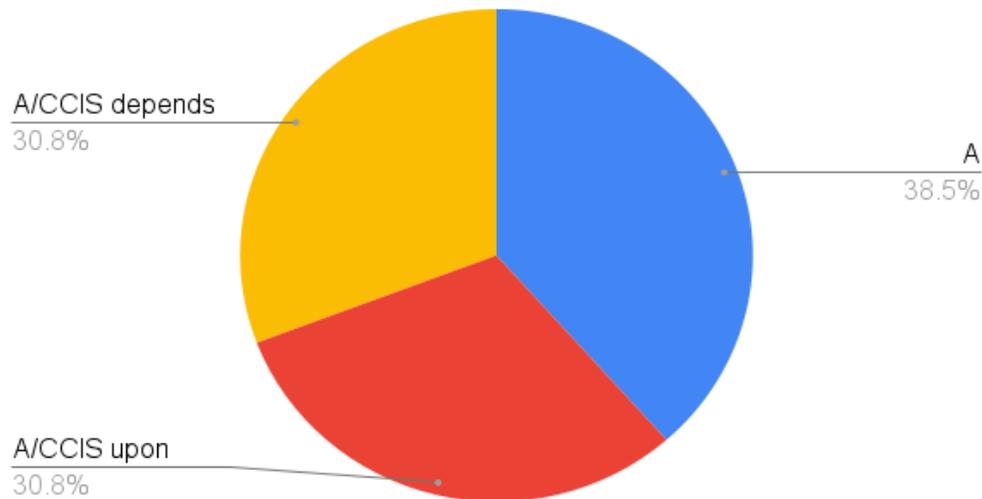
A county council states that it is uncertain who is responsible to finance the costs of interpreters in this situation. All others county councils state that CCIS is responsible.

### POLICE



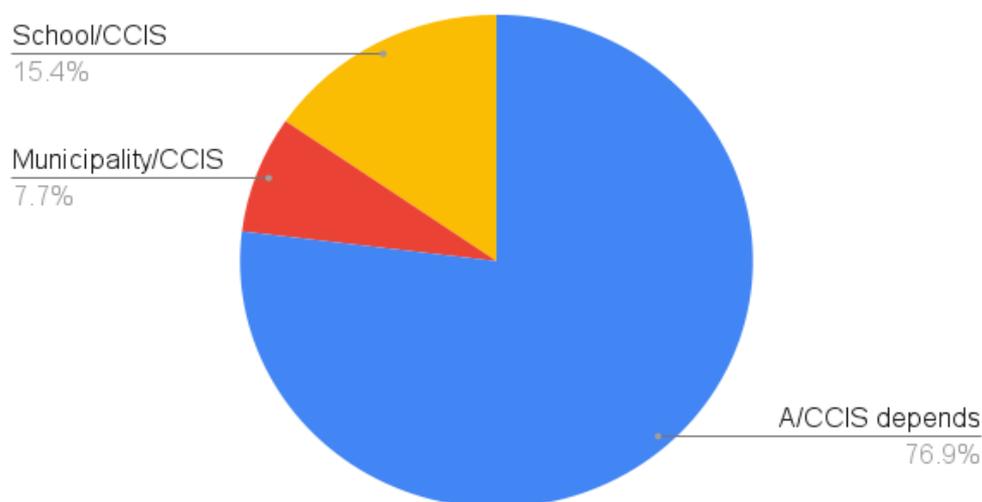
Six county councils state that the police is responsible to finance the costs of interpreters. Five county councils state that it depends on the situation and have explained how they decide whether the A or CCIS is responsible to finance the costs of interpreters. A county council states that if the interpreter user hires a sign language interpreter then the CCIS is responsible to finance the costs of interpreters. If the police hires an interpreter then they are responsible for the costs. A county council states that if the police calls for a meeting then they are responsible to pay for interpreters, otherwise the CCIS is responsible.

## THE SWEDISH PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AGENCY



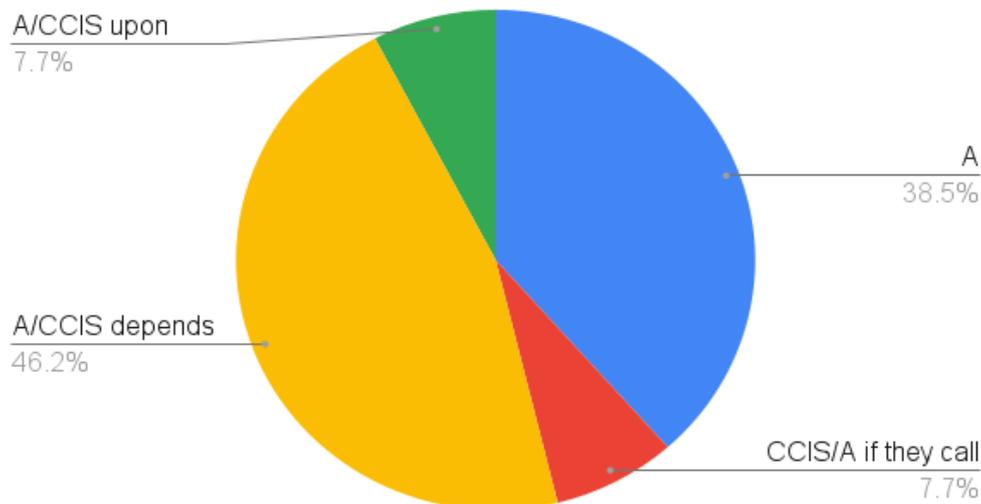
Five county councils state that the agency is responsible to finance the costs of interpreters. Four county councils state that it depends and give examples of various situations. Four county councils state that after registration the agency is responsible to finance the costs of interpreters.

## CHILD CARE AND SCHOOL



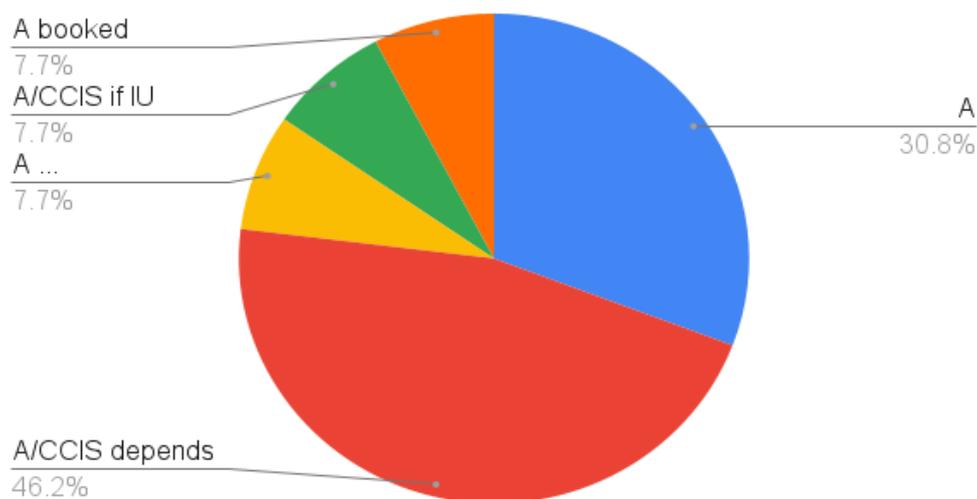
Ten county councils state that it depends on the situation who is responsible to finance the costs and give a couple of examples for when the authority or CCIS is responsible to finance the costs of interpreters. A county council states that it is the municipality or CCIS who is responsible depending on the situation. Another county council states that whether the school or CCIS is responsible depends on the situation.

## THE SWEDISH SOCIAL INSURANCE AGENCY



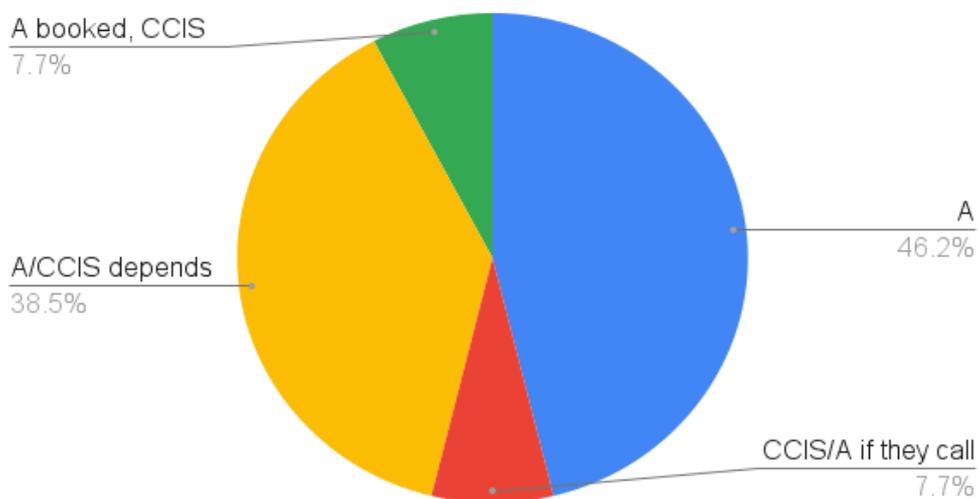
Six county councils state that whether the agency or CCIS is responsible depends on the situation and gives a couple of examples. Five county councils state that the agency is responsible to hire an interpreter. A county council states that if the agency calls for a meeting then they are responsible to hire an interpreter, otherwise it is CCIS' responsibility. A county council states that after registration the agency is responsible to hire an interpreter.

## SWEDISH TAX AGENCY



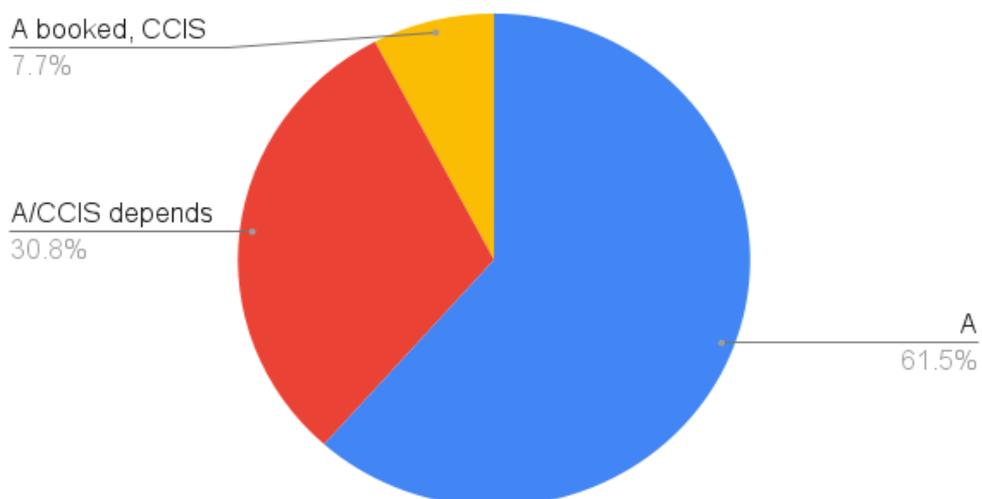
Six county councils state that whether the agency or CCIS is responsible depends on the situation. Three county councils state that it is the agency's responsibility to hire an interpreter. A county council states that CCIS is responsible if the interpreter user hires an interpreter, otherwise the agency is responsible. A county council states that the agency is responsible to hire an interpreter at booked meetings but that CCIS is responsible for general meetings. A county council states that right now the agency is responsible but that it could be changed.

### THE SWEDISH MIGRATION AGENCY



Six county councils state that the agency is responsible to hire an interpreter. Five county councils state that whether CCIS or the agency is responsible depends on the situation and gives some examples in their responses. A county council states that if the agency calls for a meeting then they are responsible to hire an interpreter, otherwise it is CCIS' responsibility. A county council states that the agency is responsible to hire an interpreter to booked meetings but that CCIS is responsible to provide interpreters to general visits.

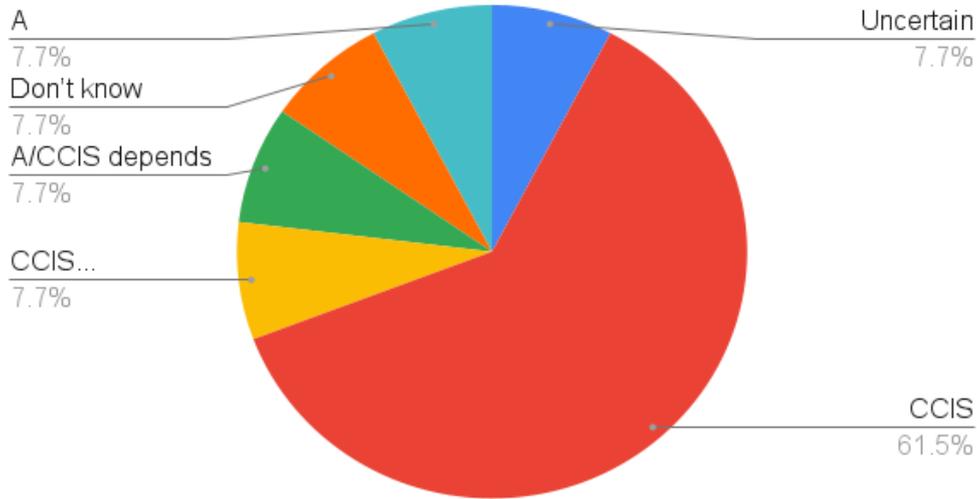
### THE SWEDISH ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITY



Most county councils state that the authority is responsible while some others state that it depends on the situation. A county council states that the authority is responsible to hire an interpreter for booked meetings but that CCIS is responsible for general visits.

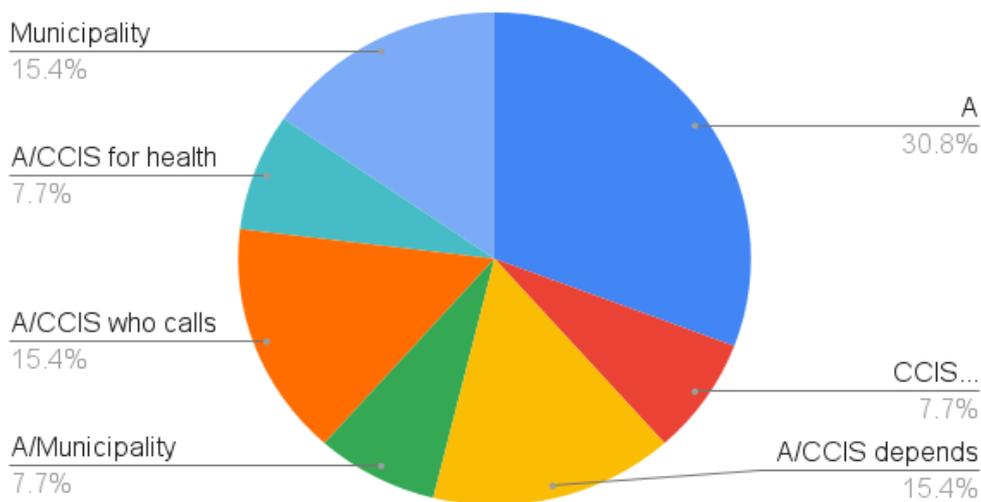
### NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

*(in municipalities, such as helplines for crime victims with witness protection and women's shelters with sheltered housing and support calls).*



More than the half of the county councils state that CCIS is responsible. A county council states that the authority is responsible. A county council states that whether the authority or CCIS is responsible depends on the situation and gives some examples. A county council states that they are uncertain who is responsible. A county council states that currently CCIS is responsible but that it could be changed. A county council does not know.

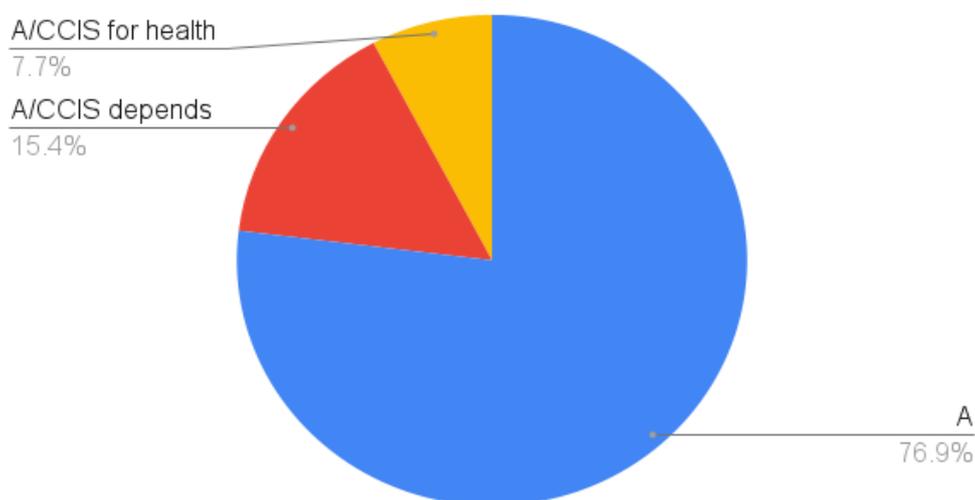
### THE SOCIAL SERVICES



Three county councils state that the agency is responsible. Three county councils state that whether CCIS or the agency is responsible depends on the situation. Two county councils state that what decides who is responsible is whether the agency or the

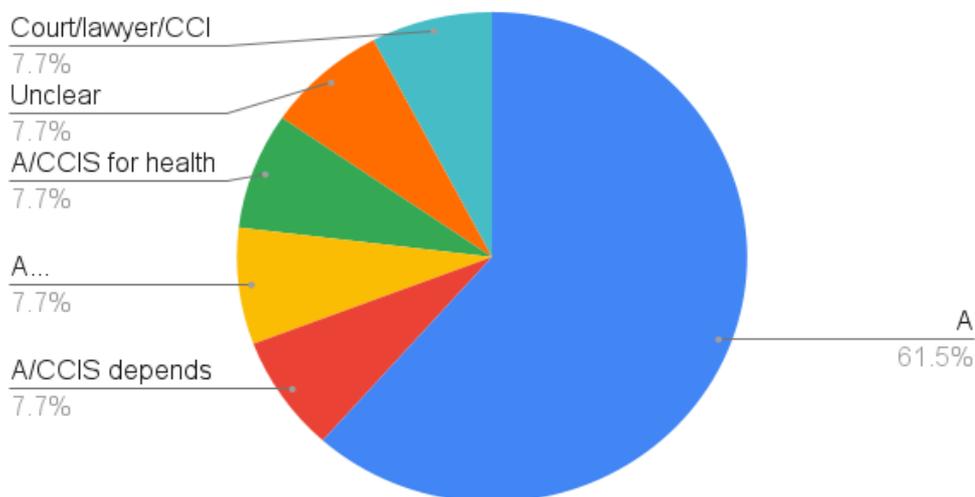
interpreter user calls for a meeting. If the agency calls for a meeting then the agency is responsible to hire an interpreter. If the interpreter user calls for a meeting then CCIS is responsible. A county council states that currently CCIS is responsible but that it could be changed. A county council states that the municipality is responsible and another county council states that it is either the agency or municipality depending on the situation. A county council states that the municipality has the responsibility to hire an interpreter. A county council states that the agency is responsible but that CCIS is responsible to provide an interpreter to matters of health and medical care.

### THE SWEDISH PROSECUTION AUTHORITY



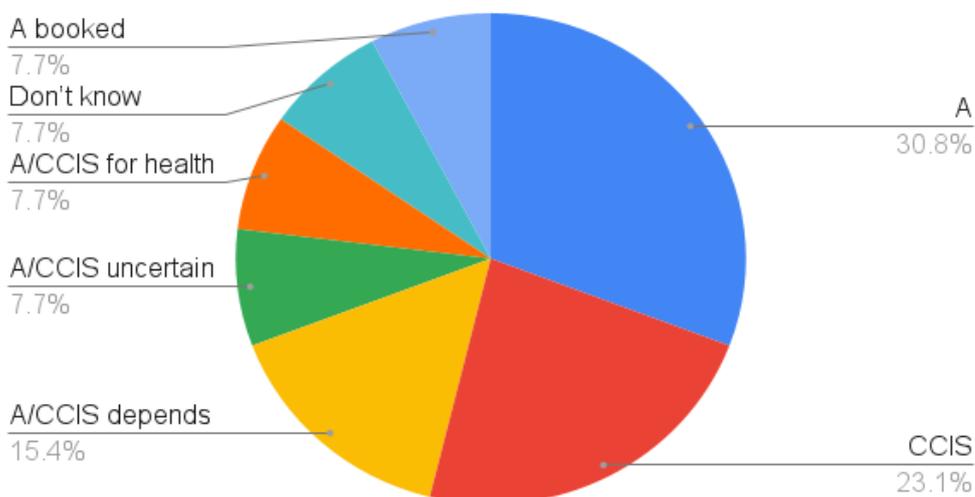
Ten county councils state that the authority has the responsibility to hire an interpreter. Two county councils state that whether the authority or CCIS is responsible depends on the situation. A county council states that the authority is responsible but that CCIS is responsible to provide an interpreter to matters of health and medical care.

### DISTRICT COURT, CRIMINAL AND CIVIL CASES



Eight county councils state that the authority is responsible. Other county councils answer a bit differently. A county council states that whether the authority or CCIS is responsible depends on the situation. A county council states that the authority is responsible but that CCIS is responsible to provide an interpreter to matters of health and medical care. A county council states that the authority is responsible but that it could be changed. A county council states that right now it is unclear who is responsible to finance the costs. A county council states that the court has the responsibility to hire an interpreter to court matters, the lawyer is responsible to hire an interpreter to crime cases and that CCIS is responsible to provide interpreters to litigations.

### THE SWEDISH CRIME VICTIM AUTHORITY



Four county councils state that the authority is responsible to hire an interpreter. Three county councils state that CCIS is responsible to provide an interpreter and two county councils state that whether the authority or CCS is responsible to provide an interpreter

depends on the situation. A county council states that the authority is responsible to hire an interpreter at booked meetings but that CCIS is responsible to provide an interpreter to general matters. A county council states that the authority is responsible but that CCIS is responsible to provide an interpreter to matters of health and medical care. A county council states that they are uncertain whether it is the authority or CCIS who is responsible to provide an interpreter. A county council does not know who is responsible.

### **SUMMARY: A FRAGMENTED INTERPRETING SERVICES SYSTEM RESULTS IN LEGAL UNCERTAINTY**

Judging from the data compiled in this section, one can conclude that the woman is provided different interpreters to different meetings. This is because authorities procure interpreting companies that offer the service that matches their needs. It is still unclear for all involved when their responsibilities divide and who is responsible to finance the costs. The victims seeking help are often asked how to solve the interpreting situation and where the authority can call to hire an interpreter. We also see that the interpreting services fail to use interpreters' assistants as they are used very scarcely by authorities. This could be due to the fact that there is an additional cost to hire an interpreter's assistant and that there is a lack of information on how to use an interpreter's assistant in an interpreting situation. It is also unclear where to find interpreters' assistants since this information is not presently provided by all interpreting companies or county council interpreting services in Sweden.

One can conclude that the interpreting services in Sweden is fragmented as each county council do differently when providing interpreters to what situations. It is generally accepted that interpreter users have difficulty navigating in the system no matter which method of interpreting is used and that it is applied in all stages of life. For education, labor market and everyday life, the interpreting services is divided in a system that requires the interpreter user to have expert knowledge in how the system works. One assumes that the person using interpreters to a certain level should know where to navigate and how to explain to, for example their kids' school, that they are sometimes responsible to finance the costs of hiring an interpreter and that sometimes the county council interpreting services are responsible to provide an interpreter. For someone who does not understand how it works, it can be difficult to grasp how the interpreting service system works. On top of everything, authorities procure regularly and the results of the procurements decide the quality of interpreters and which interpreters are hired. If the interpreting company provides interpreters' assistant or not is another important consideration in this issue.

While working on this survey, there is also a government inquiry named *Strengthened interpreting services for equality and participation* (2020:79) that will be finished by 15 January 2022. The directives given to this inquiry state that an important starting point for the inquiry is to look into the financing principle that means that each public service sector is responsible to make their activities and operations accessible to all. They refer to

13 §, second paragraph in the Swedish Administrative Law (2017:900) which states that an authority shall hire an interpreter and make the contents of their documents accessible when they are in contact with someone who has a limited ability to see, hear or speak.

Before a victim of violence seeks contact with authorities and starts to use an interpreter in meetings, there is a long process before they decide to seek help. Victims seeking help have often turned things over on whether it is worth seeking help or not because of communication issues, the complicated system with interpreting services and what kind of treatment they are going to get during the process as well as their concerns of not being understood.

Concerns about who are going to interpret the victims seeking help are very common as they do not always know beforehand who the interpreter is. If the victims seeking help also are language deprived and if an interpreter's assistant is not provided, then it is set up for disaster. People in crisis have a need for a continuous and coherent process and in such situations, a good cooperation with the interpreter is crucial for how the victims seeking help will be received and treated. The Deaf Counseling Team in Skåne describes that their three employed sign language interpreters is a security for all involved. By having their own interpreters, they make sure that they can provide the best possible help and support with a good quality (Martinsson, Research Report 8/2016).

From our viewpoint, there is a value in having a group of interpreters with a maximum of 4-6 interpreters that interprets for a victim of violence during the whole process, provided that this victim of violence is comfortable with having this kind of solution. This solution could reduce the minority stress that this group can feel and ensure that the process is secure for all involved. This requires a coordinating body around this process. In order to reach this solution, the coordination needs to be reviewed even if the financing principle regarding authorities' responsibility stands fixed. An agency needs to get the mission to coordinate the billings for the costs of interpreters.

The optimal solution in a fragmented interpreting services system would be to arrange only a port of call to where both those using interpreters and agencies hiring interpreters could call for interpreters. This would ensure that victims of violence gets a legally secure process with interpreters.

## THE LACK OF A SHELTERED HOUSING THAT OFFERS SIGN LANGUAGE

According to the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (2013), it was not until about 30 years ago that women who were victims of violence were able to get protection in women's houses and shelters. However the first ones that helped with protection and support were private equity players. Today, after thirty years, the development has reached a point where all related public services should have the foremost responsibility to provide protection. The term sheltered housing is not instilled in the Swedish legislation but is a term that principally everyone knows of and uses. In their report called Refuge from violence - a guide to sheltered housing, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare highlights that sheltered housing has various meanings depending on the situation. With this, the Board suggests that a sheltered housing can, for example, be an apartment at undisclosed address, a temporary housing at a bed and breakfast or a women's sheltered house (The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, 2013).

There are about 282 sheltered housings in Sweden but none of those can offer support and protection in Swedish Sign Language and by staff with Deaf competence skills. With this, we opine a sheltered housing for only Deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind women, girls and kids where all staff has Swedish Sign Language as a mother tongue, Deaf competence skills and knowledge about our target group and the interpreting services etcetera.

According to a report by Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (2020) in which they investigated sheltered housings in Sweden, there are women and kids who are victims of violence in need of sign language interpreters coming to sheltered housings. Their report shows that 22% sheltered housings used a sign language interpreter in 2016. Some housings have only hired sign language interpreters when needed, either physically or through videophone relay interpreting services. Table 30 in their report shows that in 2019, 38% of the sheltered housings provided sign language interpreters. This suggests that the use of sign language interpreters has increased in three years. Furthermore, 50% municipal sheltered housings, 33% non-profit shelters and 41% private equity shelters have hired a sign language interpreter that year (The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, 2020). While visiting shelters, we have also observed the issue of staff's ignorance and the costs of interpreters that have made it difficult for them to hire and provide a sign language interpreter when needed. Do those reasons explain the numbers that we have seen above?

### **CASE DESCRIPTION 1 – A SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER IS NOT NECESSARY**

A family who communicates in Swedish Sign Language arrives at a sheltered housing for hearing people because of a lack of a sheltered housing that offers staff who speaks Swedish Sign Language as a mother tongue. At a meeting with the social services, the case manager says that the kid is going to get to go to the shelter's own nursery while the family is there. The staff was supposed to provide an interpreter to the kid in order for the kid to be able to communicate with the staff and the other kids. Once in place, it turns out that they have not hired a sign language interpreter at all. They apologize for this by saying that sign language is not a language and that other kids in their nursery has neither a language as they have not learned Swedish yet. With this, staff at the shelter implies that an interpreter, no matter which language, is not needed as the kids are too little. This is an absurd assumption considering that Swedish Sign Language is a language according to Swedish law and that Swedish Sign Language is the kid's mother tongue. By knowingly choosing not to hire a sign language interpreter, the staff at the shelter deprives the kid's right to a language, participation, understanding and security.

### **CASE DESCRIPTION 2 – PEN AND PAPER AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION**

A Deaf women arrives to a sheltered housing. Upon arrival, no sign language interpreter is provided. Thus all information about security, rules and so on are given by communicating through paper and pen. The woman does not grasp everything and misses out on important things. During the whole stay at the sheltered housing, the only means of communication for the woman with the others are through paper and pen. The woman also has to read lips. These means of communication makes her very tired and often misunderstandings arise. Staff warrants that it is going so well to communicate through papers, lip-reading and body language.

### **A SHELTERED HOUSING THAT OFFERS SIGN LANGUAGE IS A PART OF THE SOLUTION**

We at the Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in sign language think it is problematic, and also a financial loss for the municipality, when a woman who is a victim of violence in our target group is placed in a shelter that does not offer Swedish Sign Language at all. Just like we mentioned in the beginning of this report, the costs of interpreting is an issue that becomes political footballs between the county council interpreting services, the social services and the sheltered housing. There are unclear boundaries on whose responsibility it is to provide interpreters. This is a major hindrance for the victims of violence speaking Swedish Sign Language to get complete information, support and to be able to communicate on their terms.

In view of our organization's collected experiences, it is clear that there is ground and a need for sheltered housings that offers Swedish Sign Language as the main means of communication. The examples provided above shows how a lack of communication could overturn and worsen the situation for Deaf women and kids who are victims of violence and their rights to get help in their language.

Our target group lives across the whole country but are too few to count in order for all municipalities to be able to provide support and services as well as adapted services to the victims of violence. The costs to offer a sheltered housing and rehabilitation in an environment where Swedish Sign Language is used are too great for each individual municipality to bear, especially when there might just be a single woman in that municipality who is in need of a shelter. Unfortunately, the Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in sign language has witnessed when the social services in various municipalities have had to drop their services to the target group because they deem it too expensive to accommodate to their needs. If the woman is placed in a sheltered housing where she is the only one speaking Swedish Sign Language then the costs of providing interpreters would bolt quickly. The cooperation between municipalities and county councils need to be improved as a part of the work with solving the financing of interpreters and in order to get increased general knowledge about the target group. But this step is not enough. We would like to emphasize again the importance of introducing a national code that is established in the system in order for women from our target group who are in need of sheltered housings to be immediately placed in our women's shelter that offers a sign language environment. This way, their mental health and their traumas can be quickly resolved by them being provided adequate help and support in Swedish Sign Language from the very first day.



## CONCLUSION

This survey shows that various challenges can be remedied by a targeted and coordinated work with men's violence toward women. In order to achieve this, we also need to develop preventive work on violence in Swedish Sign language, tactile sign language, international signs and written Swedish. To manage this, we need to establish a national code with guidelines on Swedish Sign Language for public services who work with issues of violence as well as a single point of call to the interpreting services with one and the same group of interpreters who can follow the process. It is important to ensure that all the participants can communicate and that the authorities, who decide about the type of support to be provided, have information about sheltered housing that offers a sign language environment. The Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in sign language wants to establish a coherent line for Deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind victims of violence so that the women can be certain that they will be provided support and help in Swedish Sign Language, tactile sign language, written Swedish or international signs. In order to reduce the burden of explaining for the authorities who needs to learn more about the target group, we need a coordinator who explains the whole process and supports the victims with contacts with, for example, the social services, the medical care, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and other services.

Some parts of the efforts needed are to improve detections of violence; to provide a strengthened protection, knowledge and support to girls, women, non-binary persons and kids who are victims of violence; to educate professionals working in the social services, other authorities and the medical care and health services; to strengthen protection and support to kids who have witnessed violence and oppression and to strengthen competences and skills regarding honor-related violence and oppression. Our organization has unique competences and therefore we have an important role to provide this support. Our organization needs to be acknowledged and to be a part of the cooperation between public services in all levels regarding issues of domestic violence and men's violence toward kids and women as well as honor-related violence and oppression.

The Swedish Women's Shelter and Support in Sign Language aims to be a know-how center for this target group in order for the victims seeking help to be citizens on equal conditions. Today, victims seeking help need to be able to sort out information and knowledge. For example, a Google search on violence gives 10 100 100 hits and to sort out all information that is not accessible in Swedish Sign Language is a major problem. In order to prevent victims seeking help in their journey to a life free from violence from undergoing a kafkaesque process, we need to make up the deficiencies. To do that, we need resources to offer employment, be an aggregated know-how center and to operate

a sheltered housing. In order to reach these goals, our organization needs to expand our on-call group with employees working full-time at a national level along with educating volunteers to cover weekends and nights. This is a major work that also means going on trips across the country since our target group lives across the whole country.

In this survey, we would like to put extra emphasis on the importance of long-term financing for our national women's shelter so that we can operate nationally and cover the shortages that exists today and which cannot be fixed at short notice.

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