



INSIGN

Executive Report

JUST/2013/RTSL/PR/0015/A4

Pilot project for improving the communication between deaf and hard of hearing persons and the EU institutions

Covering the reporting period from 05/12/2013 to 05/12/2014

Mark Wheatley - 8th October 2015 – 4th Version

The main objective of the Insign Pilot Project, as set out in the call for tender, was to develop a self-sustaining practical IT solution that would enable barrier free communication between all staff and elected officials in EU Institutions, Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens, utilising speech, sign and text (Total conversation).

The key findings of the review of current relevant communication practices, VRS/VRI technology and service provision are:

- *The desk-research and the survey results confirm that telecommunications services are used and needed by Deaf and Hard of Hearing users in the EU, although the level and quality of provision varies between countries. The variations between member states are due to: differing legislation, standards of sign language interpreter training, working conditions, investment level and technology innovation. All of this in spite of the EU Universal Service Directive 2009/136/EU which stated "Publicly available telephone services also include means of communication specifically intended for disabled end-users using text relay or total conversation services."*
- *In the European context, Deaf and Hard of Hearing survey respondents suggested that they would like to see a pan-European service such as Insign in order to gain access to European institutions. Desk-research also confirmed that the provision of VRS/VRI services has seen an exponential growth in users of such services over the last 20 years, in the few countries which have deployed VRS/VRI. This increase will only continue to grow due to the demand. Thus the consideration of a European-based Insign service and by extension EU wide VRS/VRI service is timely.*

Insign would alleviate the current problem of there being a number of different platforms being used throughout the EU from dedicated and bespoke systems right through to an open, and potentially risky systems that piggyback on ooVoo or FaceTime. The concept behind Insign is that it will act as a hub connecting all these to the EU institutions. A seamless system, rather than deaf people trying to find out which system they have to log in, in order to connect, to speak to someone within the EU institutions.

In a perfect world there would be a number of service providers who would be able to provide interpretation in all the 31 sign languages of the EU, have a pool of quality sign language interpreters in each country and have a platform that can work into and out of every single Member States. But until such time as that exists, Insign is certainly a major advance in this specific area.

The Insign platform has staged two demonstrations within European Institutions buildings. These involved connecting users and the interlocutors via the platform to sign language interpreters and/or captioners based in different Member States. These sessions were also used to conduct user research. The aims of these demonstration

sessions were to showcase the platform with its improvements and to promote political participation of Deaf and Hard of Hearing European citizens.

Compared to the number of Member States there are still few established relay centres in Europe. Fewer still employ the Total Conversation standard. These two points are the major challenges to extend a service like Insign.

It is the strong opinion of the Insign Consortium that in order to maximise the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the project, the European Commission should try to make the most of the designed platform which are compatible to most of the existing public and private infrastructures.

On the back of research, demonstrations and feedback gleaned from interpreters, real time captioners, Deaf people, Hard of Hearing people and institution staff, the following is important to include or be aware of in such a service going live:

- *VRI could also be accessed instantly where a Deaf or Hard of Hearing person goes into a building of the European Institutions (depending on the choice of languages as some can be accessed instantly providing that there are existing video relay services contracted by the EC). Frontline staff should be trained to use the service, with access being provided through a device dedicated to the service or through off-the-shelf Insign app already installed on the deaf visitor's mobile/tablet.*
- *If a Deaf or Hard of Hearing person has requested a short meeting with a MEP, staff or member of the European Commission, a remote interpreter can be booked in advance for the meeting. This booking should be the responsibility of the MEP's office or the Commission's service to ensure a simple and clear process that is functionally equivalent to the process any member of the community would experience when doing the same.*
- *Research actions and results show that the vast majority of interactions between European citizens and the European institutions are made to the different Citizen Services provided by the European Union. Under the current situation, those services are inaccessible to the majority of the members of the deaf and hard of hearing community therefore there is a demand for Insign service.*
- *The ability to include and make calls to Europe Direct or to have an interpreted interaction in a Europe Direct Centre in a member country produced highly positive feedback and was reported to be very informative experiences.*
- *To be sustained, Insign needs to count on the existing video interpretation centres through the member countries and to be able to easily connect to the available Citizens Services, where daily interactions are made. In some of the seven countries that do have established video relay services, these services can still be inaccessible to the members of deaf and hard of hearing community because of the financial and legal restrictions imposed upon them. For example, in the UK, deaf people who are eligible for the Access to Work (ATW) scheme are able to claim VRS expenses back to ATW, only if the interaction that took place was relevant to their employment. Meaning if the same deaf person wanted to use the same service for any other reason, the cost would have to be borne by the deaf person. This is an example as to why Insign is needed, even in countries that have video interpretation services.*

Europe Direct is the main information point of the European Institutions, but there are other many services or institutions that can be called or visited such as Your Europe Advice, Solvit, Documentation Centres, etc. It would be valuable to avail Insign to such services.

- *Dissemination of information about this service will be vital for the deaf and hard of hearing communities.*

The Insign platform can guarantee to provide services following the Total Conversation standard (Video, audio and Real Time Text), by allowing the use of remote Sign Language interpretation and captioning services, in a multi-lingual environment. This is feasible, and could be done by integrating a web page into the user site. In this way, MEPs, their assistants or staff in all European Institutions could, after receiving a previous invitation, create an account themselves, allowing them to use the service.

It would be viable, subject to negotiation with service providers, to open the service for the following languages: English, French, Swedish and Dutch as each of these countries has an existing service that is compatible with Total Conversation Standards. For other countries like Spain, Hungary, Norway or Germany, further discussions would need to take place for services in those countries to adopt Total Conversation Standards to make interactions with the EU institutions accessible.

The obvious next step would be to launch a Europe-wide Insign Service based on the model developed by the project. It is recommended that the European Commission establish contracts with service providers in each of the countries of the EU where such service providers use Total Conversation compatible platform. This would encourage existing service providers to improve the quality and availability of their own provision and act as a Blueprint for quality remote interpreting services where none currently exist. In countries where there is no current service provider, it is anticipated that the Insign project could prove to be the catalyst that leads to the establishment of such services.

A development such as this that would see Deaf and Hard of Hearing people discussing small matters via telecommunication channels would be fully supported by the EUD's network of national associations of Deaf people. European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsl) too would work with its membership of 31 national and regional associations of interpreters to develop a Europe-wide network of qualified and appropriately qualified and trained interpreters. It must be stated however that those associated with this project are not asserting this as a replacement for face-to-face interpreting. The Insign platform is an ideal solution for a one on one conversation or interactions.

The perspective of the consortium regarding the inter-language feature (which is already available and ready to use immediately within the Insign service) is that it should be adopted in a gradual way. We advise to focus on established spoken and signed languages in the first phase of an operational Insign service. After the evaluation of the first stage, the inter-language feature will be able to be implemented, this will be after cementing the process and experiences with service providers in various Member States. To make that inter-language feature realised, it will need a lot of administration support behind it to ascertain language combinations of qualified sign language interpreters who will work in VRS/VRI centres.

GOING FORWARD

The complete analysis that includes: network requirements, hosting, server maintenance and updating of applications, in addition to data centres and a cost estimate for a 5-year implementation operation after the project has concluded, can be found on chapter 3 – Business Design and Business Model Canvas in the Annexes.

To continue using the Insign technical platform, without the interpretation and service providers costs, there are three different possibilities the Commission could select from:

1. Renewing - IVèS hosting and maintenance

EU commission would have a turnkey service and will benefit from djanah upgrade (including new version of MacOSX plugin). Annual price with: 4 languages; unlimited number of users; unlimited app installation on android iOS PC Mac; 10 concurrent interpreter seats, including interpreter support level 1; support level 2 during business hours for visitors; hosting; monitoring; preventive maintenance; predictive maintenance; software upgrade with latest product version; peering with VRS in Sweden, the Netherlands, France, UK, Belgium and unlimited phone call to Belgium landline, peer to peer calls: **72.000 €** (annual) Option: man/day for extra customisation/enhancement : **650 € / day**

2. Migrating - IVèS hosting and renewing maintenance

EU will manage the hosting by them, including connection to the phone network.

Migration takes 40 days of work = **26.000 €** (one time). In that case the software must be maintained by IVèS.

Preventive maintenance; predictive maintenance; software upgrade with latest product version: **52.000 €** (annual)

3. Migrating - from djanah to another platform

First the EU Commission will have to buy the license of another Total Conversation platform.

Then the customised components from the djanah platform shall be disconnected and connected again to the new platform. Finally the hosting and maintenance of the new Insign based on the other TC platform will have to be quoted by the new provider. In that case IVèS will have to provide support to let the new provider migrate the service. Support the developer to connect to the user website; interpreter website; android app and iOS app on the new platform: IVèS cost estimation: around 100 days of work = **65.000 € (one time)**

A definitive cost for sign language interpretation is difficult to provide due to the different economic situations of various countries, hence the different charges. However, during negotiations with the successful service providers after a tender process has been observed, the cost for interpreting services can then be established. But to offer a very rough idea, we have obtained costings from one random interpreting agency in the UK. This service may not reflect other costs that service providers in other Member States may provide and or charge.

SignLive Small Bundle 125 minutes

- 125 minutes of SignLive BSL Interpreting
- 3,35 € per minute over allowance
- 400 € per month

SignLive Medium Bundle 250 minutes

- 250 minutes of SignLive BSL Interpreting
- 2,75 € per minute over allowance
- 645 € per month

SignLive Large Bundle 485 minutes

- 485 minutes of SignLive BSL Interpreting
- 2,35 € per minute over allowance
- 1.115 € per month

Adopting and realising this platform would be one way the European Institutions could provide a minimal provision to ensure political emancipation and participation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens of the European Union. In doing so, the EU will be implementing its own policy, the EU Disability strategy 2010-2020 'to empower people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their full rights, and benefit fully from participating in society' and hold up its commitments to various instruments, not least of which, the UNCRPD.