



SIGNON

Sign Language Translation Mobile Application and Open Communications Framework

Deliverable 6.1: SignON Communication and Dissemination Plan



Project Information
Project Number: 101017255
Project Title: SignON: Sign Language Translation Mobile Application and Open Communications Framework
Funding Scheme: H2020 ICT-57-2020
Project Start Date: January 1st 2021

Deliverable Information
Title: D6.1 – SignON Communication and Dissemination Plan
Work Package: 6 – Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation
Lead Beneficiary: VGTC
Due Date: 31/03/2021
Revision Number: V1.2
Authors: Jorn Rijckaert
Dissemination Level: Public
Deliverable Type: Report

Overview: This document describes the communication and dissemination plan for the SignON project.

Revision History

Version #	Implemented by	Revision Date	Description of changes
V1.1	Jorn Rijckaert	15/03/2021	First version

V1.2	Jorn Rijckaert	29/03/2021	First version - updated
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The SignON project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Programme under Grant Agreement No. 101017255. The views and conclusions contained here are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies or endorsements, either expressed or implied, of the SignON project or the European Commission. The European Commission is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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Approval Procedure

Version #	Deliverable Name	Approved by	Institution	Approval Date
V1.1	D6.1	Aoife Brady	DCU	22/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Giacomo Inches	FINCONS	30/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Vincent Vandeghinste	INT	19/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Gorka Labaka	UPV/EHU	22/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	John J O’Flaherty	MAC	15/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Josep Blat	UPF	16/03/2021

V1.1	D6.1	Irene Murtagh	TU Dublin	23/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Lorraine Leeson	TCD	30/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Gregg Young	VRT	30/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Mathieu De Coster	UGent	23/03/2021
V1.2	D6.1	Jorn Rijckaert	VGTC	30/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Anthony Ventresque	NUID UCD	24/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Henk van den Heuvel	RU	16/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Catia Cucchiarini	TaalUnie (NTU)	23/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Tim Van de Cruys	KU Leuven	23/03/2021
V1.1	D6.1	Frankie Picron	EUD	19/03/2021
V1.1 V1.2	D.6.1	Dimitar Shterionov Dimitar Shterionov	TiU	16/03/2021 30/03/2021

Acronyms

The following table provides definitions for acronyms and terms relevant to this document.

Acronym	Definition
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
PDCA	Plan, Do, Check and Adjust
VGTC	Vlaams Gebarentaalcentrum

EUD	European Union of the Deaf
WFD	World Federation of Deaf
SO	Strategic Objectives
OO	Operational Objectives
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Acceptable, Realistic, Time-related

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1. Introduction

“Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation” (WP6) is a very important part of the SignON project. In SignON’s integrated approach, the communication aspects are defined from the beginning and will evolve together with the project. Based on the project proposal (p.39), the dissemination and communication plan is the key to communicating about the project, for which Vlaams Gebarentaalcentrum (VGTC) is responsible:

Before, during and after the SignON project, we aim to inform our audience regularly about its design, planning, execution, monitoring and results. The dissemination and communication plan will be managed by the project manager together with the leader of the communication and dissemination work package. The interaction between these two actors, allows the communication to be adaptive throughout the project, since a continuous evaluation and validation of this plan is essential.

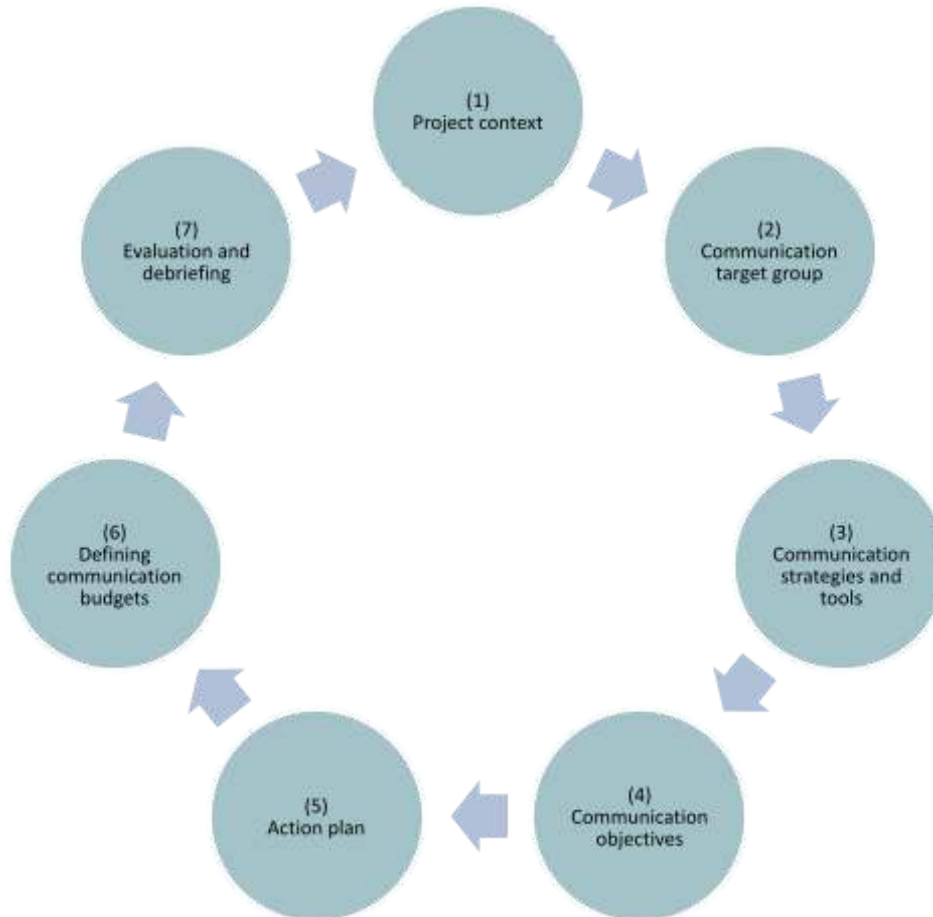
Based on the above text, in the process of creating, implementing and updating the dissemination and communication plan we mostly opt for a publicity-oriented approach in which informing, giving insight, motivating and 'selling our idea' are key. To elaborate this strategy, we use the 'PDCA'¹ principle (Plan, Do, Check and Adjust) proposing a seven-step method of continuous improvement in the communication approach.

This plan is created to structure, coordinate and oversee the communication concerning the project. An important note to remember is that a communication plan is not the same as a marketing plan. A communication plan deals with the following questions (shown schematically below), which will serve as a guideline for this plan:

1. What is the current situation and why do we want to communicate?
2. Who are the target groups in our communication?
3. Which communication strategies and tools do we use?
4. What are our communication objectives?
5. When will we communicate?

¹ <http://www.foresightguide.com/shewhart-and-deming/>

6. What is our budget for communication?
7. How effective is our communication?



As indicated above, it is important to realise that this communication plan is **iterative**, which means that the communication must always be adapted and will evolve according to the needs of the SignON project and the target groups of our communication. In the first iteration, it is important that all partners involved in the SignON project agree on the communication plan and that there are intermediate evaluations of the (achieved) communication objectives, so that the communication plan is continuously updated over the three project years.

Moreover, the communication plan is **not** a **linear** process. All elements are interrelated. Different steps can be implemented at the same time, or one step before the other, going back to a previous step at any time, etc. The role of the communication coordinator is to ensure that different aspects of the communication plan are integrated in a coherent way.

2. Step 1 - Defining the Project Context

Before developing a communication plan, a brief analysis of the current situation is required. Then we make a SWOT² analysis giving an impression of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats related to the project and its objectives. Even though the SignON communication service will be more than an advanced machine translation service, we only briefly examine what has happened in the past in the field of automated recognition of and translation to sign, audio and text, with respect to sign language synthesis through virtual signers (often referred to as avatars).

From the VGTC point of view, below we only note the general impressions and reactions on the concept of “automated sign language recognition” and “automated translation through sign language avatars”. This is not an in-depth exploration study. In its first version, the communication plan should rather be drafted on the basis of our earlier and quick findings. As indicated in the previous section, our communication plan is iterative and the insights from task 1.1 (“case studies and evidence analysis”) will also constitute an important input for adjusting this communication plan in the near future.

2.1. Project Definition

The SignON project aims to develop a mobile application that will translate between different European sign and verbal languages. The application, running on a standard mobile device, will interact with a cloud-based distributed framework dedicated to the computationally heavy tasks. The application and the framework will be designed through a co-creation approach where deaf and hearing users will work together with the SignON researchers and engineers to build a solution that suits all user types. Furthermore, it will be built for easy adaptability to other languages (sign and spoken) and modalities. Ultimately, the application will promote equitable exchange of information among all European citizens.

² https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm

The translation process involves three major steps which we need to be clearly communicated with the various research, industry and user communities:

- Recognition of input message: spoken messages will be transmitted as an audio stream, signed messages will be transmitted as a video stream and text messages -- simply as text. The audio and/or video will be processed accordingly for a suitable intermediate representation to be recognized.
- Translation from one language into another via an intermediate representation: symbolic and embedding based representations will be developed to facilitate the translation of (recognized) messages from one language (signed or verbal) to another.
- Output message synthesis: based on the output from the previous step, an output message will be generated in the necessary modality - audio via text to speech; signed message via a 3D avatar and text simply as text.

One of the main challenges in communicating our project is with respect to sign language avatars, which we address in more detail below.

2.2. Current Situation on Sign Language Avatars and Automated Recognition of Sign Languages

Sign language avatars have been appearing sporadically for a number of years now. One of the best known examples is Siphon the Lion³ (created by Braam Jordaan, deaf film/animation maker, South Africa) which shows the names of 131 countries in sign language and became the official mascot of the XVI World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) in 2011. Several other videos and series featuring sign language avatars have also been released, but most of the examples found on the Internet are mainly for children. A well-known recent example is StorySign⁴ by Huawei, a free mobile app that uses AI and motion capture to translate text from selected books into some European sign languages. Finally, several videos went viral on social media, with signing deaf people using emojis⁵ mostly on an amateur and experimental level. Since these sign language avatars were mainly used for entertainment purposes, the deaf communities seemed to welcome them positively.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Nonprofit-Organization/Siphon-the-Lion-117463454953344/>

⁴ <https://consumer.huawei.com/be/campaign/storysign/>

⁵

<https://www.pocket-lint.com/phones/news/apple/144743-what-are-memoji-how-to-create-an-animoji-that-looks-like-you>

The topic of sign language translation and recognition has seen a recent increase of interest. However, the emerging (academic) projects and research in automatic translation from and to signed languages as well as sign language recognition has led to a notable wave of resistance in Europe to the proposed technology, e.g. sign language 3D avatars. While the deaf people and communities, in general, are not very aware of this evolution, it is mainly the deaf and sign language organisations that react to it. The resistance is mainly based on the lack of involvement of “deaf” project partners from the beginning and/or the development of the project. Such organisations question the idea of automatic translation between verbal and sign languages and especially the use of avatars.

2.3. External Analysis: Opportunities and Threats

Although "threats" is a strong word, there are still many stakeholders (especially in relation to deaf communities and sign languages) who question the idea of automated translation from and to sign languages (and the use of sign language avatars). We were able to draw these conclusions from our own Flemish experience, where VGTC closely followed up the situation regarding the Horizon 2020 project Content4All⁶. The Flemish Deaf Association reacted to the project as follows: "*Doof Vlaanderen* finds it hard to believe that television programmes can be translated in a qualitative way by means of a 3D model. Moreover, translating television programmes with a 3D model is not what deaf VGT-users want."⁷ *Adviescommissie Vlaamse Gebarentaal* (the Advisory Committee on Flemish Sign Language) supports this decision⁸. According to the Advisory Committee, Flemish Sign Language is a minority language with a vulnerable status. Sign languages have been suppressed for years and have traditionally had little media exposure, and research on sign languages is recent and scarce. However, suggestions were made to possibly use this model in other contexts, such as automated announcements (e.g. in airports or train stations). In their Position Paper⁹ the EUD considers the use of pre-recorded avatars to be possible in some broadcasts, especially those providing non-essential information with a limited vocabulary. They still believe that the use of sign language interpreters continues to be crucial in important broadcasts, such as live emergency communications or the news, to ensure that all elements of the information are properly transmitted and understood.

⁶ <https://content4all-project.eu/>

⁷ <https://doof.vlaanderen/nieuws/project-vrt-content4all>

⁸ <https://www.adviesvgt.be/adviescommissie-brengt-advies-uit-over-project-content4all-en-vraagt-nauw-overleg>

⁹ <https://www.eud.eu/about-us/eud-position-paper/accessibility-information-and-communication/>

There is some resistance not only from the deaf and sign language communities, but also from the field of sign language interpreters. The interpreters not only fear that they may be replaced by sign language avatars in the future, but also that their interpreting work in the media may be used as research data without their knowledge¹⁰. At the same time, interpreters see the automated translation service and sign language avatars as a possible opportunity to improve and/or make their work easier. They also recognise the added value of using this automated system for different settings (e.g. automated announcements) that they would rather not see in their fully booked schedules. After all, the number of sign language interpreters available does not meet the demand from the deaf community.

2.4. Internal Analysis: Strengths and Weaknesses

Several stakeholders from the deaf and sign language communities have stressed the need to involve deaf people, experts and stakeholder organisations in all phases of projects related to accessibility for deaf and sign language users. In various project phases, different cooperation models are created between the target groups and researchers in defining use cases, co-designing and co-developing the SignON service and application.

SignON took that opportunity and involved EUD and VGTC as partners in all phases of the project, starting from the drafting of the SignON project application. This should certainly be considered a strength as this is a project primarily aimed at supporting accessibility of information and communication between deaf signers and non-signers. EUD and VGTC each have an extensive network of deaf signers, organisations for the deaf and sign language users and experts. EUD is also closely in touch with the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI).

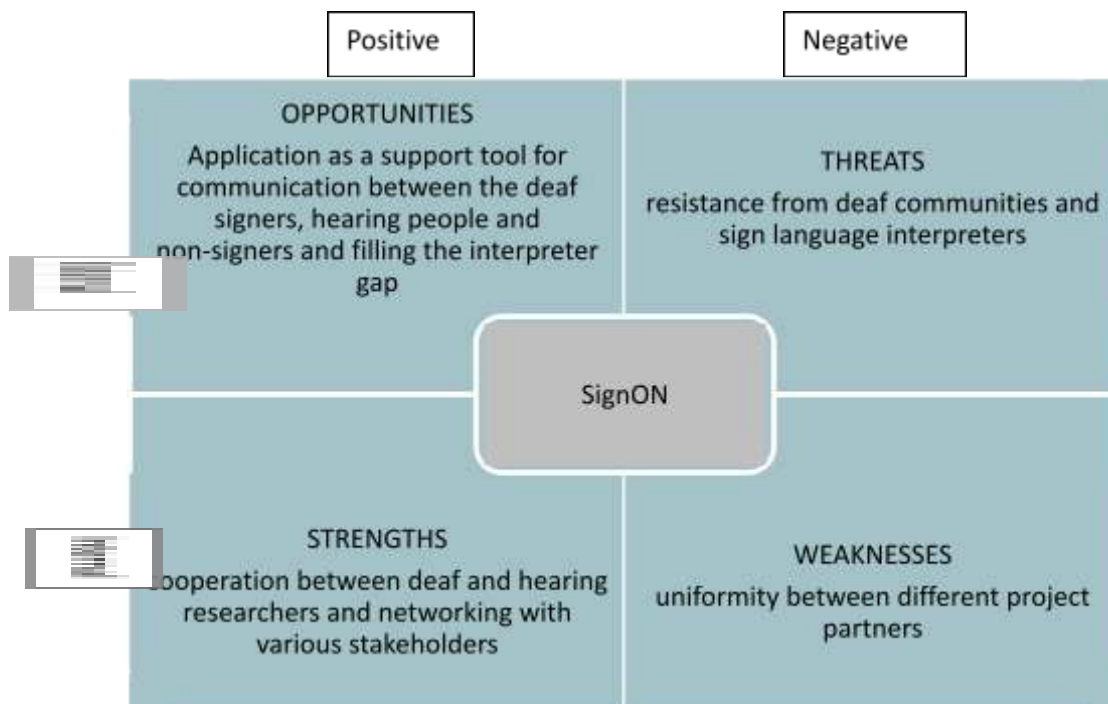
This internal cooperation can also be a great challenge in terms of communication with the outside world. After all, if you compare the project application with the values of EUD and VGTC, there are still some differences to be found in the use of automated translation from and to sign languages (and the use of sign language avatars). The deaf and sign language organisations, in line with their mission and

¹⁰Information was taken from the Live Panel on New Frontiers in Interpreting Technology (organised by Innovation In Interpreting Summit, www.innovationininterpreting.com) on 25 February 2021.

vision, still remain the representatives of cultural-linguistic minority groups. Deaf staff and partners still remain a minority in the project. In order to prevent our project from leaving a kind of "well-intentioned but still wrong" impression on our target groups, a good exchange between different project partners is necessary. In the project, the project partners representing our primary target groups must be given enough say and space to help steer the project in the right direction. Especially in times of COVID-19, when video meetings are the most common way of meeting, rather than physical meetings, this makes our internal informal contacts more difficult. It is precisely these kinds of contacts that provide the ideal opportunity to check and harmonise each other's expectations and concerns in order to reach agreement, which can be seen as a strength in communication towards the outside world.

2.5. SWOT Summary

Following the SWOT analysis above, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the SignON project and the corresponding objectives of the project are listed below. This information serves as a starting point for drawing up a communication strategy and objectives.



3. Step 2 - Defining the Target Groups

The target groups of our project are not homogenous, yet we can cluster different target groups based on more or less the same characteristics. Our communication plan should be expected to include communication tailored to these different target groups. The table below lists various target groups to whom the SignON project communication should be addressed. The purpose of this target group analysis is to see just how intensive and interactive the communication should be for these target groups.

In general, it should be made clear that SignON is still a research and innovation project and not an industrial-scale development of existing approaches. The first message in the below table (indicated with *) should also be conveyed to all target groups.

Target group	Importance of the target group	What messages should we convey?
EXTERNAL		
DEAF SIGNERS, mostly members of European deaf communities, who identify as a linguistic and cultural minority group and use a sign language as their primary or preferred way of communication.	Primary	This project aims, in the end, to provide an application that will facilitate communication and remove existing barriers - the SignON app - which will initially provide limited services (will not work perfectly in all use-cases and scenarios) but eventually will grow to become a bridge between signers and non-signers.*
ORGANISATIONS AND REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE DEAF PEOPLE AND SIGN LANGUAGES, includes professionals and experts.	Primary	
DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE WHO ARE NON-SIGNERS ¹¹ , and do not	Primary	The SignON application is flexible, scalable and adaptable (including

¹¹ In most of the cases this concerns people that have become deaf (e.g. old age, accidents, sickness, etc.) deaf people that did not have been exposed to nor used sign languages since birth, or deaf people with cochlear implants that did/do not have the need to use sign language and can deal with verbal language, etc.

<p>identify themselves as members of a deaf community necessarily. They use a verbal language as their primary and preferred way of communication.</p>		<p>personalisable) and provides multi-lingual translation via different input and output modes; it is not only a ‘sign language app’.</p>
<p>HEARING PEOPLE with a connection to deaf and hard-of-hearing people and sign language(s). Involves hearing family, colleagues or relatives of deaf people, etc.</p>	<p>Primary</p>	
<p>SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS (both deaf and hearing) and their organisations.</p>	<p>Secondary</p>	<p>The SignON service is not a replacement of professional interpreters but a tool to co-exist with them and aid the communication between deaf, hard of hearing and hearing people in conditions where interpreters are not available. It is important to note that we only work with data from persons and interpreters with their consent.</p>
<p>SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY, SISTER EU PROJECTS, REGULATORS, POLICY MAKERS, CLIENTS, AND INVESTORS: people with a scientific, political or economic link to this project, in a wide range of domains.</p>	<p>Secondary</p>	<p>The SignON project will provide new content and knowledge important for the advancement in SOTA; we will stress the importance of the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and how this project fits in there.</p>
<p>INTERNAL</p>		
<p>CONSORTIUM PROJECT PARTNERS including the hearing researchers and</p>	<p>Tertiary</p>	<p>The SignON project does not want to conclude or exclude anything about</p>

<p>the deaf representatives and organisations for the deaf people and sign languages.</p>		<p>the application of the service. It is still a research project and is still open to dialogue in which all views and concerns can be expressed.</p>
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4. Step 3 - Which Communication Strategies and Tools do we Use?

The communication plan will be directed to all of the above described target groups, as well as a wider, general audience. This will include hearing family, co-workers or friends of DHH people, as well as people with a general interest in the fields of (sign) languages, technology, translation or mobile applications. The communication messages to these audiences should focus mainly on awareness development and dissemination of project achievements: our goal is to inform them about the project's progress (SO2), as well as to create a positive attitude towards it (SO3).

The better our messages are adapted to the needs of the target groups, the more impactful our communication will be. The messages we want to convey should be clear, simple and action-oriented. In our communication we will actively concentrate on the following key topics:

- (i) the SignON project including its aims, objectives, outputs, and expected impacts;
- (ii) the challenge of developing technology solutions for deaf people;
- (iii) the role and importance of co-creating the solution with the deaf, hard of hearing and hearing communities;
- (iv) the progress in development of the SignON platform and application.

The following communication strategies¹² are among others used with our primary target groups:

- **Reputation strategy** should be applied to the "doubters" and "naysayers" about the intentions of the project. In our communication, we must strengthen our reputation and create the desired image among the target groups.

¹² The communication strategies follow from the book "Communicatiestrategie" by Wil Michels (2019, published by Noordhoff)

- **Positioning strategy** in which we create the distinctive position of the SignON project in the minds and experiences of the target groups. In doing so, we determine and strengthen the position of the project and its objectives and clarify what place the SignON service can occupy with the primary target groups.
- **Word of mouth strategy** is a common communication strategy within the close deaf communities. The SignON project needs to acquire a distinctive identity within the primary target groups, which will make people talk positively about the project and share our posts on social media. In this way SignON's brand awareness is raised and its image is strengthened. This will entice the target groups to behave more positively about the project.
- Finally, **participation strategy** is an important communication strategy to be applied to the target group of deaf people. This strategy is all about entering into a dialogue with the target groups, which should lead to cooperation. Through co-design and co-development, solutions are found to the issues of the project. The expertise and experiences of the primary target groups are used.

For other stakeholders such as representatives and organisations of deaf and sign languages (primary), sign language interpreters and their associations (secondary) and our tertiary target group of scientific community, regulators, policy makers, clients and investors, we opt for a **network strategy** in which building long-term relationships is key. This is done by highlighting the project's own role in the network of relations and by paying attention to the interests of other stakeholders in the network.

For internal communication needs, we use a **family strategy** where stronger involvement is created between different project partners. The aim of this strategy is to find common focus and appreciation.

Consortium members have identified several communication activities and channels to support the goal to increase general awareness of the key issues:

- **Project website** with a news feed where interested parties can access up-to-date information relevant for each target group, engage with the project and check progress. Short publications and articles will also be included on the website.
- On **social media** we create accounts (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) to disseminate relevant content, project progress, sign language summaries to the deaf communities and other target groups.

- Interested parties can also subscribe to our quarterly **newsletters**.
- **Specialised publications and public engagement activities** (workshops, demonstrations, presentations, publications, etc.) with the target groups and maintaining presence in events frequented by deaf communities and other target groups (e.g. World Federation of the Deaf congress, local events like World Deaf Day), Sign Language interpreter conferences (e.g. European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters).
- **Presence in the media** (through press or consortium partner contacts and networks) to publicise the objectives of project SignON and promote inclusion and awareness. This can take the form of articles, videos, interviews, etc.

Channel	Target group	Measure	Project target
Project website	All	# site visits	6.000 during the project lifecycle
Social media	All	# followers	10.000 during the project lifecycle
Newsletter	All	#subscribers	200
Workshops by SignON	All	#attendees	3 workshops during the project lifecycle + 20-40 people per workshop
Internal workshops	Project partners	#attendees	Min. 3 workshops
Demonstrations	Deaf community and industry partners	#demonstrations	5 (over the lifecycle of the project)
Industry presentations and conferences	Industry partners and investors	#presentations	12 (4 per year)
Scientific publications	Scientific community	#submitted papers	Min. 31 submitted papers for the project lifecycle (15 for conferences, 10 for workshops and 6 for journals)
White papers	Policy makers	#papers	2

Media publications	All	#publications	10
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Dissemination and communication materials that are not aimed at one target group specifically, need to be available in English and International Sign. Other dissemination and communication materials should be optimized to be provided in each target group's first language, i.e. the language community members identify themselves with and is their preferred form of communication. The languages we consider are the following: Flemish Sign Language (VGT), Irish Sign Language (ISL), Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT), Spanish Sign Language (LSE), British Sign Language (BSL), International Sign (IS) (for pan-national interaction), English, Irish, Spanish and Dutch. If necessary, we will provide supplementary services (e.g. subtitles) to remove any communication barriers. Which languages and/or services are required for a specific activity, will be evaluated for each of these activities individually, while always adopting a user-centered approach.

5. Step 4 - Defining the communication objectives

In this step of the communication plan, we determine the communication objectives, i.e. the results we want to achieve with the project's communication. A SWOT analysis, an analysis of the target groups and the selected communication strategies and tools are the basis for making decisions about the direction we want to pursue with the project's communication. The objectives are represented as strategic objectives (SO, long-term) and corresponding operational objectives (OO, short-term) and are SMART formulated (see step 7). Each operational objective includes concrete action points which are not shown here, but are developed and monitored internally by VGTC and under the supervision of DCU.

SO1 - Increase visibility of SignON project

Through communication, the project will acquire a form and an identity to the stakeholders and project SignON will become a topic of conversation among the primary target groups (**word of mouth strategy**). Different communication tools must be used efficiently in order to improve the visibility of project SignON. The objectives below are mainly focused on the mindset of the target groups, that is: what should the target group think of the project? In short, we want to generate interest from different target groups about the SignON project.

OO1.1. – Design of new SignON logo

The most important thing for the visibility of the project is a recognisable logo with which different target groups can identify. The logo should incorporate the name of project SignON with enough visual elements so that the stakeholders can immediately understand what the purpose of the project is. This is why the logo is designed by a deaf expert who knows how to create a logo that fits the interests and lifestyles of sign language users. This logo will renew/replace the current logo.

OO1.2. – Sign name for SignON

A sign name is often indispensable in the sign language community when a name is often mentioned. Rather than using fingerspelling, a sign name is very useful to represent a name in spoken/written form. Giving SignON a sign name will give the project a stronger position in the sign language communities. A sign name can be created by the deaf sign language community (usually based on visual characteristics of the logo) or can be created by the deaf staff/partners within the project. Moreover, a SignON sign name is very useful for the translators and interpreters involved in the project, both internally and externally. This sign name should be the same for the different sign languages involved in this project.

OO1.3. – Create a corporate style guide

A corporate style guide is created together with the design of a new logo. This document is important for monitoring the corporate identity of project SignON in their various communication tools and channels. It will provide an overview of guidelines and rules for applying a corporate style. These include guidelines for logo use, colour schemes and typography. For this purpose, the same deaf professional who designs the logo will be consulted.

OO1.4. – Create templates

With the help of the corporate style guide various templates will be created that are shared internally, for example for PowerPoint presentations, correspondence, email signatures, etc. The same deaf professional who designs the logo will be consulted for this.

OO1.5. – Website update

Once the logo and corporate style have been designed, the current website www.signon-project.eu will be updated so that it complies with the guidelines described in the corporate style guide. An external website developer with strong experience in creating websites for the deaf and sign language community will be tasked with this design update. This website developer will liaise with the logo and corporate style designer.

OO1.6. – Start-up of social media

New accounts for SignON will be created on social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. The corporate style will also be applied here. This is the responsibility of the communications coordinator employed by VGTC. DCU will be a co-administrator of these social media accounts.

OO1.7. – Introducing hashtag #signon

The hashtag #signon will be introduced at the first postings on social media. This will allow us to group all social media postings about SignON and it can serve as a support to gain insight into what is being communicated about the project and which opinions and attitudes there are about the project on the part of external stakeholders.

SO2: Disseminate information about and results of project SignON

Using the communication methods, we primarily want to raise the stakeholders' awareness about the project, its progress and its results. Most importantly, from the very beginning, we want to inform all target groups as much as possible about the project. This will be especially the case for our primary target groups of deaf people, because this is a project that promotes accessibility between deaf signers and non-signers, across the languages of different European deaf communities. Following the "Nothing About Us Without Us" principle and in order to avoid speculation, we adopt a transparent communication method. This also contributes to image improvement regarding the intentions of the SignON project (**reputation strategy**). The target groups are clearly informed about the benefits of the SignON service and therefore an attempt is made to soften the (biased) resistance of various target groups. This is where we need to highlight our strengths, namely cooperation between the primary target groups and researchers. The objectives below are mainly focused on target group knowledge, that

is: what do the target groups need to know about the SignON project? Similarly, by giving the stakeholders a better understanding of the project's objectives and what their role is, we stimulate their involvement so that they also become ambassadors of the project (**positioning strategy**).

002.1. Announcement of the SignON project

A short awareness-raising video will be made about the SignON project in the initial phase. In it, the most important actors will be interviewed about project objectives and this video will be distributed through the social media channels of SignON (managed by VGTC and co-managed by DCU). In this way, the target groups immediately will get to know our project and its leads. This video will mainly be produced from a deaf point of view in order to address the most important target group, namely the deaf signers. The video will also be made accessible to everyone through subtitles and translators.

002.2. Setting up accessible information and communication about the project

The aim of the project as a whole will be converted to accessible text which will be published on the website. Attention will be paid to written language that is as accessible as possible for the different target groups. These texts will be translated into International Sign and various national sign languages (VGT, LSE, NGT, BSL and ISL) if necessary. In addition, we will try to make the texts more attractive with illustrations and visual elements. In this way, those who are interested can find out more about our project and gain a clearer understanding of the project's objectives.

002.3. Making the structure and functioning of the project transparent

In order to increase the credibility of our project, our website will make our structure and operations as transparent as possible. In this way, the target groups will gain insight into our internal network of researchers and experts. This is also meant for interested parties to know who they can address their question to (e.g. if someone has interesting sign language data, they should know which project partner to contact). In our transparent communication, we will also reflect the role of our target groups in our structure and operations, so that they will better understand their contribution to our project and feel like co-ambassadors.

002.4. Create FAQ

A FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page will be created on the website. The purpose of this page is to answer possible questions or concerns in a public forum. This may save time answering questions by email or on social media on a one-to-one basis but more importantly we will build trust with our knowledge and experience as it will show that we know what is important to our stakeholders and that we already have answers to their questions. We feel that by doing this we will increase the credibility and the perceived professionalism of the SignON project.

002.5. Communicating news and (intermediate) results about the project

Throughout the project, in different project phases across all WPs, we want to inform all of our target groups about the progress of the project and (intermediate) results. We will try to inform them as quickly as possible, using short news bulletins. These news items will also be published as soon as possible on our different media channels. In this way, we will keep our project dynamic through lively communication with the stakeholders and target groups whilst also gauging their reactions and expectations. These news items will also be made accessible where possible (taking into account time and budget) via sign languages. Based on the project application, the following measurement results are aimed for:

Channel	Frequency	Target measure
Project website	Monthly updates	6.000 site visits during the project lifecycle
Social Media	Weekly updates	10.000 followers during the project lifecycle
Newsletter	Quarterly editions	200 subscribers

002.6. Dissemination of research data and specific publications

During the project research data (for example videos, animations, etc.), scientific publications and white papers will be issued. These will also be announced and published on our website and social media and addressed to the specific target groups (scientific community and policy makers respectively). If relevant, the abstracts will be written out in easy-to-read English and translated to International Sign.

002.7. Dissemination by (mainstream) media publications

We may write press releases in-house when events or issues related to the project have some news value for the public. We will also respond to various press enquiries and dedicate sufficient time and input for this purpose. A press folder will be prepared and shared via the SignON website. The aim will be to achieve a minimum of 10 media publications.

002.8. Organising demonstrations, conferences and workshops

Various types of demonstrations, conferences and workshops (either physical or online) will be organised for relevant stakeholders, target groups and communities, in order to promote collaboration with other EU deaf and hearing communities and outreach to language policy organisations. Technical workshops will also be organised for researchers and the SignON partners will also have the opportunity to participate in workshops organised by others. Based on the project application, the following results are aimed for:

Channel	Target group	Project target
Workshops by SignON	All	3 workshops
Demonstrations	Deaf community and industry partners	5 demonstrations
Industry presentations and conferences	Industry partners and investors	12 (4 per year)

These workshops need to be accessible in both the national sign language (or, in international settings, International Sign), the verbal language of the region the workshop takes place in and/or in English. When required, additional adjustments will need to be made to facilitate accessible communication for all parties, for example spoken language transcription. These requirements will need to be examined for each workshop individually and should always be optimized to remove any possible language or communication barrier for members of the target groups willing to attend.

SO3 – Raising positive attitude about and fostering engagement with SignON

There are different opinions among various target groups about the SignON project and/or translation between sign and verbal languages (and especially when it comes to the use of sign language avatars). Changes are often accompanied by fear and resistance. Through our communication, we want to familiarise the target groups with the project and its objectives and in this way we can stimulate and accelerate their acceptance process of sign language translation. By entering into a dialogue with these target groups (network strategy) and involving them in various project phases (participation strategy), it is envisaged that they may "digest" change more easily. It is hoped that this approach will also increase the credibility of our project. The objectives below are mainly focused on the behaviour of the target groups, that is: what do the target groups think / what should they do? In other words, with our communication we want to trigger an action from the target groups that translates into more positive and constructive behaviour towards the project. All of the following objectives are therefore part of SignON's PR work.

OO3.1. Actively entering into dialogue with potential users

In order to gain insight into the needs of the target groups, we will frequently poll the deaf, interpreters and sign language communities, to find out what they think of the project and make sure that our objective to change their behaviour in a positive way has been achieved and adjust the course if necessary. Through social media we will always try to enter into a dialogue with the target groups, but other more active communication tools are also needed, such as information stands at the major events of the target groups (including World Deaf Day), organising webinars, attending seminars organised by the stakeholders, etc. We will also prepare targeted communication towards hearing users in order to raise awareness within all possible user groups.

OO3.2. Actively entering into dialogue with representatives and organisations

The deaf and sign language organisations in Europe were particularly active in their communication about the concept of automated translation from and to sign languages (and the use of sign language avatars). They expressed their vision and point of view on the subject. Since these stakeholders are mainly the representatives of deaf and sign language users, our communication plan also focuses on approaching these stakeholders personally. By entering into

a dialogue with them, we can cooperate on our communication plan and hopefully contribute to the positive attitude of the target groups. The same applies to professional interpreters and their organisations.

003.3. Actively entering into dialogue with research and innovation groups

The SignON project revolves around diverse innovative research activities, e.g. efficient recognition of sign language, interlingual representation, avatar synthesis and deployment on mobile devices. We will communicate our progress, outcomes and innovations with the various research communities through academic and popular science publications and presentations, social media and mailing lists. We will retain a publication and presentation collection on the SignON website.

003.4. Preparing communication scenarios

As the use of automated translation from and to sign languages (and the use of sign language avatars) in communication settings is a sensitive topic within the deaf, hard-of-hearing and interpreter communities, we need to prepare different communication scenarios. These scenarios will be used in the case of a communication crisis, when we are likely to get negative publicity about the project. This can happen, for example, when a deaf influencer posts negative comments about the project on social media. In preparing this communication crisis prevention, we must therefore dare to face the risks, analyse them and develop scenarios.

003.5. Managing reactions on social media

The communications coordinator should monitor the reactions and shares on social media related to our project and react if necessary. These reactions (likes, shares, viewers, etc.) must also be registered statistically and analysed. This analysis serves for intermediate evaluation moments in order to adjust our communication objectives in time.

003.6. PR videos about the transparent operation and cooperation

The strength of the SignON project is the co-creation workflow between deaf and hard-of-hearing communities and researchers. Videos will be produced that illustrate how this cooperation takes place with the objective of responding to actual needs for real-life

communication of potential users of the SignON service. The viewers will see the weight and importance of decisions of deaf and hard-of-hearing communities imprinted in the SignON service. This will lead to a more positive attitude (less biased) and behaviour (more engaged) towards SignON.

OO3.7. Create demonstration videos on the use of SignON service

By responding to real-life communication needs of the users, SignON will be able to define some use cases. These user-oriented practices will be turned into some demonstration videos that can illustrate the use of the SignON service. This is not only to convince our primary target groups, but also to promote accessibility and inclusiveness. These videos will be published on the website and will be widely disseminated through social media.

SO4 - Aligning visions between project partners internally

Internally, the project partners should also be able to communicate the objectives of the project together (family strategy). In the project there are two project partners whose visions and missions match the values of the deaf and sign language communities. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness about the deaf and sign language communities among other project partners internally. Everyone needs to have the best possible informed understanding of what the sensitivities are around the SignON service and the sign language avatars and what impact they may have on the deaf and sign language communities. The objectives below aim to bring knowledge about our primary target groups, their language and their culture to the project partners.

OO4.1. Raising awareness about the deaf and sign language communities among project partners

(At least) one internal training will be organised by VGTC, in cooperation with EUD, in which other project partners will be sensitised regarding key concerns within the deaf and sign language communities, especially with regard to sign language avatars. This knowledge that is shared can concern linguistic aspects of sign languages as well as ethical issues related to deafness and accessibility for deaf signers. This internal communication objective provides

enough space for the deaf project staff, who are still a minority in the network of project partners and staff members at SignON, to share their values.

OO4.2. Communication training for project partners

Disseminating correct terminology about being deaf and sign language

In general, incorrect, outdated and/or derogatory terms are still often used in the media and elsewhere when talking about deaf people, their language and their world. Therefore, an internal workshop will be organised preventively and carefully on how best to communicate about deaf people and sign language to external audiences. After this, a document will be shared in which some correct terminology about being deaf and sign language will be given, and what absolutely must not be said/stated. This will help all project partners to ensure that they use this terminology and are mindful of the sensitivities when engaging in internal and external communication.

OO4.3. Aligning visions among different project partners

As each project partner is involved in different WPs with their own task content, care must be taken not to lose the overview: for whom are we doing the project and with what intentions. If internally we can achieve a unified vision on the sign language and audio recognition, translation and interlingua as well as implementation and use of sign language avatars, this will increase the motivation of each (deaf) project partner, contribute to better cooperation and increase the credibility of the project. Therefore, a workshop will also be organised (at least) in order to have an open and constructive dialogue between the main actors in the project.

6. Step 5 - Planning and Organising the Communication

The above communication objectives are shown below in a schedule (the rows represent operational objectives and the columns represent the month of the project lifecycle). Only those communication objectives that must be followed up over the entire project lifecycle are coloured grey. Other communication objectives with a short lifespan are shown in turquoise and concern a period (first turquoise is the start of the communication objective and last turquoise is the completion).

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7. Step 6 - Defining the Communication Budget

The budget is managed internally by VGTC and monitored by DCU. The new communications manager (part-time, 60%) assumes responsibility for most operational objectives. For the logo (OO1.1), corporate style guide (OO1.3 and OO1.4) and website development (OO1.5, OO2.1 and OO2.3), an external supplier will be used. In addition, for several operational objectives related to the dissemination of the information (OO2.1-OO2.8), we will work with different translators and interpreters for International Sign, VGT, LSE, ISL, NGT and BSL. The number of texts translated into IS and/or national sign languages will be determined by the budget and price offers of the selected translators and interpreters. Finally, it is understood there is enough budget to cover the organisational costs of workshops and the transport costs of the communication manager (who will take care of the video productions).

8. Step 7 - Follow up, Evaluate and Adjust

As indicated in the introduction, this communication plan is a working tool that can constantly evolve. This requires frequent internal analysis of our communication strategy and activities: did we achieve our objectives (in part or in full)? If not, what went wrong? How can we improve them? The objectives are formulated in terms of SMART¹³ criteria and must always be evaluated as such:

- Specific: is the communication objective clearly defined?
- Measurable: are there predefined indicators to check whether the communication objective has been achieved or not?
- Acceptable: is the communication objective (still) feasible?
- Realistic: does the communication objective take sufficient account of existing limitations?
- Time-related: has the deadline for a communication objective been set correctly?

Intermediate evaluation moments must be planned in order to adjust the communication plan and objectives if necessary: it may be necessary in the meantime to cancel or update planned activities or to schedule additional activities. There is a monthly follow-up meeting between the VGTC coordinator and communication manager. After that, at the monthly PMB meetings the communication and dissemination plan is discussed as a recurring agenda item. Finally, an annual report is drawn up with a

¹³ <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/nc-smart-goals-fact-sheet.pdf>

short overview of achieved communication objectives and the impact (e.g. social media statistics, number of attendees at the workshops, number of news items, etc.).