

## The Russian Sign Language

### The Russian Sign Language Community



There are approximately 8.7 million Deaf and “Hard of Hearing” in the Russian Federation and Central Asia countries according to 2000 census data. There are no recent census statistics available for Russia’s approximately sixty-five different administrative regions plus twenty-one separate republics. The former Soviet government established a limited number of schools specifically for the Deaf. At these schools, the Deaf meet and mix with other Deaf students from a broad range of other ethnic groups. As a result, the Deaf see themselves as Deaf first and then secondly as their particular ethnic group. Russian Sign language is said to be standardized everywhere in Russia thanks to the education policies of the former Soviet government. There does not seem to be a distinction between Russian Sign Language versus Signed Russian (where words are signed in the Russian word order and have the same meaning as the Russian words). There is some limited evidence pointing towards a growth of non-Russian sign languages as other ethnic groups are developing a sense of pride in their history and language. The Soviet government also established a policy directed toward the formation of factories and other places of employment. Those places were largely focused on providing a working environment for Deaf employees, thus providing them with a more homogeneous working environment adapted to their needs. Currently there are many attempts to communicate the Gospel to the Deaf of Russia. There is some question regarding the overall effectiveness of this approach, however, due to the differences between printed Russian and Russian sign language. At present, there are many hearing churches that provide sign language interpretation during their services; however, there are relatively few churches specifically for the Deaf themselves.

**Primary Religion:**  
 Non-religious

**Disciples (Matt 28:19):**  
 Unknown

**Churches:**  
 100

**Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):**  
 None

**Population (date):**  
 1,500,000



## The Deaf of Russia

### Have They Heard The Gospel

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Call Themselves Christian                | Unknown   |
| Believe In Jesus As God And Only Savior  | Unknown%  |
| Prophet/Good Man, But Not God's Son      | Unknown   |
| Have Not Heard Who Jesus Is              | Unknown   |
| Response to the Gospel                   | <p>Rapid church growth; Under the Communist regime, very few people including the Deaf had any opportunity to become a regular part of a church. In more recent years, many Deaf have responded eagerly to presentations of the Gospel. Indeed, many new Deaf believers have a desire to reach out to others in their Deaf community and to share their faith with them. Under the Soviet government, a system was in place to group the Deaf into somewhat homogeneous communities regardless of ethnic background or ties to the extended family. While that system apparently had economic benefits, it also had negative influence on birth family relationships. This has carried over into the social structure of the church. The percentage of Deaf believers is smaller than the percent age of Deaf in the general population. Operation World* states that over 90% of Russians have no meaningful link with a church, and while over half of Russians claim a nominal allegiance, only 3% are actively involved. 7% attend only once a month.</p> |
| Is the Word of God Translated?           | <p>They have access to the Bible in Russian. Russian is, how ever, a second language for most Deaf, and most do not understand or use it well at all. Sign is the first and heart language for most Deaf.</p>   |
| Any Hindrance to Scripture Distribution? | <p>The lack of scriptures recorded in sign language is one hindrance. Other primary hindrances are likely to be the following:</p>  |
| Forms of Gospel Presentation Available   | Literature, films/video   |
| What Kind of Missionaries Are Needed?    | <p>Missionaries with specialized experience are needed. It is likely that linguistic and translation consultants will be needed to facilitate the translation of the Scripture into Russian or other sign languages. Any who go to minister should be willing to work under the authority of local leaders of missions to the Deaf.</p>   |

# The Deaf of Russia

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## Group Description

### Population All Countries

Comment

1,500,000

When we speak about Deaf people as opposed to deaf people, we're making the distinction of, among other things, their language of preference. Simply stated, Deaf people identify with the Deaf culture and use that signed language; deaf people do not and prefer to use the spoken language. Estimating the population of a Deaf community is difficult. Quite honestly, no one knows how many Deaf there are in a given country. However, some generalities seem to hold true. In 1st world nations (like the US) 1-2 people in 1000 are Deaf; in those nations that are considered "2nd world", 3-4 people per 1000 are Deaf; in 3rd world nations, the numbers are much higher: 6-8 people per 1000 are Deaf. Again, this is an estimation only. There is absolutely no quantifiable documentation to support these numbers. But, they are the best we know.

As implied, the estimated number of deaf is always larger than the number of those who learn sign language and become part of the Deaf community. Some become deaf late in life. Some children's parents do not have the funds to send their child to a deaf school and some of these children never encounter others with whom to communicate. Almost all deaf children are born to hearing parents. Instead these children grow and work at home where they use gestures and sounds but do not have a true language. The number of these is unknown.

### Geography and Environment

Comment

Russia covers 11 time zones

### Language and Linguistics

Primary Language

Comment

**RUSSIAN SIGN LANGUAGE**

Most Deaf prefer to use sign language, however, since they are educated in Russian, they also learn at least some communication skills in Russian. The vast majority of Deaf schools use an oral approach. Some studies suggest that even the most skilled lip-readers only achieve up to 30 or 40 % in most conversations.

Attitude Towards Mother Tongue

Very receptive

Percent Monolingual (%)

Low percent

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### Second Languages

Comment

RUSSIAN

Most learn at least some spoken and written Russian in school. There are over two- hundred and twenty-five schools in Russia. The vast majority of those schools are oral. An oral school is where a Deaf child is expected to learn to lip-read, and instruction is not done in sign language. In some areas of the Russian Federation, local “finger spelling” languages are now developing, however, most Deaf still rely on Russian sign language for wider communication.

### Economics

Subsistence Type

Industrial

Occupation

Woodcarving, cleaning, computer, cooking, cord making, denture fabrication, drafting, drawing, duct manufacturing, electrical work, factory work, flower making, furniture manufacturing, glass making, beauticians, jewelry manufacturing, key making, auto mechanics, metalworking, painting, photography, sculpting, selling, sewing, shoemaking, woodworking,

Comment

There are a variety of factories that were set up in Soviet times to provide employment specifically for the Deaf. Most of these factories are still open. Other Deaf people find work in unskilled labor positions. More information is needed on this.

### Community Development

Health Care (Quality)

Good

Diet (Quality)

Good

Water (Quality)

Good

Shelter Description

Apartments and houses

Electricity

Russian electricity companies

### Society & Culture

Social Habits/Groupings

The Deaf function as a sub-group within the broader hearing culture, and they live in two overlapping social groupings: a) family, friends, neighbors, b) Deaf culture group. Deaf people are known to travel long distances in order to socialize with Deaf from other areas. if given a choice, most Russian Deaf would prefer to be with other Deaf. Often Deaf gather in cities. Therefore Deaf communities, clubs and schools can be found in major urban centers.

Cultural Change Pace

Rapid

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|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Identification With National Culture | Integrated   |
| Media                                | The Russian media is open to those who are Deaf. Russian television stations have signed programs in many areas.   |
| Attitude To Outsiders                | Very receptive   |
| Attitude To Change                   | Somewhat receptive   |
| <b><u>Education</u></b>              |  |
| Language Of Instruction Early Years  | Russian  |
| Language Of Textbooks Early Years    | Russian  |
| Language Of Instruction Later Years  | Russian  |
| Language Of Textbooks Later Years    | Russian  |
| Comment (Education)                  | There are about two-hundred and twenty-five specialized schools for the Deaf in the Russian Federation. Some are found in the major cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk and Vladivostok.   |
| Comment (Education)                  | Deaf schools are classified in two groups: a) those using the oral method (signing is not used in the classrooms), and b) those schools that allow signing in the classroom. Many deaf schools are no longer fully subsidized by the federal or local government. They struggle to provide basics such as adequate heating in winter and food. As a result of their precarious situation, many deaf schools are much more open to contacts with and assistance from outside organizations. |

## The Deaf of Russia

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### Status of Christianity

#### Church Growth

There is a definite Church growth movement in terms of responsiveness. Missionaries to the Deaf are taking the Gospel to every part of Russia and Deaf Christians are actively involved.

#### Religion & Response

Attitude To Christianity

Very receptive

Attitude To Religious Change

Somewhat receptive

Spiritual Climate And Openness

Open

Current Needs

There are specific needs for financial support and encouragement for projects that have started. It is important to respect the fact that these are established ministries. Those who come in from outside the country should do so as servants.

Items For Prayer

1. For wisdom for the many Deaf pastors a church leaders to discern priorities in reaching out to the Deaf
2. That each Region (49) and Republic (21) would have contact with a Deaf missionary who will establish ministry to the Deaf.
3. For Deaf Christians in other countries to become aware of opportunities to reach out to Deaf Russians.

#### History Of Christianity

Comments

1. There are Russian ministries to the Deaf in the Russian Federation. Both Deaf and non-Deaf people carry out the work. Some of these individuals are considered missionaries.
2. There are a variety of non-Russian organizations with specific ministry to the Deaf. These organizations tend to operate from their home country office rather than setting up separate offices in Russia. The Independent Baptists, Southern Baptists (IMB) and other groups are in this category.

Comments

3. There are a limited number of "sister church" relationships which have been established between Russian Deaf churches and other churches outside the Russian Federation. During the Soviet era, evangelistic efforts were usually very low-key. Deaf believers worked one-on-one with other interested Deaf. Contact with the wider Deaf community was possible through such events as the World Games for the Deaf. Other events such as secular Deaf Conferences

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also provided opportunities for them to meet. In the early 1990s, when Russia and the Central Asia countries became more open to Christianity, Deaf Christians began making a greater effort to find each other and to make plans (a) to evangelize other Deaf and b) to evangelize their country. Deaf churches and Ministries to the Deaf in Europe also began to widen their contacts with similar ministries in the Russian Federation. Today, the International Christian Center in St. Petersburg provides specialized training and materials for those interested in starting or working in Deaf ministries. A Bible school for the Deaf provides the training for pastors and missionaries.

### Scripture

Translation Status

Comment (Scripture)

Possible

There are several print versions of the Scriptures in Russian. The most widely used Bible is the Synodal version, prepared under the auspices of the Orthodox Church well over one-hundred years ago. In the early 1990s, two other translations were completed in Russian. At present, a new translation is being prepared under the auspices of the Bible Society of Russia. It is not clear what the average reading level is for most Deaf, nor their level of understanding of the Russian Bible. There are few, if any, printed materials that use Russian Sign Language for communicating Scripture.

Other Forms Of Gospel Available

Literature: No

Other Forms Of Gospel Available

Recordings: No

Other Forms Of Gospel Available

Film/Videos: Yes. Currently there is no Scripture in Russian Sign Language. The Jesus video/film interpreted into Russian Sign Language is well used. Newsletters and other informational material for the Deaf are distributed. Evangelistic, discipleship, and training videos are being produced.