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 **Title:** SA Sign Language roll-out stalls amid funding crisis

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d: said it was unacceptable that those system that has allowed the endless peaceful society."

CHALLENGES

SA Sign Language roll-out stalls amid funding crisis

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NEARLY two years after South African Sign Language (SASL) became the country's 12th official language, there has been little progress by the government in incorporating its use in national departments.

The Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) is unhappy with the progress made since the National Assembly approved the constitutional amendment in May 2023 and President Cyril Ramaphosa enacted it two months later in July that year.

PanSALB is the country's constitutional institution established to promote and create conditions for the development and use of all official languages, including the Khoi and San languages. The official recognition of the SASL was meant to redress access to quality education, socio-economic opportunities, and public participation for deaf South Africans.

The board has now detailed the struggles faced by state institutions, which by law, are required to promote and use all official languages of the Use of Official Languages Act.

According to the board, data was collected from 49 national departments, public entities, and enterprises, but only four national public enterprises stated their readiness, which is only about 8% of the total submissions.

The National Treasury reported to the board that Braille and SASL publications are not provided for due to budgetary and capability constraints.

However, in its response to the board, the Treasury has promised that Braille and SASL services will be outsourced.

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has acknowledged its inclusion of SASL in its language policy but said there was a lack of resources and finances to find adequate SASL interpreters, and suggested outsourcing them until further notice.

Another challenge facing government departments was noted by the Department of Mineral Resources, which stated that it had a sign language interpreter in its establishment, but the person resigned, and attempts to fill the post were unsuccessful as suitable candidates preferred to freelance rather than take up the position full-time.

The Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, under which PanSALB falls, has one full-time sign language interpreter and is recruiting a second to meet the demand. Also under way is a project to develop a digital sign language interpreter system and an online dictionary.

PanSALB noted that funding of language-related programmes and projects in compliance with the Constitution and Use of Official Languages Act is cited as the biggest stumbling block to implementation. This has a ripple effect on the number of skilled and professional staff, and establishment of the departmental or institutional language units.