

# PEOPLE GROUPS: THE DEAF OF NORTH AFRICA

Across the world, there are up to 72 million Deaf people, making them one of the largest unreached people groups on the planet. According to DOOR International, a mission specializing in reaching the Deaf, fewer than two per cent know Jesus.

Conservative estimates put more than 1.5 million Deaf people across the seven northernmost countries of Africa, where followers of Islam comprise at least 97 per cent of the population, except for Egypt, which is 86 per cent Muslim. In such places, the likelihood of a Deaf person meeting a Christian, let alone being able to communicate with that Christian, is rare.

Traditionally the Deaf have been viewed as “disabled”, but it is more accurate to see them as having a separate culture, with their own language, the local sign language. Across the world, the Deaf share many characteristics and challenges in daily living. The parents of most Deaf children can hear, and most of them do not learn sign language. Where it is available, a Deaf child may learn to communicate from other Deaf people or from a Deaf school. Their community is comprised of other

Deaf people rather than neighbours and family. This leads to a distinct worldview.

Deaf people may suffer a great deal of oppression from those who can hear; in some places they are not allowed to marry and no efforts are made to include them socially; few people learn sign language to engage the Deaf. In many communities, they have no real voice and can be isolated, or even hidden because of family shame.

Another challenge for the Deaf is low literacy levels. Poor access to education means they do not often learn spoken language well enough to read it. This creates problems in using any study materials, including the Bible. There are very few scriptures in local sign language, and no Gospel videos or other resources.

Through experience and practice, it has become very evident that the best people to reach the Deaf are those who are Deaf themselves, or who have been accepted into Deaf society. Training for Deaf leaders and Deaf missionaries is needed to bridge this gap.

## AT A GLANCE

- Many Deaf people value their language and culture so much that if they were given the chance to hear, they would refuse.
- The Deaf community is often isolated from those who do not understand them.
- Interaction with the hearing world can traumatize the Deaf, who cannot process audible information.

## PRAY FOR

- Missionaries and local Christians, especially those who are Deaf, to be trained in reaching the Deaf of North Africa.
- Resources for Deaf people in languages and formats they can access.
- A growing love for the Deaf, and a willingness in Christians to reach out locally and globally.

Sources: Joshua Project, Peoplegroups.org, DOOR International, Open Doors, Christer.org | <https://www.pray4tunisia.com/en/uupg/deaf/>



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