



PRESS RELEASE

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Face masks with transparent coverings procured by the Office of Civil Contingencies to assist people to lip read

The Minister with responsibility for Civil Contingencies Samantha Sacramento MP is pleased to announce that the Office for Civil Contingencies has been able to procure face masks with a transparent panel that will enable people who are Deaf or hard of hearing to lip read. The face masks have a clear plastic section in the area around the mouth, therefore allowing the user's lips to be seen clearly when speaking.

As civil contingency arrangements during the pandemic developed, Minister Sacramento, as Minister for Equality as well, was mindful of the needs of those who are reliant on lip reading to fully understand what is communicated to them, especially when discussing medical treatment, and asked for an alternative to the standard facemask that was suitable for this purpose to be found.

The Department of Equality worked closely with the Office of Civil Contingencies and after much searching, the Office for Civil Contingencies managed to find a supplier that could custom make such masks of a suitable quality.

The masks that have been procured are reusable and can be washed after use numerous times before the need to replace them.

This batch of masks has already been distributed to the ENT and Audiology departments at St Bernard's Hospital and to the Primary Care Centre as a priority so that the masks can be used by clinicians or others as needed in order to be able to better communicate with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing who require these services. Further masks will be distributed to other public services that require the use of a face mask.

Equally, the private sector are encouraged to use these clear masks so as to be more inclusive. Details may be obtained from the Office of Civil Contingencies.

The Department of Equality has met with the Gibraltar Hearing Issues and Tinnitus Association (GHITA) and with Mia Wallace, who recently started to raise awareness on this issue through social media, to discuss the use of these masks and to show them the masks that were ordered some time ago and have just arrived in Gibraltar.



The Minister for Equality, Justice and Civil Contingencies, the Hon Samantha Sacramento, MP said: “Wearing face masks in public has become an all too familiar concept in recent times due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Its use in certain circumstances is mandatory. The very thing that has become a symbol of our battle against COVID-19 has also unfortunately provided a barrier to those people who, in order to communicate, depend on facial expressions and lip movements. Inclusion of people with disabilities is important to this Government and it was therefore essential for us to procure face masks with transparent coverings so as not to diminish the face-to-face services we still need to provide. Good quality masks were difficult to source and I must highlight the commitment of the Office for Civil Contingencies for sourcing these for us and thank them.

“It was pleasure for my team and I to meet with GHITA to show them the masks. We have been working closely with GHITA during the pandemic to ensure that members of the Deaf and hard of hearing community were supported during this time.”

A spokesperson for GHITA said: “These masks, kindly being acquired for the Gibraltar Health Authority by both the Department of Equality and the Office of Civil Contingencies, are of utmost importance to ensure clear and interrupted communication for both the service users as well as employees who also experience hearing loss. We hope private organisations will follow suit and clear masks are widely used.”

Mia Wallace said: “I am so happy to learn that after writing to the Hon. Minister Samantha Sacramento MP and posting on my Facebook page about the difficulty I am encountering with people wearing masks during COVID-19, that clear masks had already been ordered and are now available at the GHA. I look forward to this been available in all Government Departments and in the private sector as it makes such a difference to people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

“Speaking from a perspective of a deaf teenager I would hope members of the public would be encouraged to wear these masks to ensure no one has to feel isolated. Thank you to those involved and the Minister for Equality for moving the right direction for an inclusive community.”