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# Summary of the first global report on deafblindness

The World Federation of the Deafblind (WFDB) has published the first ever global report on deafblindness in cooperation with Sense International, supported by the International Disability Alliance. The report examines whether the rights of persons with deafblindness as recognised in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are being met by governments across the world. Despite impressive achievements by individuals and specialist organisations, regrettably the report finds that overall the issues faced by persons with deafblindness have largely been ignored and persons with deafblindness are being ‘left behind’, contrary to the principle underpinning the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Key findings

The report shows that around 0.2% of the world’s population is living with severe deafblindness. Analysis of prevalence data also found that 2% of the world’s population lives with ‘milder forms’ of deafblindness.

The research found:

* Persons with deafblindness are more likely to be poor compared to persons with other types of disabilities and compared to persons without disabilities.
* Families and households that include persons with deafblindness are more likely to be in the bottom 40% in terms of their socio-economic status.
* Persons with deafblindness are ten times less likely to be employed than non-disabled persons, and 30% less likely to be employed than persons with other types of disabilities.
* Children with deafblindness are 17 times less likely to be in school than non-disabled children, and twice less likely to be in school compared to children with other types of disabilities.
* Between 20-75% of persons with deafblindness have additional impairments.
* There is a high prevalence of depression amongst persons with deafblindness, but low access to mental health services.
* Children with deafblindness are less likely to live with both parents.
* Persons with deafblindness are less likely to be married.
* Persons with deafblindness report a low quality of life and experience restrictions in participating in a wide-range of activities.

Case studies in the report provide insights into what is possible when persons with deafblindness are listened to, have access to health, education and training, and are supported to participate fully in the life of their community.

## Recommendations

The evidence contained in the report confirms there is a disability and development gap. While the adoption of the SDGs in 2015 demonstrated a growing momentum for change based on inclusion, concerns remain that national development efforts will continue to exclude persons with deafblindness. Recommendations of the report are centred around seven key areas; pre-conditions for inclusion, social protection, education, health, work and employment, political participation and social participation. Below are the recommendations related to pre-conditions for inclusion:

* Universal and national recognition of deafblindness as a distinct disability in law and practice
* Development, in consultation with persons with deafblindness and their organisations, of support and deafblind interpretation services, in particular interpreter-guides, and adequate public funding to ensure support in education, work and community life
* Ensure that organisations of persons with deafblindness are included in all consultation with persons with disabilities
* Involve persons with deafblindness and their organisations in awareness raising and inclusion-related programmes, serving as role models, mentors and peer support
* Adopt, in consultation with persons with deafblindness and their organisations, a consistent definition and measurement of deafblindness, and collect, disaggregate and analyse data, to assess and monitor the situation of persons with deafblindness, including through relevant analyses of national datasets using the Washington Group Short Set questions
* Conduct additional research on the issues facing persons with deafblindness, including health status and access to healthcare, social participation and wellbeing, quality of work and education, causes, and age of onset. Undertake impact evaluations of interventions designed to improve inclusion.

## Report Methodology

Persons with deafblindness from across the world contributed to the report. The statistical research was led by a team from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The full report is based on prevalence estimates of deafblindness for 22 countries, in-depth analysis of 11 countries, an academic literature review, surveys and case studies. In total, over 97.6 million persons were included across the 22 datasets. This represents the largest population-based analysis of deafblindness conducted to date and includes evidence from a variety of regions and country income groups.

## Next steps

The WFDB, in coordination with Sense International, aims to publish follow up reports every four years until 2030, to monitor progress on realising the rights of persons with deafblindness according to both the CRPD and the SDGs.