



ICEVI – WBU Joint Education Position Statement

Preamble

The World Blind Union (WBU) and the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) are global organisations with members in more than 190 countries working to make a significant difference in the lives of 253 million blind and partially sighted children and adults. WBU, an active founding member of the International Disability Alliance, works to provide blind and partially sighted persons' representation, capacity building, resource sharing, and accessibility in all areas and to influence policies at the national and international levels. ICEVI promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for all children and young people with visual impairments so that they may achieve their full potential. Both organisations have consultative status with several United Nations (UN) and other international agencies.

The aim of this Position Statement is to present the position of ICEVI and WBU regarding the provision by national governments of equitable, quality, inclusive education for all children and young people with visual impairment. The Position Statement offers governments a foundation for setting national objectives and establishing accountability measures within school systems and educational organisations. Integral to the Position Statement is UNESCO's (2011) definition of "education" as educational development from pre-school through primary, secondary and higher education, including technical and vocational education and training, non-formal education and adult learning. The term "visual impairment" refers in this statement to persons with blindness, low vision or deafblindness, including persons with visual impairment and additional/multiple disabilities.

Recognising the gross inequalities in educational opportunities for children and young people with visual impairment, especially in the developing and under-developed countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, where 90% of all children with visual impairment live and where less than half of these children currently have access to any type of formal or non-formal education;

Affirming the human right of all children with visual impairment to equal access to quality education and lifelong learning as enshrined in the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), the *World Declaration on Education for All* (1990), the *Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (1993), the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* (1994), the *Dakar Framework for Action* (2000), the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006), and the *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* (2015); and

Emphasizing the basic human right of all children to education, social equality, protection, health, nutrition and cultural participation; and the right to a voice within a democratic educational environment, as enunciated in the UNESCO *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (1994); and the right of children with disabilities to enrol and receive high quality education support and services at all stages of their lives on an equal basis with others, as proclaimed in the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (Article 24, 2006);

ICEVI and WBU,

Urge all governments to implement the 2030 Education Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals that seek to ensure no child is left behind in the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning;

Recognise the inherent capabilities of all children to learn and the obligations of governments and education systems to provide for the educational needs of all children and young people, whatever the level of their ability, disability or other form of diversity;

Recommend and advocate for the provision of a range of quality educational services, including inclusive and special, formal and non-formal, that accommodate diversity of individual educational needs associated with visual impairment, and each child's capabilities, life goals and family circumstances;

Endorse the rights of parents and carers to choose the most appropriate education for their child; and the rights of children to be educated in the "least restrictive environment", where personal safety, non-discrimination, and academic and social development are reflected in school policies, procedures and practices;

Emphasize the importance of early identification of visual impairment and referral to appropriate early childhood intervention and education services, in order to minimize the physical, social and cognitive implications of low vision or blindness, and to prepare children for successful transition to formal schooling;

Emphasize the need to incorporate gender perspectives and initiatives to ensure that girls and young women with visual impairment have equitable access to inclusive and quality education services and programs on the same basis as their male peers;

Urge governments to adopt the social justice principle of "nothing about us without us", and implement systems of education that promote personal empowerment and participation of children and young people with visual impairment, and prioritize the recruitment and training of persons with visual impairment as educators, mentors, or education advisors;

Endorse literacy as the foundation of lifelong learning, and braille literacy as the key to competency, independence and equality for children and young people who are blind; with all necessary mainstream and specialist technology and technological support to enable access to the curriculum, made available to individual learners and schools as appropriate;

Advocate for the concept of total communication for the education of deafblind children and provision of the necessary technologies for this purpose;

Urge governments to fundamentally review and revise their pre-service and in-service teacher education programs to ensure the principles of inclusion, diversity and quality are embedded in all training courses;

Urge governments to support and promote teacher training programs in visual impairment that include the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) areas of Braille literacy, curriculum and pedagogy adjustments, sensory efficiency, assistive technology and low vision devices, orientation and mobility, independent living, social interaction, recreation and leisure, career education, and self-determination skills;

Request governments to take appropriate measures to facilitate provision of the necessary financial, human, technological and physical resources to ensure that children and young people with visual impairment receive an equitable, inclusive, quality education. These essential measures include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (1) Establishing national guidelines and standards for school-based adjustments to the curriculum, pedagogy and learning environments to minimise the impact of vision impairment;
- (2) Putting in place the necessary arrangements for teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum in schools;
- (3) Recruiting the required number of teachers who are trained in the Expanded Core Curriculum and setting reasonable and achievable teacher-student caseloads to ensure equitable, inclusive, quality education;
- (4) Establishing alternative format centres for the production and distribution of textbooks, examinations and learning materials in Braille and other accessible formats (large print, audio, electronic); and
- (5) Establishing education monitoring systems that report disaggregated data on enrolment, drop out, completion and achievement rates for children and young people with disabilities, including those with visual impairment;

Assure governments of the joint and separate fullest support of ICEVI and WBU, especially in terms of professional advice, advocacy, and technical assistance.