



Recognising Deafblindness as a Distinct and Diverse Reality of Life

June 2026 - To mark International Deafblindness Day on 27 June, Deafblind International (DbI) and the World Federation of the Deafblind (WFDB) emphasise that deafblindness is far more than simply a combination of visual and hearing impairments. It represents a distinct reality of life with a wide range of implications. DbI and WFDB therefore emphasise that deafblindness encompasses a broad spectrum. Furthermore, DbI and WFDB highlight the importance of the 'ICF Core Sets for Deafblindness' within the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). This international reference framework helps to better understand the individual needs and to promote specialised support tailored to the diverse requirements.

Dual sensory impairment and deafblindness are characterised by the simultaneous impairment of vision and hearing. In professional circles, this situation is sometimes described using the formula '1 + 1 = 3'. This illustrates that the effects of a combined visual and hearing impairment go beyond the sum of the two sensory impairments. This results in a distinct reality of life with specific challenges, especially regarding access to information, communication, orientation and social participation.

At the same time, the lived experiences of people with deafblindness vary greatly. Some still have some vision and hearing, others do not. Forms of communication also vary: they range from spoken language and sign language through tactile forms of communication to the use of reference objects.

This diversity highlights how important it is to think of deafblindness as a spectrum. And how important frameworks are that capture the individual situation of each person in a nuanced way.

An international framework for a better understanding of deafblindness

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), developed by the World Health Organisation, offers a holistic approach to understanding disability. It takes into account not only body structures and functions but also activities, social participation, and context factors. Since mid-2025, the ICF also includes specific 'Core Sets for Deafblindness' – a great help to capture the individual situations of people with deafblindness.

The Core Sets were developed through an international process involving people with deafblindness and professionals with and without deafblindness from all WHO

regions. They create a common basis for assessing situations, tailoring support services and facilitating collaboration among the professionals involved.

This development is also in line with the motto of the [World Conference on Deafblindness 2027](#), organised by Dbl and WFDB from 19 to 23 July 2027 in Davos: “Innovate + Empower + Collaborate”.

As the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Heba Hagrass, emphasises: “People with deafblindness must be recognised as an autonomous yet highly diverse group whose equal participation requires targeted measures and specific support.”

To mark the International Day of Deafblindness, Dbl and WFDB are calling for the ICF Core Sets for Deafblindness to be used more widely in educational, therapeutic, psychological, social and medical contexts. This can play a key role in better identifying the individual needs of those concerned and promoting their inclusion.

You can download three versions of the Core Sets for free.

The brief Core Set has 33 ICF codes for clinical use. Link:
<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/NK29J>

The intermediate Core Set has 137 ICF codes for communication. Link:
<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/627PF>

The comprehensive Core Set has 218 ICF codes for all aspects. Link:
<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/A942K>