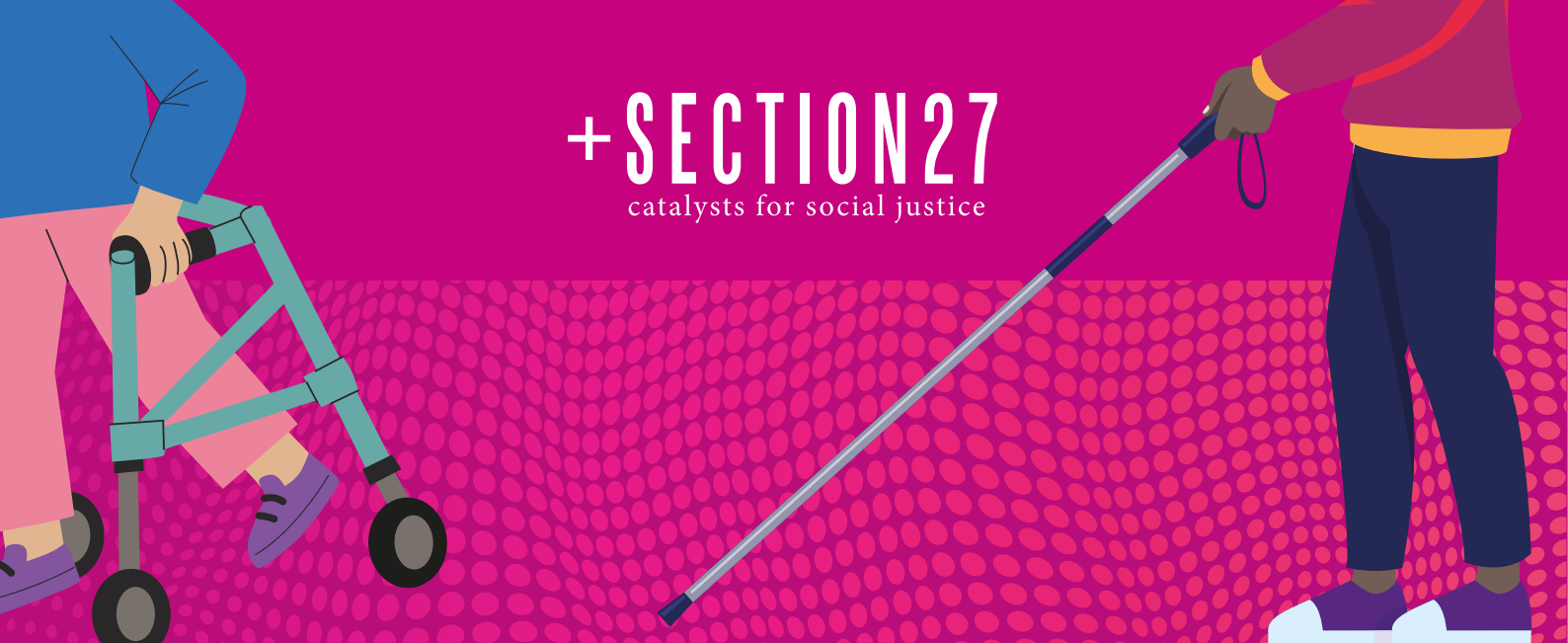
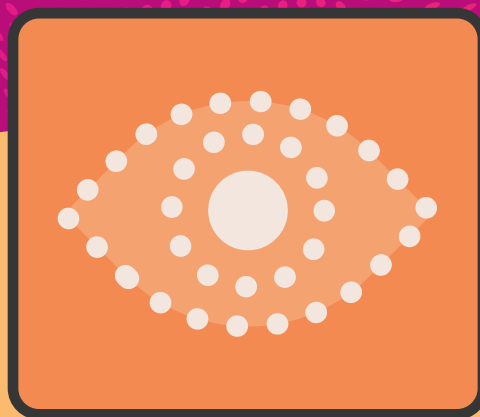


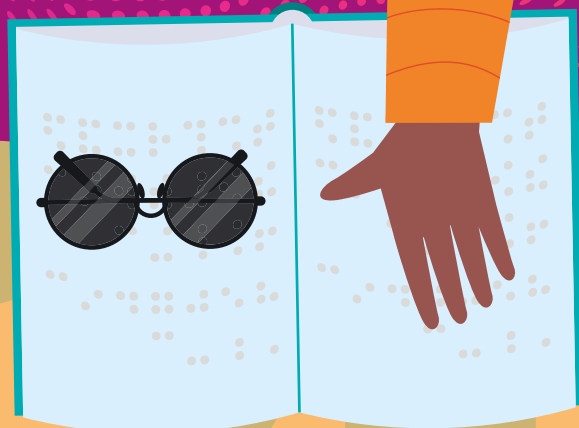


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ORIENTATION + MOBILITY REPORT



THE IMPORTANCE OF
ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY TRAINING FOR
LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN
SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS



This report examines the **importance of orientation and mobility training** for learners with **visual impairments in South African schools**. It outlines how the lack of such training limits these learners' **independence, safety, and access to education**. The report defines orientation and mobility, explains its role in educational development, and highlights the shortage of qualified practitioners and systemic barriers to implementing orientation and mobility services. It examines legal obligations under South African, international, and African regional human rights law, presents data on the limited number of schools and practitioners, and discusses challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of formal recognition, and absence of national standards. It calls for urgent reforms, including the creation of funded posts, curriculum integration, and expansion of training programs to ensure visually impaired learners can navigate their environments safely and participate fully in school and society.



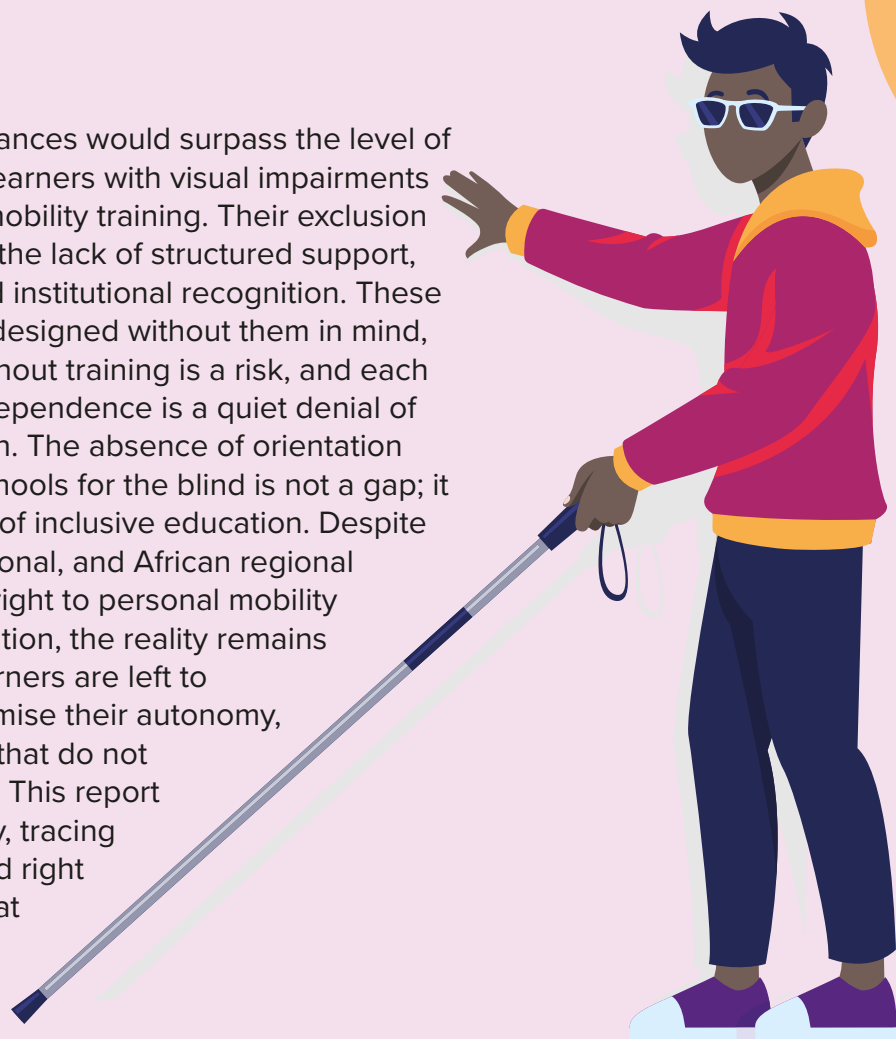
This report was compiled and written by Benni Mudau. SECTION27 acknowledges, with gratitude, the input and contributions of Blind SA to the report.

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1. INTRODUCTION

If measured, not many instances would surpass the level of hardship experienced by learners with visual impairments who lack orientation and mobility training. Their exclusion is systemic, entrenched in the lack of structured support, professional guidance, and institutional recognition. These learners navigate a world designed without them in mind, where each step taken without training is a risk, and each missed opportunity for independence is a quiet denial of dignity and basic education. The absence of orientation and mobility services in schools for the blind is not a gap; it is a breach of the promise of inclusive education. Despite the constitutional, international, and African regional obligations that affirm the right to personal mobility and equal access to education, the reality remains stark: visually impaired learners are left to depend on peers, compromise their autonomy, and endure environments that do not accommodate their needs. This report emerges from that urgency, tracing the contours of a neglected right and the systemic inertia that sustains it.



2. DEFINING ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY, AND TRAINING

The Orientation and Mobility Association of South Africa (“OMASA”) defines the words orientation and mobility.¹ According to OMASA, mobility means “the ability to move safely, efficiently, and effectively from one place to another, such as being able to walk without tripping or falling, cross streets, and use public transportation.”² On the other hand, orientation means “the

ability to know where you are and where you want to go, whether you are moving from one room to another or walking to the shops.”³ Various researchers have noted that orientation and mobility is the application of a comprehensive set of environmental knowledge about a specific place while traveling safely around that place.⁴ Furthermore, according to

BlindSA, training for orientation and mobility involves teaching learners at certain schools how to navigate both indoors and outdoors, such as taking buses and crossing streets.

This training also includes skills for daily living, like preparing their own meals, to help blind learners become independent.⁵

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY SKILLS IN EDUCATIONAL SPACE

The significance of orientation and mobility training for learners with visual impairments at schools cannot be overemphasised. The Department of Basic Education (“DBE”) considers orientation and mobility training essential for learners with visual impairments to receive a basic education.⁶ Furthermore, orientation and mobility training is an essential part of the education and development of blind and partially sighted learners.⁷ This training helps visually impaired individuals understand and navigate their environment, as well as perform basic tasks such as cooking, hailing public transport, and identifying currency.⁸ Without orientation and mobility training, visually impaired learners struggle to develop the skills necessary to adapt to their surroundings, putting them at risk of injury while moving from one place to another.⁹ This lack of training ultimately deprives them of meaningful access to the right to basic education, as outlined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (“Constitution”).¹⁰

There is a vast body of scholarship on the significance of orientation and mobility skills for visually impaired learners, demonstrating that these skills enable them to navigate their environments safely and independently. For instance, Hatlen observed that while children typically learn many skills incidentally, those who are blind or visually impaired often need direct instruction and compensatory techniques to develop these skills.¹¹ Mobility, which involves the ability to travel safely and independently, is particularly challenging for learners with vision loss. Therefore, vision professionals recommend orientation and mobility instruction to provide targeted teaching in concept development, orientation, and travel skills to meet the specific needs of visually impaired learners.¹²

Similarly, Riley emphasises that for visually impaired children to navigate their environment independently and purposefully, they must acquire orientation and mobility skills.¹³ Developing these independent travel skills is crucial for visually impaired students to

engage fully in academic, non-academic, and extracurricular activities.¹⁴ Furthermore, Hill and Ponder highlight that visually impaired learners must develop orientation and mobility skills to participate actively in their community and school.¹⁵ Acquiring these skills is essential for accessing educational opportunities and improving their quality of life.¹⁶ Lastly, these skills foster the self-esteem and social and economic independence of visually impaired learners, as Abubakar argues.¹⁷

It is evident from the above scholarship that without orientation and mobility training, learners with visual impairments face significant challenges in navigating their environments safely and independently. This lack of essential skills can lead to increased risk of injury, limited participation in academic and social activities, and reduced ability to perform everyday tasks. Consequently, these barriers hinder their ability to access and benefit from basic education, effectively denying them the constitutional right to education and full inclusion in school and community life.

1. OMASA, ‘Education’ <https://www.omasa.org.za/?page_id=2> accessed 14 January 2025.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Alphonse Dzapasi, ‘Orientation and Mobility Services for Persons with Visual Impairments: South African Orientation and Mobility Practitioners’ Eye View’ (Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness) <https://www.academia.edu/48087027/Orientation_and_Mobility_Services_for_Persons_with_Visual_Impairments_South_African_Orientation_and_Mobility_Practitioners_Eye_View> accessed 14 January 2025. Abdulrahman Isah Abubakar, ‘Orientation and Mobility Skills for Children with Visual Impairment’, page 6. <https://www.academia.edu/download/80543392/Orientation_and_Mobility_Paper.pdf> accessed 17 November 2025. Carolina Martinez, ‘Orientation and Mobility Training: The way to go’, <<https://txdeafblindproject.org/orientation-and-mobility/orientation-and-mobility-training-the-way-to-go/>> accessed 17 November 2025.

5. BlindSA, Orientation and Mobility Training Overview <<https://blindsa.org.za/mobility/>> accessed 22 January 2026. See also Abubakar (note 4 above), pages 1 and 8.

6. SECTION27, ‘Registration of orientation and mobility practitioners’ (2015) <<https://SECTION27.org.za/2015/10/SECTION27-calls-on-the-hpcs-a-to-finalise-registration-of-orientation-and-mobility-practitioners/>> accessed 17 January 2025.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Hatlen Philip Herbert, ‘The Core Curriculum for Blind and Visually Impaired Students, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities’ (1996) 28(1) Review.

12. Ibid.

13. Riley Richard Wilson, ‘Educating Blind and Visually Impaired Students: Policy Guidance’ (2000) Federal Register, Part IV, Department of Education.

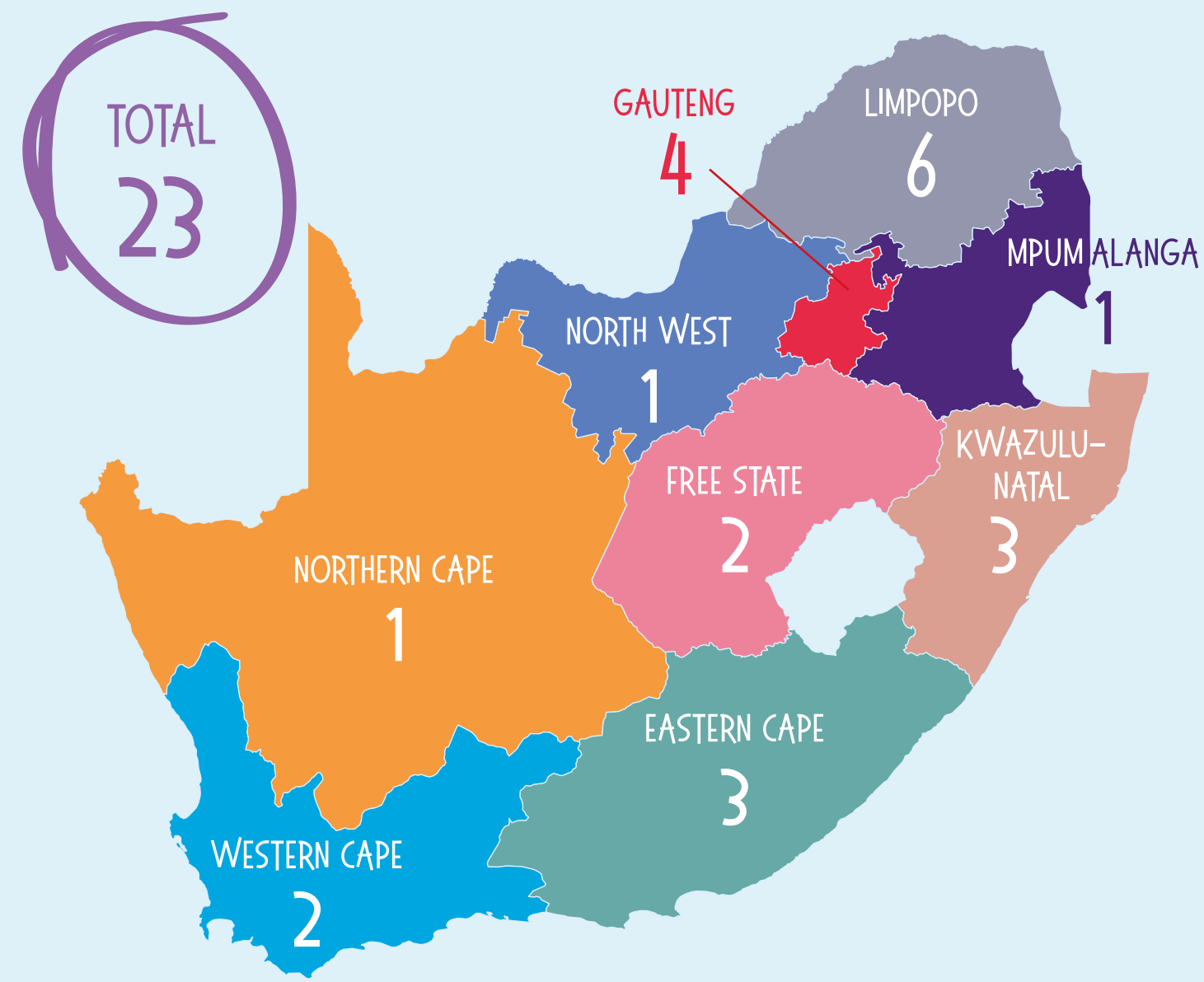
14. Ibid.

15. Hill, Everett W, and Purvis Ponder, Orientation and Mobility Techniques: A Guide for the Practitioner (American Foundation for the Blind 1976).

16. Ibid.

17. Abubakar (note 4 above), page 2.

4. TOTAL NUMBER OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT SPECIFICALLY CATER FOR LEARNERS WHO ARE BLIND AND/OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN EACH PROVINCE ACCORDING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA¹⁸



18. Department of Basic Education
<<https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Media/Parliamentary%20Questions/2022/NA%202381%20Annex.pdf>> accessed 15 January 2025.

5. EXPLAINING THE ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PRACTITIONERS' PROFESSION AND REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

OMASA defined the Orientation and Mobility profession as a profession that focuses on low vision and blindness and teaches efficient, safe, and effective travel skills to all vision-impaired people of all ages.¹⁹ According to the Regulations relating to the Registration of Orientation and Mobility Practitioners ("Regulations"), an orientation and mobility practitioner is a person registered as such in terms of the Health Professions Act 56 of 1974.²⁰ Per the Regulations, the registrar is authorised to register individuals as orientation and mobility practitioners if they possess one of the specified qualifications. These qualifications must encompass experiential training conducted under the supervision of an occupational therapist in a board-approved training facility designated for this purpose.²¹

The recognised qualifications include:

QUALIFICATION	EXAMINING AUTHORITY
Orientation and Mobility Instruction Certificate	South African Guide-Dog Association
Orientation and Mobility Instruction Certificate	Orientation and Mobility School/College of Orientation and Mobility
Orientation and Mobility Instruction Certificate	University of Johannesburg Technicon Witwatersrand
A National Diploma: Orientation and Mobility Practice for Blind and Partially Sighted Persons	Education Training and Development Practice-SETA

The Regulations stipulate that individuals who have served as orientation and mobility practitioners for a minimum of five years before the enactment of these Regulations may apply for registration to the Professional Board for Occupational Therapy, Medical and Orthotics and Prosthetics and Arts Therapy ("OTB").²² The OTB holds the discretion to waive certain requirements outlined earlier in this report for such applicants. Furthermore, the Regulations indicate that an individual who has been actively engaged as an orientation and mobility practitioner in the years leading up to the promulgation of these Regulations may apply to the registrar. This application must be completed using a form provided by the OTB and should include proof of practice or employment as an orientation and mobility practitioner.²³

19. Omasa (note 1 above).
20. Department of Health, 'Regulations relating to the Registration of Orientation and Mobility Practitioners' 13 December 2024, <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202412/51740gon5654.pdf> accessed 16 January 2025.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.

6. THE SCOPE AND DURATION OF THE QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED TO BECOME AN ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PRACTITIONER IN SOUTH AFRICA

The orientation and mobility certificate is a comprehensive program designed to train practitioners who assist visually impaired individuals in achieving greater independence.²⁴ The program focuses on teaching skills such as using a white cane, route travel, and daily living skills, like cooking and cleaning.²⁵ It includes both theoretical and practical components, ensuring practitioners are well-equipped to support visually impaired individuals.²⁶ The

course is a two-year program, accredited at NQF level 5 by the Education, Training, and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (“ETDP SETA”).²⁷

The National Diploma: Orientation and Mobility Practice for Blind and Partially Sighted Persons offered by the ETDP SETA in South Africa is designed to equip practitioners with the skills needed to support visually impaired individuals in achieving

greater independence.²⁸ The qualification aims to ensure that practitioners can enable blind or partially sighted individuals to be functionally independent by teaching them effective orientation, mobility, and daily living skills.²⁹ The program includes both theoretical and practical components, covering skills such as using a long cane, room orientation, and daily living activities like cooking and cleaning.³⁰ The course is typically a two-year program, accredited at NQF level 5.³¹

7. THE PREVALENCE OF ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PRACTITIONERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

An investigation conducted by SECTION27 in late 2014 and early 2015, titled “Left in the Dark,” examined over 20 public special schools for the visually impaired in South Africa.³² The findings revealed that teachers were not adequately supported due to a lack of essential non-educator positions, such as orientation and mobility practitioners, among others.³³ The South African Mobility for the Blind Trust (“SAMBT”) reported that approximately

50 professional orientation and mobility practitioners were employed in South Africa.³⁴ Furthermore, SAMBT noted that only 5 out of the 23 schools for the blind in the country had orientation and mobility trainers on their staff in 2023.³⁵ This data shows a gap in the provision of essential services for learners with visual impairments in South African schools. The limited number of professional orientation and mobility practitioners,

coupled with the fact that only a small fraction of schools for the blind has such trainers on staff, reveals the challenges faced by these learners in accessing adequate support. The scarcity of orientation and mobility trainers in South African schools suggests that many visually impaired learners may not receive the necessary training to develop safe and effective travel skills, which are crucial for their independence and integration into schools.

24. South African Guide-Dogs Association, 2023<<https://guidedog.org.za/orientation-and-mobility/>> accessed 17 January 2025.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. South African Qualification Authority <<https://allqs.saga.org.za/showQualification.php?id=49087>> accessed 17 January 2024.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Section 27: ‘Left in the Dark: Education system is NOT effective for visually impaired learners’ <<https://www.polity.org.za/article/section-27-left-in-the-dark-education-system-is-not-effective-for-visually-impaired-learners-2015-11-18>> accessed 16 January 2025.

33. Ibid.

34. South African Mobility for the Blind Trust, ‘Annual Review 2023’ <https://sambt.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/SAMBT_-_AR_2023_web.pdf> accessed 14 January 2025.

35. Ibid.



8. THE REQUIRED NUMBER OF ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PRACTITIONERS PER VISUALLY IMPAIRED LEARNER

According to the South African Guide-Dogs Association, one qualified orientation and mobility practitioner can only train 40 to 45 blind people per year.³⁶ This means even

at schools, one orientation and mobility practitioner could possibly train 40 to 45 learners per year. However, this is not standard as the number of learners an orientation and

mobility practitioner can train per year may vary, depending on the availability of the learners, and the pace at which a particular learner could adapt and learn.

36. South African Guide-Dogs Association (note 24 above).



9. CHALLENGES IN THE PROVISIONING OF ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY TRAINING AT SCHOOLS

There are various obstacles that are hindering the provisioning of orientation and mobility training at schools. In its publication dated 7 January 2015, SECTION27 stated that professional positions for orientation and mobility practitioners could only be established once the profession is registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (“HPCSA”).³⁷ In 2023, OMASA indicated that the application for registration under the HPCSA was in process and was at the final step before becoming a reality.³⁸

Although the process of registering the orientation and mobility profession with the HPCSA has been underway for decades, initiated as far back as 1987, it has faced repeated delays due to frequent changes in leadership within the relevant boards. Each new board director has had to restart the process, and this has caused administrative delays. Even though recent developments have seen the Regulations gazetted, their implementation is yet to be seen. The orientation and mobility practitioners are now expected to register under the OTB, which is part of the

HPCSA, but logistical issues such as entry-level salaries and administrative coordination are still unresolved.

Another obstacle is the limited capacity of training institutions. Only a few colleges in South Africa offer the qualifications to become an orientation and mobility practitioner, and these institutions have restricted intake numbers, accepting new students only every two years. Because of this, there is a shortage of qualified orientation and mobility practitioners, and even those who do complete the training often seek employment

in other sectors due to the lack of standardised salary structures and better financial opportunities elsewhere. Most orientation and mobility practitioners are employed by School Governing Bodies (“SGBs”) or non-profit organisations (“NPOs”), which rely on external funding and offer inconsistent remuneration. This lack of financial stability discourages long-term commitment to the profession. The absence of formal posts within the DBE is another significant obstacle. The DBE has indicated that orientation and mobility practitioners must be registered with a professional body before they can be integrated into the

department’s human resources plan. This requirement creates a bottleneck, as registration is still pending. In the interim, schools have resorted to relying on external organisations like the South African Mobility for the Blind Trust to provide services. However, these are temporary and unsustainable solutions that do not address the systemic need for dedicated, government-funded orientation and mobility positions in schools for visually impaired learners.

Furthermore, the lack of national norms and standards for orientation and mobility services in schools also

leaves schools without a clear framework for implementing the orientation and mobility training. This Regulatory gap means that even when practitioners are available, there is no uniform policy guiding their integration into the school system or curriculum. The absence of curriculum inclusion also poses a challenge, as orientation and mobility training often occurs outside school hours.

This exacerbates the challenges faced by visually impaired learners, as the training may compete with their academic responsibilities, force them to stay after school, and increase fatigue.



THIS REGULATORY GAP MEANS THAT EVEN WHEN PRACTITIONERS ARE AVAILABLE, THERE IS NO UNIFORM POLICY GUIDING THEIR INTEGRATION INTO THE SCHOOL SYSTEM OR CURRICULUM



37. SECTION27 (note 6 above).
38. OMASA, 2023 <https://www.omasa.org.za/?page_id=500> accessed 20 January 2025.

10. THE OBLIGATION TO PROVIDE ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY TRAINING AT SCHOOLS UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

International human rights law consists of both binding and soft law, each of which must be considered in the interpretation of human rights.³⁹ In this section, both international binding and soft law that either implicitly or explicitly require the provision of orientation and mobility training at schools for visually impaired learners are considered. In South Africa, international law instruments become binding upon ratification⁴⁰ by the legislature, except for those that do not require ratification, and such instruments must be considered in the interpretation of the Bill of Rights.⁴¹ Furthermore, even the non-binding instruments must be considered in the interpretation of the Bill of Rights.⁴²



10.1 United Nations Binding Instruments

10.1.1. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (“CRPD”)

In November 2007, South Africa ratified the CRPD and its Optional Protocol.⁴³ In doing so, South Africa consented to be bound by the CRPD and fulfill its aspirations. This was a significant step towards the improvement of the lives of people living with disabilities in South Africa. Subsequently, the CRPD entered into force in 2008. Its purpose encompasses the respect, protection, and fulfillment of the equal and full enjoyment of fundamental freedoms and all human rights by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their dignity.⁴⁴

Article 4 of the CRPD provides the general obligations that must be met by States Parties, including South Africa.⁴⁵ Under Article 4(1)(a) of the CRPD, the States Parties have an obligation to adopt legislative,

administrative, and other measures to implement the rights recognised in the CRPD.⁴⁶ The right to personal mobility for people with disabilities, including learners with visual impairment, is implicitly encompassed by Article 9 of the CRPD, which obliges States Parties, including South Africa, to take appropriate measures to enable people with disabilities to live independently and to participate fully in all aspects of life.⁴⁷ Such measures should include the elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility to schools, among other state facilities.⁴⁸ For learners with visual impairments, this means that the government must implement measures to make educational environments accessible. This could involve providing specialised equipment, ensuring that school buildings are navigable, and offering support services such as orientation and mobility training.

The right to personal mobility is further explicitly provided under Article 20 of the CRPD, which provides that,

States Parties shall take effective measures to ensure personal mobility with the greatest possible independence for persons with disabilities, including by:

- Facilitating the personal mobility of persons with disabilities in the manner and at the time of their choice, and at affordable cost;*
- Facilitating access by persons with disabilities to quality mobility aids, devices, assistive technologies and forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including by making them available at affordable cost;*
- Providing training in mobility skills to persons with disabilities and to specialist staff working with persons with disabilities;*
- Encouraging entities that produce mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies to take into account all aspects of mobility for persons with disabilities.*⁴⁹

Article 20 of the CRPD underscores the critical need for adequate support systems to ensure the personal mobility and independence of persons with disabilities. In the context of South African schools, where there is a scarcity of orientation

and mobility practitioners, this provision highlights the urgency for the government and relevant stakeholders to take effective measures. It calls for the facilitation of personal mobility at an affordable cost, access to quality mobility aids and assistive technologies, and the provision of specialised training for both persons with disabilities and the staff working with them. The provision also emphasises the importance of encouraging manufacturers to consider all aspects of mobility for persons with disabilities.⁵⁰ Addressing these areas would improve the support available to visually impaired learners, ensuring they receive the necessary training and resources to navigate their environments safely and independently. This, in turn, would promote their inclusion and equal participation in the educational system. As personal mobility is a right recognised under the CRPD, Article 4(1)(a)⁵¹ creates an obligation for South Africa to implement appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures.

10.1.2. Convention on the Rights of Child (“CRC”)

South Africa ratified the CRC in 2015, committing to be bound by its provisions. Article 23(3) of the CRC recognises the special needs of children with disabilities and mandates that assistance should be provided free of charge whenever possible.

This assistance must ensure that children with disabilities have effective access to education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment, and recreation opportunities. These provisions are designed to promote the child’s fullest possible social integration and individual development. This article implicitly includes the need for orientation and mobility skills, as effective access to education and training for visually impaired learners requires the ability to navigate their environment safely and independently.

10.2. United Nations Soft Law

10.2.1. The Recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (“Committee”)

In its concluding observations on the initial report of South Africa in 2018, the Committee expressed concern regarding the significant and increasing challenges faced by persons with disabilities, particularly those with mobility impairments and those who are blind or visually impaired, in accessing quality and affordable mobility and assistive technologies, live assistance, and intermediaries, in accordance with Article 20(b) of the CRPD. These challenges are especially pronounced in remote and rural areas.⁵² The Committee also

39. S v Makwanyane and Another (CCT 3/94) [1995] ZACC 3 (6 June 1995), at para 35.

40. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, sec 231.

41. Ibid, sec 39(1)(b).

42. Makwanyane (note 39 above).

43. Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, ‘First Country Report to the United Nations on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)’ (2012) <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/draft-country-report-crpd-public-comment-26-nov-2012.pdf> accessed 14 January 2025.

44. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (adopted 13 December 2006, entered into force 3 May 2008) 2515 UNTS 3 (CRPD).

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ‘Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of South Africa’ (2018) CRPD/C/ZAF/CO/1, para 36(a).

highlighted the lack of orientation and mobility practitioners, as well as teachers, to train persons with motor impairments and those who are blind or visually impaired, particularly in these remote and rural areas, on the use of their assistive technologies to enhance their dignity and respect in society.⁵³ Consequently, the Committee recommended that the State Party adopt measures to facilitate the acquisition of necessary mobility and assistive technologies, live assistance, and intermediaries, particularly for persons with motor impairments and those who are blind or visually impaired, especially in remote and rural areas.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the Committee urged the adoption of an effective national strategy for the training and retraining of orientation and mobility practitioners and teachers in the use of devices for persons with motor impairments and those who are blind or visually impaired, particularly in remote and rural areas.⁵⁵

10.2.2. General Comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
In its General Comment No. 4,

the Committee emphasises that the effective implementation of inclusive education hinges on guaranteeing personal mobility for individuals with disabilities on an independent basis.⁵⁶ In situations where transportation options are limited and personal assistants are not available to facilitate access to educational facilities, it is essential that individuals with disabilities, particularly those who are blind or visually impaired, receive comprehensive training in mobility skills to foster greater independence.⁵⁷ Furthermore, States Parties must provide individuals with disabilities access to mobility aids and devices at reasonable costs.⁵⁸

10.2.3. General Comment No. 5 on living independently and being included in the community by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

According to the Committee in its General Comment No.5, the absence of support for personal mobility, as outlined in Article 20 of the CRPD, perpetuates obstacles to independent living within the community for many individuals with disabilities.⁵⁹ Ensuring the availability and affordability of high-quality mobility aids, devices, assistive technologies,

and various forms of live assistance and intermediaries is essential. These provisions are fundamental prerequisites for the comprehensive inclusion and active participation of persons with disabilities in their respective communities.⁶⁰

10.2.4. Guidelines on deinstitutionalisation, including in emergencies, by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

According to the Committee, these guidelines complement and should be read in conjunction with the Committee's General Comment No. 5 as discussed above on living independently and being included in the community, which is Article 19 of the CRPD, and the Committee's guidelines on the right to liberty and security of persons with disabilities, which is Article 14 of the CRPD. They are intended to guide and support States Parties in their efforts to realise the right of persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community, and to serve as the basis for the planning of deinstitutionalisation processes and the prevention of institutionalisation.⁶¹

The guidelines draw on the experiences of persons with disabilities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, which uncovered widespread institutionalisation. This highlighted the harmful impact of institutionalisation on the rights and lives of persons with disabilities, including the violence, neglect, abuse, ill-treatment, and torture they experience in institutions, such as chemical, mechanical, and physical restraints.⁶²

According to the Committee, persons with disabilities leaving institutions require a wide range of possibilities for daily living, life experiences, and opportunities to thrive in the community. States Parties must

meet their general obligations to uphold the rights of these persons, on an equal basis with others, with respect to accessibility, personal mobility, privacy, physical and mental integrity, legal capacity, liberty, freedom from violence, abuse, and exploitation, and from

cultural life and recreation, and participation in political life.⁶³

THEY ARE INTENDED TO GUIDE AND SUPPORT STATES PARTIES IN THEIR EFFORTS TO REALISE THE RIGHT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY AND BE INCLUDED IN THE COMMUNITY



53. Ibid, para 36(b).
54. Ibid, para 37(a).
55. Ibid, para 37(b).
56. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 'General Comment No. 4 on the Right to Inclusive Education' (2016) CRPD/C/GC/4, para 53.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 'General Comment No. 5 on Living Independently and Being Included in the Community' (2017) CRPD/C/GC/5, para 84.
60. Ibid.
61. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 'Guidelines on Deinstitutionalisation, Including in Emergencies' (2022) CRPD/C/5, para 99, para 1.

62. Ibid, para 2.
63. Ibid, para 99.

11. AFRICAN REGIONAL INSTRUMENTS THAT RECOGNISE ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY

11.1. African Binding Instruments

11.1.1. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ("ACHPRRPD")

South Africa has ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ("ACHPRRPD"), committing to fulfill its aspirations.⁶⁴ Article 4 of the ACHPRRPD provides general obligations that states, including South Africa, have, towards people with disabilities, including visually impaired learners.⁶⁵ It provides that,

States Parties shall take appropriate and effective measures, including policy, legislative, administrative, institutional and budgetary steps, to ensure, respect, promote, protect and fulfil the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, without discrimination on the basis of disability, including by:

- Adopting appropriate measures for the full and effective implementation of the rights recognised in the present Protocol;*
- Mainstreaming disability in policies, legislation, development plans, programmes and activities and in all other spheres of life;*
- Providing in their constitutions and other legislative instruments and taking other measures to modify or abolish existing policies, laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against persons with disabilities;*⁶⁶

For South Africa, Article 4 of the ACHPRRPD means that the government must adopt appropriate measures to fully and effectively implement the rights recognised in the Protocol. This includes mainstreaming disability considerations into all policies, legislation, development plans, programs, and activities, ensuring that disability is integrated into every

sphere of life. Article 20 of the ACHPRRPD recognises social mobility for people with disabilities. It provides that persons with disabilities have the right to an adequate standard of living, and States Parties, including South Africa, are mandated to take appropriate and effective measures to facilitate the full enjoyment of this right by persons with disabilities based on equality. The article also provides that this be achieved through mobility aids and caregivers, among other provisions.⁶⁷

For vision-impaired learners in South African schools, Article 20 of the ACHPRRPD could be interpreted to mean that they have the right to an adequate standard of living, just like everyone else. This includes having access to necessary support such as mobility aids and caregivers. The government is required to take effective measures to ensure that these learners can fully enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others. This could involve providing trained staff,

such as orientation and mobility practitioners, to assist them in their educational journey, thereby promoting their independence and inclusion in the school environment.

11.2. African Regional Soft Law Other International Law Instruments that Implicitly Recognises Orientation and Mobility

11.2.1 Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

Adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 1993 (resolution 48/96 annex), the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities outline measures to ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.⁶⁸ Although not legally binding, these rules represent a strong moral and political commitment by governments to take action towards the equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities.⁶⁹ While the rules do not explicitly mention

orientation and mobility, they implicitly recognise the concept. Specifically, the preconditions for equal participation stipulate that states should ensure public education systems reflect full participation and equality.⁷⁰ Ensuring full participation and equality within the public education systems for visually impaired learners would require the States Parties to provide orientation and mobility training.



64. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (adopted 29 January 2018, entered into force 10 March 2020) AU Doc EX.CL/Dec.1006(XXXII).

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. UN General Assembly, 'Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities' (20 December 1993) UN Doc A/RES/48/96.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

12. SOUTH AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AND POLICIES THAT RECOGNISE ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY

12.1. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

The Constitution does not explicitly reference orientation and mobility. However, it includes several provisions that uphold the rights and needs of individuals, which can be interpreted to encompass orientation and mobility, particularly for persons with disabilities, including learners with vision impairments.⁷¹

Section 9 guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including disability.⁷² Section 10 affirms that everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.⁷³ Section 29 (1)(a) ensures everyone's right to basic education, which includes the provision of necessary support for learners with disabilities, including those with vision impairments.⁷⁴ Collectively, these provisions support the rights of visually impaired learners to receive the necessary accommodations, including orientation and mobility training, to ensure their full enjoyment of the right to basic education in schools.

12.2. South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 ("SASA")

SASA is another significant South African legislative instrument that establishes a uniform system for the organisation, governance, and funding of schools in South Africa.⁷⁵ It plays a crucial role in addressing past educational inequalities and ensuring high-quality education for all learners. It was made to give effect to section 29 (1)(a) of the Constitution, which provides for the right to basic education.⁷⁶ Section 12(5) of the SASA mandates that the Member of the Executive Council ("MEC") for Education must take reasonable measures to ensure that learners with disabilities can access physical education facilities.⁷⁷ Although this provision does not explicitly mention orientation and mobility, it could be interpreted to imply that such measures should include the availability of orientation and mobility practitioners at schools. These practitioners would be essential in training visually impaired learners to effectively navigate and utilise physical education facilities. This interpretation aligns with the broader

objective of ensuring equal access and inclusivity for all learners within the educational system.

12.3. Children's Act 38 of 2005

The Children's Act is another significant piece of legislation that contains provisions that could be interpreted to include the provision of orientation and mobility practitioners in schools.⁷⁸ Section 11(1)(b) of the Children's Act mandates that in any matter involving a child with a disability, efforts must be made to ensure the child's participation in educational activities.⁷⁹ The presence of orientation and mobility practitioners would be a crucial effort in enabling visually impaired learners to engage in these educational activities effectively.

12.4. Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support ("SIAS")

On 19 December 2014, Minister Angie Motshekga approved the SIAS. The SIAS aims to establish a standardised framework for identifying, assessing, and providing

programs for learners who need extra support. This policy ensures that all learners receive the necessary assistance to improve their participation and inclusion in schools. It also gives effect to section 29 (1)(a) of the Constitution, which provides for the right to basic education. Under the SIAS Policy, "additional support needs" are

defined as the extra assistance some learners may require to aid their learning. These needs can stem from various factors that create barriers to learning, including social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, disability-related, or family and care circumstances. This definition also encompasses mobility impairment as a condition that may necessitate support.⁸⁰

THE PRESENCE OF ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PRACTITIONERS WOULD BE A CRUCIAL EFFORT IN ENABLING VISUALLY IMPAIRED LEARNERS TO ENGAGE IN THESE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES EFFECTIVELY.

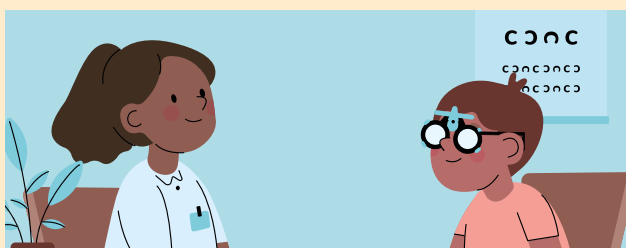


80. Department of Basic Education, 'Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support' (2014).

71. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. South African Schools Act 84 of 1996.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Children's Act 38 of 2005.
79. Ibid.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

South Africa has clear and binding obligations under international, African regional, and domestic law to ensure that learners who are blind or visually impaired receive the necessary support to access education on an equal basis with others. Instruments such as the CRPD, CRC, and the ACHPRRPD all affirm the right to personal mobility and inclusive education for persons with disabilities. These obligations also stem from the Constitution, SASA, and the Children's Act, which collectively guarantee the rights to dignity, equality, and basic education. To meet these legal and moral obligations and to ensure that learners with visual impairments can navigate their environments safely, participate fully in school life, and develop independence, the following recommendations are proposed:



13.1. Establish Funded Orientation and Mobility Practitioner Posts in Schools

A major obstacle identified in this report is the severe shortage of orientation and mobility practitioners in South African schools for visually impaired learners. This gap deprives learners of essential training and compromises their safety, opportunity to learn, and independence. To address this obstacle, the DBE should create and fund formal posts for orientation and mobility practitioners in all schools that cater for visually impaired learners. This would ensure consistent access to mobility training, reduce learner dependency, and uphold their constitutional right to education and dignity. It also aligns with South Africa's obligations under international instruments such as the CRPD, CRC, and the ACHPRRPD.



13.2. Expedite Registration of the Orientation and Mobility Profession with the HPCSA

The registration of orientation and mobility practitioners with the HPCSA has faced decades of delays due to administrative turnover and a lack of coordination. Without formal recognition, orientation and mobility practitioners cannot be integrated into the DBE's human resources framework. The DBE and HPCSA must collaborate to expedite the finalisation and operationalisation of the registration process, including the development of salary structures and job descriptions. This would enable schools to formally employ practitioners, standardise service delivery, and ensure accountability.



13.3. Expand Accredited Training Programs and Increase Intake Capacity

South Africa has limited institutions offering orientation and mobility qualifications. This restricts the supply of qualified practitioners and worsens the shortage. To resolve this, the government should partner with existing institutions to expand training programs and increase the intake frequency.



13.4. Develop National Norms and Standards for Orientation and Mobility Services

The absence of national norms and standards for orientation and mobility services in schools leads to inconsistent implementation and a lack of accountability. Schools operate without a clear framework, and training often occurs informally or outside school hours. The DBE should develop and enforce a policy framework that includes curriculum integration, service delivery models, and monitoring mechanisms. This would ensure uniformity, quality, and sustainability of orientation and mobility training across all schools.

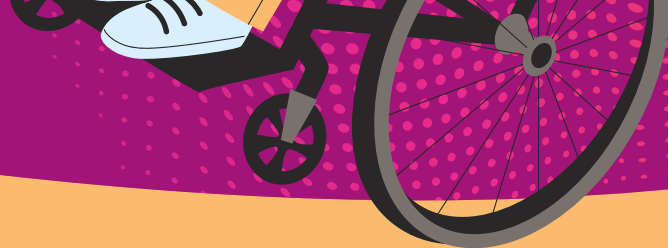


13.5. Integrate Orientation and Mobility Training into the School Curriculum

Currently, orientation and mobility training is often conducted outside regular school hours because it is not integrated into the school curriculum. This creates challenges for learners, as the training competes with their academic responsibilities, forces them to stay after school, and increases fatigue. As a result, learners may struggle to keep up with schoolwork or be unable to attend training sessions consistently. To address this, orientation and mobility training should be formally integrated into the school curriculum with dedicated time slots and resources. This would promote equal access to both academic and mobility education, reduce learner stress, and improve overall development and participation in school life.

13.6. Establish Standardised Salary Structures

Orientation and mobility practitioners are often employed by NGOs or SGBs, which offer inconsistent remuneration and lack financial stability. This discourages long-term commitment to the profession. To solve this, upon creating and funding formal posts in schools as recommended above, the DBE should establish standardised salary structures for orientation and mobility practitioners that it would have employed. Competitive remuneration would attract and retain skilled professionals, ensuring the sustainability and quality of orientation and mobility services in schools.



14. CONCLUSION

Orientation and mobility training is not a luxury; **it is a necessity**. It is the bridge between **isolation** and **inclusion**, between **vulnerability** and **empowerment**. The continued absence of formalised support structures, professional recognition, and curriculum integration for orientation and mobility practitioners in South African schools undermines the constitutional promise of **equality, dignity**, and the international commitment to **inclusive education**. Learners with visual impairments deserve more than ad hoc solutions and temporary interventions; **they deserve a system that sees them, supports them, and equips them** to move through the world with **confidence**. The recommendations outlined in this report are actionable. They represent a call to restore dignity, ensure safety, and uphold the rights of every learner to navigate their environment independently and thrive within it.

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