EBU In Action – Episode 3: Artificial Intelligence: a new challenge on the horizon

Intro

[Music]

(Neven): Welcome to the third episode of the European Blind Union's podcast, EBU in Action.

Our aim is to discuss different issues related to blind and partially sighted persons in Europe. My name is Neven Milivojevic and here joining me from Poland, I have my colleague Paweł Masarczyk. Hello Paweł.

(Paweł): Hello Neven, how are you?

(Neven): I'm very well, thank you. And you?

(Paweł): Doing great, thank you very much. Summer is actually coming around here as well, so I'm enjoying the good weather as much as I can.

(Neven): Great. Well, I mean, today we are going to first have an insight into what EBU does and then, as always, we will, in the end, have a correspondent's section.

But what more are we going to talk about today, Paweł?

(Paweł): Well, as always, we have our focus topic as well, which will take a lot of our time, but for a good reason, because the topic is very important and discussed all over the Internet. If you are in the know, of course, that's the Artificial Intelligence.

And we are going to focus on the aspects of this phenomenon in the context of people with disabilities and also blind and partially sighted people, of course, with our guests, Kave Noori, the Artificial Intelligence Policy Officer at the European Disability Forum, and Jude Stern, the head of knowledge management at the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness,

I don't know about you, Neven, and about our listeners, but I'm so excited for this discussion because Artificial Intelligence is everywhere now. It's everywhere on the Internet and in our discussions.

(Neven): Absolutely, I couldn't agree more. I'm really excited about this topic. And I do believe that it's going to be very interesting. And then of course, as I said, we are going to end with a visit to Montenegro and our correspondent there. But well, what to say, should we start?

Paweł: Yes, let's hear from the EBU themselves.

News from EBU

[Music]

(Neven): Now, we will start by listening and talking to our friend and colleague from EBU office, Nacho Lopez. How are you? Are you there?

(Nacho): Hello, Neven. How are you? I'm very, very good.

(Neven): Excellent. I'm very happy to hear from you. So, tell us what's going on in the EBU lately.

(Nacho): It's been quite a busy time at the EBU. Recently, our organization attended the fifth edition of the European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities in Brussels.

Focused on topics such as free movement or the upcoming 2024 European elections, the event gathered over 700 disability advocates, policymakers and other stakeholders from different national delegations.

Importantly for EBU, the European Disability Card featured amongst the most prominent initiatives and a legislative proposal is to be expected by the European Commission in September this year.

At the same time, as part of our commitment to strengthen our relationship with our national members, EBU has also held bilateral meetings with Ligue Braille, our Belgian member, NCBI, our Irish member and with our Polish member to foster cooperation with them and to shape the EBU future agenda together.

(Neven): Interesting. But yeah, because I heard that you also visited a mobility conference in Warsaw. What was that about?

(Nacho): Yeah, sure. It was the International Mobility Conference that was held in Warsaw. The topic of this conference was information resulting in mobility and ability.

Over 300 experts gathered to exchange ideas on different aspects of mobility nowadays. And one of the main outcomes of this conference was the lack of professionals to teach mobility skills.

(Neven): Let's move on. What more have you done in EBU lately?

(Nacho): On May 17th, EBU hosted a webinar to present the first part of its Handbook of High Quality Audio Description on Screen. On the eve of Global Awareness Accessibility Day, our organization wanted to emphasize the importance of Audio Description as one of the tools to

facilitate access to audio-visual content for blind and partially sighted people.

The event, organized by our culture network, gathered a lot of AD users as well as practitioners, university professionals, and people from our national members. Parts two and three of the handbook will be available in the following months.

(Neven): So, if I understand you correctly, there are three parts. What are the subjects of these different three parts?

(Nacho): So in part one, we explain the principles of good audio description and the correct use of grammar.

In part two, we expand on the audio descriptive principles with an analysis of broadcast AD samples to demonstrate and explain what is good, what is bad, and why.

And on part three, we talk about the practical application of AD and how to use it in other disciplines.

(Neven): Well, well, I'm looking forward to both of them. So, oh yeah, and then I also know you have done some consultations. Tell us something about that.

(Nacho): Yes, advocacy and campaigning activities do not stop at the European Blind Union. Recently, our organization responded to two public consultations by the European Commission.

On one hand, we responded to a consultation about the upcoming EU Disability Card, stating that it should also be extended to workers, trainees, or students as a matter of transition when settling in another EU country besides travellers and consumers on short stays.

In the consultation, we also emphasized that it should remain physically separated from the EU disability parking card.

On the other hand, EU has also published a position paper about the evaluation of the Marrakesh Directive and Regulation. In the document, we welcome the positive impact of the EU's Marrakesh Treaty legal framework, but also expressed concerns about compensation schemes and approval of authorized entities, calling for the drop of these elements for ensuring the treaty's proper implementation.

(Neven): Well, many, many things going on there in the EBU office. You're really doing fantastic work. So, Nacho, thank you so much. And please, give our best regards to your colleagues for all your great work.

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Neven. Bye bye.

(Neven): Bye.

Well, Paweł, this is really a lot of things going on there. I mean, interesting thing that soon we will have a EU Disability Card. I mean, what do you think? Will you have any use of such a disability card?

(Paweł): Neven, I can't tell you how much I've been waiting for this for the last couple of years because during the twenties of my life, I have moved quite a lot around Europe and every time it's the same thing.

You have to apply for a new disability recognition certificate with every country, doing the procedure in a language that you might not necessarily understand or speak properly to do administrative work.

And then you have to go through eye doctors examinations every single time all over again because your local documents from your home country do not apply, are not understood by the eye doctors elsewhere.

I believe this is very much needed. And I really hope it will boost also the confidence of people with disabilities in tourism.

Because what I hear a lot from my friends, when I try to recommend for them to travel a little bit, they always say: "Paweł, but you know, this costs so much. I would have to pay much more because I might need some additional support".

Maybe, I will need some kind of private means of transport a little bit more. And there are some different costs that cannot be covered and that are additional due to the disability. So people resign from traveling for these reasons as well.

And I really hope that the Disability Card, the European Disability Card will change that.

(Neven): Yeah, I'm looking forward to see how it develops. But at this moment, I really can't wait anymore.

(Paweł): Neither do I. So let's hear from our guests about the artificial intelligence topic, shall we?

The Focus Topic: AI: a new challenge on the horizon

[Music]

(Paweł): Technology makes doing everyday things easier for everyone, but it makes a lot of things possible for people with disabilities. And it's no different in the context of artificial intelligence.

The technology that has been all over the media recently has been in discussions for many years and brings a lot of hope for persons with disabilities and also especially persons who are blind or partially sighted.

To evaluate a little bit more about this, what these hopes and challenges and applications are, I will speak to my today's guests.

That's Jude Stern, the Head of Knowledge Management at the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness, coming to us from Australia all the way. So great to have you here, Jude.

(Jude): Great to be here. Thank you.

(Paweł): And Kave Noori, the Artificial Intelligence Policy Officer at the European Disability Forum all the way from Brussels. Welcome to you, Kave.

(Kave): Thank you for having me here.

(Paweł): So, Kave, maybe we'll start with you and the more general picture in terms of artificial intelligence and its application or the general concepts discussed when thinking of persons with disabilities.

What scope of topics are we talking about? What are the current areas of interest in this relation, in this regard?

(Kave): Well, I would say that AI is a set of different technologies. And there is not, as far as I understand, a unified scientific definition of what artificial intelligence is.

But the European Union is currently negotiating an Artificial Intelligence Act where they are, among other things, trying to define what it is.

And even though this may not be in the scientific definition, it has a purpose to define it legally because it's relevant to decide, for example, what obligations somebody who is developing an AI or using an AI, like a company who uses AI for, let's say, screening applicants.

And there needs to be accountability and also guardrails of how you use it so that it will not come to harm. And from the context of persons with disabilities, artificial intelligence solutions both have the ability to massively make people more independent and empowered.

For example, if you have, I don't know, I guess an app maybe like I've heard this Be My Eyes, which can help you. I haven't used it personally, but I've understood that you can hold it and it will make a visual interpretation of what you're seeing.

And I have a background in the organizations for persons with hard of hearing. And there, for example, sometimes it can be very helpful for many of our members to use these speech-to-text apps when there is not an interpreter around.

So in one sense, it can really increase autonomy, but there can also be downsides. So one problem can be that AI is trained on statistics and use statistical averages in the data it's trained on.

And persons with disabilities are, per definition, mostly outliers in the statistics because even though we're 15% of the world population, the thing that unites us most is that we are very different on an individual level.

And also persons with the same disability can also be very different in how they behave, or maybe they have, let's say, maybe they have ADHD and visual impairment. And somebody else has another combination.

So it's very unpredictable. And for this reason, if you fall out of the norm, the AI might actually treat you unfavourably because it has been trained on the norm as what it prefers.

(Paweł): Yes, and it's worrying to see that inherently, the technology created by people will most likely inherit the biases of these people.

And this is where we are probably left out in the example that you've given.

But Jude, how does this scope out in terms of people with visual impairments? What are the general aspects to discuss there in terms of artificial intelligence? What are we talking about?

(Jude): Thanks. I think, you know, Kave has picked up with a lot of the concepts and generalities are very similar and specific to AI and people who are blind or have visual impairment.

I mean, on the plus side, AI is already embedded in many assistive and digital technologies and has enhanced, or for some even revolutionized, what they are able to do, because some of those capabilities are quite general, for example, like Kave said, they can certainly empower people and increase their autonomy where they work at their best.

So around information gathering, information sharing, you know, there's all kinds of enhancements that have happened to make reading easier, so instantaneous conversion of printed text into audio and the AI-enabled versions are able to sort of interpret and do this much faster.

Image descriptions, I think, is one of the key areas. I once had it described to me, particularly if you think about a child learning at school.

And if they used to have a graph presented to them, someone, a teacher or an assistant or a fellow student would have to sit next to them and really describe whatever they could on the graph in whatever way that happened, whereas now, with AI sort of on a graph image description, it can actually give a better, more consistent description, maybe not than every reader, but then probably the average reader, it can be more consistent and it can start to become much more detailed and conversational even because the person that's trying to interpret that image can ask questions and go further into it.

And so similarly down that conversational AI piece, you know, accessing real time information, you know, most people enjoy conversing with Alexa or Siri or whatever app it is that you might use.

And this has certainly been kind of a game changer for people with vision impairment. And also that support kind of follows through with people that might want to do their own writing and being able to do speech to text as opposed to the visual side of things.

Facial recognition has been a big one as well and navigation, so real time obstacle detection and recognition that can be fed straight into audio guidance for someone as they're navigating the world is quite revolutionary really, to be able to navigate a little more independently.

And there's a lot of personalisation and customisation that can come in via the settings on a lot of these technologies, which is something that all minority groups are not used to having.

As you, as Kave said earlier, you know, a lot of the design is not necessarily there for people with vision impairment, but these technologies are allowing a fair amount of personalisation and customisation, which is nice.

The challenges are many. And while a lot of the technologies are widely available and many of them free to access, who can access them can be quite an issue.

And their ability to use whatever technology platforms they have or infrastructure and their own local digital environment can be a real challenge.

There are versions of different technologies that are very expensive and they need high-end equipment to run them, and so, that's clearly a challenge of people getting what they need

And also, obviously, all of their digital technologies. And there's a real digital divide that is growing across the world. And so, some people kind of tend to miss out.

We need to make sure that these apps continue to be improved and become accurate and reliable. And consumers need to be able to evaluate that. They need to understand what they're choosing.

And there's a wealth of sort of different apps or technologies available and how that they can work out which is the right one for them. And what is OK in the way that it collects their data and it uses their own environment to learn.

And so there's sort of a lot of work that still needs to be done in that space. And like Kave said, the systems are often designed on or AI is designed and learned on representative data.

And it depends how much the needs of people with vision impairment have been included in that original dataset and then the follow-on datasets. And you certainly get the more complex or less representative your dataset is.

So if you for example, we know there's some general biases in gender, for example, or people from certain different ethnic backgrounds. And so that kind of thing can be exacerbated for people with vision impairment as well.

But I do want to end on a high because I think there's a lot of fantastic technologies that are out there now.

(Paweł): I can also say as an end user that I'm ever so grateful that new solutions keep coming to the market. We are still learning how to use them, but we profit from a lot of them.

Be My Eyes is one, but there are plenty of apps that profit from AI, from the capabilities that this technology brings. And also you, Jude, mentioned the voice assistants.

I think this is also a great advancement for especially people with less technical background, because giving voice commands is just intuitive.

So a lot of people who are new to being blind, so to speak, they will appreciate this capability.

And we can see different member organizations of the EBU rolling these capabilities out to their members and their customers across Europe, especially in terms of reading, accessing information, accessing reading material, libraries for the blind, organizations for the blind.

So that's definitely something worth watching out for. Kave, so you already spoke about the general aspects of AI in terms of persons with disabilities, but what are persons with disabilities using AI at the moment for?

What are the most frequent applications and what are the biggest achievements on that arena?

(Kave): So, I believe that one application, which also Jude mentioned, is going to be personal assistance.

We already are used to having Alexa and Siri, for example. And I read an interview with a man with Alzheimer who was able to live more independently because he used Alexa to remind him of when he was going to take his medications, so this decreased his need to have assistance for the purposes of remembering to take the medication.

I don't want to say that AI should be used to replace humans and the social contact, but maybe those parts where it's just about administering, like reminding someone to take a medicine or some things, then it can actually help to increase personal autonomy.

Because sometimes you might also be in situations where you actually prefer to not involve another human if it's, like, something very intimate.

I'm also thinking about if you're, for example, using speech-to-text to write something that's highly personal, for example, then you would like maybe just to share this with your computer and nothing more.

And so for myself, I have ADHD and when I write documents, I really rely heavily on dictation because it allows me to focus on my thoughts.

And also when I'm reading stuff, I cannot keep so much information in my head, so I can look at the information and then just say what the computer should write.

I also use text-to-speech to listen to what I've written because that helps me find errors in the text I've produced or just to listen to PDFs that I'm reading.

And I know also that many people with hearing impairments or people who are hard of hearing also rely on speech-to-text apps to understand what other people are saying.

So I, myself, am also active in the board of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing Young People. And when we have meetings, we do have interpreters, but for some parts, maybe we don't have interpreters for everyone when we have small talk.

And one thing that I've noticed is that many of our members are frustrated because these tools which are like sort of marketed as something that will be of use for persons who are hard of hearing, they actually are not so good at recognizing the way hard of hearing people might speak.

Like some have this distinct deaf accent or hard of hearing accent, which is due to maybe that they don't hear their own voice and therefore speak in a certain way.

And I think this is a good example that there are shortcomings in these applications that are being designed because they are not sufficiently trained on a diverse range of persons with disabilities, which they should be, especially if they're also marketed as something that is helpful, then that needs to be done.

And I see this as also a form of bias because, well, bias is not only about judging someone, like an AI that is deciding about your life is judging someone.

It can also be that it's not recognizing you. Similarly, there is AI that can, for example, let's say, if it's facial recognition or similar, then maybe it's not able to detect a person with Down syndrome because their face looks different or similar because it has just not been trained on how to recognize people as well.

So there is definitely many examples of how AI has the prospect of being able to make our lives both easier, but also in some cases, even enable us to do things that we couldn't do earlier.

So I read once an article where a person who is with a mobility impairment who also works as a journalist who said that the only way she could be active in her field is actually thanks to the speech-to-text.

So that really shows us that AI can be very helpful and there are many more applications that will come as time goes by and more inventions are made and also the capabilities of the technology are refined.

(Paweł): Jude, your organization is concerned, as the name implies, with the prevention of blindness.

So how does AI help in that? Is it about better diagnosis or does it suggest actual treatment methodologies? Could you evaluate a little bit about that?

(Jude): it's quite remarkable when I was reading up on AI a while back now when I started going down this path and discovered that actually eyecare or ophthalmology were the first group to register a technology that was able to screen from images using AI to screen for diabetic retinopathy.

So to be able to, a group had trained the technology on large datasets and images of people with retinal damage from retinal photographs with diabetes and trained the system to be able to see the difference between normal and those with retinopathy.

And so it was actually the first medical device registered, I think, at the FDA. Now I'm going to have to double check that, but at the FDA to have AI and health device.

So, it is a field that is leading in the area. We, in eyecare, are definitely using AI to increase the number of people being routinely screened and monitored for eye disease before the onset of signs and sight loss and also during the onset of small signs or small amounts of sight loss to stop any, to be able to react and put an intervention before it gets worse.

AI-enabled systems can differentiate those with disease, enabling timely referral and access to eyecare services. And for people without signs, they can be recalled for screening as appropriate.

This means that screening can now happen at a community level rather than often this was done in a doctor's office at tertiary level in a hospital that perhaps was less accessible or affordable to people.

And so it's much more convenient and efficient for the person who required care.

And mostly, this has happened in diabetes, but we are seeing for people with diabetes, but we are seeing more and more areas of eye disease being able to use these technologies, including age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma and other retinal diseases.

We're seeing improved patient outcomes from using AI as a tool to assist in clinical diagnosis and decision-making. In many settings around the world, we have minimal or not enough appropriately trained HR.

And in these circumstances, mostly the AI is coupled with other technology such as telehealth to diagnose and manage the person.

So the AI or the technology will say, you know, this person needs to be seen, this kind of intervention needs to happen. And then the teleophthalmology platform can connect to an ophthalmologist somewhere else who can help the local person deliver whatever the solution is that is required.

AI also allows for continuous monitoring by relevant staff who can then connect to the remote services when needed.

And this is happening in a condition called retinopathy of prematurity, which happens as it might sound in newborn premature babies, which is, you know, beyond life-changing for people that have access to this care.

It's also being used to diagnose and grade cataract and predict IOL, so the power of the lens that goes inside, that replaces the lens when the lens is taken out. And, you know, in the future, we're likely to see predictions around who is likely to not access services and interventions.

And then, we can put in place strategies to make sure that these people actually get to the service.

There are some studies that show the cost-effectiveness for these screening programs and assistive diagnosis programs, but we need to see a bit more work in that.

But they are proving to be in environments where they are in a mixture from Singapore through to a study done in Rwanda, we've seen that it's quite a cost-effective thing to do. And there's early work being done around workforce and systems efficiency. And that, you know, we'll see more of in the future.

But I think that's a really exciting AI development so that medical experts are freed up from doing more of the screening tasks and really being used where they're really needed in surgery, therapeutic treatment, that kind of thing.

And things that we really need to look at and concentrate on and work together is to make sure that these solutions are improving equitable access to eyecare, and so that the datasets that are being used are

representative of all people that we need to provide eyecare to, and that we can look at making sure that the services are then accessible to everybody.

And also, what's exciting that may come up is, at the moment, AI technologies have been sort of brought in for each kind of disease area separately.

And I think there'll be a time shortly where we start to see it much more integrated. So it's much more holistic in the way that, you know, we're looking at a person and their eyes, and not just by condition and disease.

And then, you know, that will really actually quite change what the sector is capable of doing and delivering.

(Paweł): This sounds exciting, indeed. So, we can see these applications of artificial intelligence in ophthalmology. I wish you and your organization the best of luck carrying on with this development and the research.

Right, we already touched upon this, Jude, you actually touched upon this very important aspect.

When we talk about artificial intelligence in the context of persons with disabilities, it's not just wonderful applications, and it's not just hope and promises for more independent life.

It also brings with it the challenges. And I would like to know, what are they? Are they very varied? And are they actually dangerous at some point to the point where they will limit our independence?

Jude, can we start with you? How is it in the case of blind and partially sighted people?

(Jude): Thanks, it's an excellent question. And, you know, we all wish we actually had the crystal ball to predict exactly what's going to happen in the future.

I was at a talk on AI just last week, and the author of the talk, Toby Walsh, who's an excellent expert in the area, suggested that AI is actually augmented intelligence, not artificial intelligence, and the need for people still to make certain decisions and use the AI in the most appropriate, beneficial way for humankind, I guess, which I think is a nice, interesting take on it.

So in doing that, we need to do what we know should be done in terms of the challenges around data, collecting the right data in a way that is

ethical and can cross borders and can represent all people that it needs to for whatever the project is. And, you know, that privacy laws and all of that kind of thing is respected.

You know, Kave, I was very interested in what you said earlier about negotiating the AI Act in the EU. I think we have to talk afterwards.

Making sure that it's accessible, any of these good developments are made accessible and affordable and appropriate to the people who need them most.

And making sure that we understand the need of people with visual impairment, which starts with the people with visual impairment.

Some of the best innovations are going to come from the people who know exactly what it is that they need out of the technology, rather than other people deciding or thinking that.

And so, making sure there's opportunities for all people with visual impairment or people that live with people with visual impairment can have an opportunity to innovate and contribute and really come up with the best that they can to make these technologies even better and designed for purpose.

The other challenge is just basic technology challenges, infrastructure and support and digital literacy, making sure that, again, that's available wherever people are that don't have it and need it.

And that doesn't limit the use of these great technologies for people. There's a lot, I would hate to just end the future bit just on challenges because there's a lot of exciting things on the horizon. I think rather than individual apps, we'll start to look at more complete systems.

For example, real smart home technologies embedded from start to finish for visual impairment.

People with visual impairment will have increased or have improvements with increased learning and understanding of the technologies we currently have and as general technologies improve.

So I think the future looking ahead is very exciting.

(Paweł): Great. So we need to learn how to develop and use these technologies responsibly, taking into consideration the great diversity of this world.

And it's important to bear in mind when discussing and touching upon these subjects.

Kave, in a broader disability picture, how does it span out when it comes to persons with disabilities in general? What are the challenges in store for us?

(Kave): I agree with everything that Jude said. It's also applicable to other disabilities as well.

So for example, as you said, it needs to be both affordable, but we also need to be mindful of how it is designed so that it doesn't create new disabilities, but also that it actually corresponds to the need of persons and also privacy.

So I want to give an example of something called the sign language glove, which several inventors independently have gotten innovation awards for.

And it's like a glove that recognizes which hand shape you have and also where the position of the hand is. And it tries to convert that to text or to speech from the computer.

However, the people who invented these, they didn't consult deaf persons and they don't even like… the glove doesn't take into account that like 70% of the communication in sign language is based on the tilting of the upper body and facial expressions.

So even if you want to distinguish between a question and a statement like "You are hungry." or "Are you hungry?", the only distinction is in the eyebrows and not in the hand sign, in the signs.

And that is a great example of when persons who may not have a disability themselves just try to imagine what the needs of persons with disabilities are, then they might end up putting a lot of resources to develop something that will not be helpful.

So this thing with co-creation, which is meaningful, as Jude was talking about, is super important for this.

Because otherwise, even ordinary things that are supposed to help can actually be even worse.

Like I'm just imagining that let's say you have a poorly designed speech, like a personal assistant that, suddenly, when you're sitting in a Zoom call thinks that you're giving it the command and then it comes as a layover over the conversation that you have and then, you cannot really interact with this call that you're having.

And also when it comes to data, I have myself a background in data protection and something very important I would like to also emphasize is that if you are using a system that is based on cloud processing, so let's say, I'm dictating to my computer, which I do a lot in Word, I actually myself have ADHD and I heavily rely on speech-to-text and text-to-speech when I'm writing.

So if I'm writing a document, I want to look into the book that I'm reading to cite from it, because otherwise I won't remember this.

And also, I listen to the text I have written to see, because I need both visual and audio to read and grasp what I'm reading.

And if, for example, I'm using these functions in Word, Word will automatically send the content of my document to Microsoft if the computer is online, because then it can produce less robotic speech when I'm trying to listen to it.

But let's say I'm a journalist working on some very sensitive files, then if I use this feature, confidential information could be shared with Microsoft.

And one thing that we really need to also give a lot of attention to is how do we make sure that privacy, as Jude was saying, is actually preserved, because if we rely on things that are only reliant on processing in the cloud, then people with disabilities might be hindered from working in using them in contexts where there are strong confidentiality requirements.

And we want persons with disabilities to be able to have any job based on… that they're qualified for. So there is still a lot to work on.

(Paweł): So in this vein of "Nothing about us without us", it's very important, Kave, as you said, to also co-create, so involve people with disabilities in the creation process of the tools that will, in the end, in the long run, benefit them the most.

Thank you both. Thank you, Jude. Thank you, Kave, for your inputs. It was very good having you here and I wish you a lot of luck with your achievements and projects in terms of artificial intelligence and everything else. Thank you for being here with us today.

(Jude): Thank you so much for having us. Congratulations on a great podcast.

(Kave): Jude and Paweł, thank you as well. I also look forward to this, to continue this conversation.

(Paweł): Let's hope for that. And let's hope that these technologies will be built furthermore with persons with disabilities in mind.

Right, Neven, you heard about all these wonderful technologies that are powered by artificial intelligence. Have you ever used any of those? ChatGPT, for instance? How do you find it?

(Neven): Well, yes, actually, I did try. And I think it's very exciting, although I haven't still figured out all the best ways how to use this.

So I think this is our challenge to be open for finding out new possibilities. But we also have to understand that we have to learn how to see it as a useful tool for us.

(Paweł): Yes, finding good prompts is essential. Do you also see any dangers in this technology?

(Neven): Well, of course, there are dangers. But I think that at the moment, I think I am in the step that I try to figure out how I can use it as a useful tool, mainly.

(Paweł): Good luck with that. I'm sure it will be an exciting journey for you.

And now handing the microphone over to you for our correspondent' section.

Correspondent' section: Montenegro

[Music]

(Neven): We are now moving to the correspondent' section. This is a section where we try to visit different members of the EBU to get a little better insight into the situation for blind and partially sighted across Europe.

And today, we have the pleasure to talk to Anđela Dragović, from the Union of the Blind of Montenegro. Dobro nam došla! Welcome, Anđela.

(Anđela): Hvala! Hvala puno! Thank you for an invitation and thank you for an opportunity to participate in this podcast.

(Neven): Well, let's start with that you tell us a little about who you are and what's your position in the Union.

(Anđela): As you said, I'm Anđela, Anđela Dragović, and I work in the Union of the Blind of Montenegro as a project assistant. In addition to that, I deal with matters concerning gender equality, youth employment, employing people with disabilities.

And also, I'm a member of the Women's Committee within the Union of the Blind of Montenegro and president of the Youth Committee, also in our Union.

And for a period from 2022-2025, I have been appointed a young leader from Montenegro who is a part of the youth working group within the European Blind Union.

(Neven): Great, great. So I don't know if you listen to our podcast, but if you do, you know that the last episode was about consumer products. And I know that your organization works quite actively in this field. So could you tell us a little about that?

(Anđela): Yes, we are really active in this field of work. Actually, the Union of the Blind of Montenegro is, I can say, one of the few in Europe that addresses the issues of product accessibility to visually impaired persons.

In Montenegro, complies with the standards for braille labelling on products.

Actually, braille labelling is required by the law on consumers' protection and the rulebook on braille labelling to consumers products.

The following products in Montenegro, at the moment, are accompanied by information in braille: liquid body wash and hair shampoos, liquid laundry detergent and dishwashing liquids.

Actually, I can say that traders who sell the mentioned products are obliged to provide braille labels for, at least, 50% of this total amount of this product.

Actually, on a shelf where these products are placed, at least one of them must contain information expressed in braille.

So a product name and quantity with embossed information must be, how can I say… actually should be on a transparent label and separate leaflets should contain additional information who are usage for that product in braille.

Actually, our colleagues who work in the printing office not just print, not just access only these braille labels with the required information, but also they monitor the application, the obligation of regulation as well as the compliance with them.

(Neven): I think this is a great field, but I know you do some other things. I mean, I know you're very active in the field of employment also. You have some platform. Could you tell us a little about that?

(Anđela): Yes, yes. We have a platform for employing people with disabilities and actually it's a platform that was provided from our Union and it's, how can I say, it's named "Zaposliossi.me", employ persons with disability.me.

And I can say that that is a place, a unique designed place where all people can find all necessary information for employing.

And I can say that that information, yes, are on one place. First of all, this platform contains several categories. First of all, candidates.

These categories contains CVs, professional CVs of potential employees with disabilities and a short video presentation. We consider that it can be important because some people with disabilities in that way can get key information and give, sorry, improve their first impression of themselves to a potential employer.

There is also a section containing legal regulation, all the rulebooks, forms, patterns.

There is a blog, really active category when somebody can find information, experience, good practices, examples from Montenegro, from Europe, from all our neighbours, neighbour countries.

And we can here find good experiences, bad experiences, and how some people can start some own business, some create a new idea.

All potential candidates before submitting their CVs and their little presentation attend a series of workshops about writing CV, about how to act in an interview job. And it can be really useful for them.

(Neven): Great. That sounds really great, Anđela. And of course, it's relevant, isn't it, that in Montenegro, you have like a quota system. So the employers, they have, they're supposed to employ a certain percentage of persons with disabilities. Isn't it like that?

(Anđela): We have a little bit barrier with employers, some people who employ people with disabilities because they have often negative views of the potential of their abilities.

And we try to highlight all the benefits because in Montenegro, we have really good benefits about reasonable accommodation, assistance for helping in work for people with disabilities.

And we tried to improve that and try to encourage employers to be okay in relation with people with disabilities.

(Neven): Wonderful. Wonderful. Well, you know, time flies, Anđela. I mean, I think we have to wrap up the correspondent' section for today.

But we could encourage everybody to come to Montenegro, I think, and to maybe visit you and this beautiful country. And do you have something very, very brief you want to end with? Something which you do?

(Anđela): Yeah, we have our orchestra inclusive group with the members of the Union of the Blind and members who are not our members.

Actually, we had a lot of performances, concerts in Montenegro and across former Yugoslavia. We have our own song, video for the song, where you can, where people can see all our activities, sports where we are successful and I think it's a really good way to improve our musical skills and spend useful our free time.

(Neven): Wonderful. Wonderful. Thank you so much, Anđela. It was great to talk to you and very interesting to hear about all the work you do in the Union of the Blind of Montenegro.

And I wish you a very nice continuous summer then. Thank you.

(Anđela): Thank you. I wish you that too. And thank you for an opportunity. And I hope we will have a next time to talk and to meet again.

(Neven): Yes, we will see you again. Thank you so much. Bye bye.

So, Paweł, have you ever been to Montenegro?

Paweł: Actually, no, I've been… The closest I've been to Montenegro is Croatia, but I really hope I can go one day.

And now I know that if I come and if I ever need to get a shower gel or shampoo, I will know what it is because it's labelled in Braille.

(Neven): OK, thank you very much for today, Paweł.

(Paweł): Thank you as well, Neven. Until the next episode.

(Neven): Yes. And we also have to give a big thanks to our master of sound, Emiel Cornelisse, who is in the Netherlands. So thank you, Emiel.

And well, also thank you to all our listeners. If you would like to subscribe to the EBU in Action podcast, you can always do that in your podcast reader.

Or if you would like to know more about the European Blind Union or send us some comments or questions, you can find all the contact information in the show notes.

So we would like from our team to wish you all a continuous nice summer. And by that, I say: "Bye bye".

[Music]

(Voiceover): EBU in Action is co-funded by the European Union.

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