Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

Women with visual impairments can be anything they dream they can be!!!

They build their future based on their dreams. They have the vision, the determination and the desire to follow long roads of hard work to rise to the top.

Welcome to the European Blind Union - EBU - the voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe.
EBU is committed to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

It’s been a long and sometimes very rocky road for blind and partially sighted women to show their capability to gain the positions they should have had for many years already. But now they’ve succeeded in some way. I really am proud to say that now we find women in many many functions leading positions within the national organisations as well as in EBU. But we still are on our way and it’s necessary that more and more women will gain those positions and be able to show that they in some way are even better and more sophisticated than men are. So let’s go ahead and I really would like to encourage our women’s network to keep on going that road.

“The roads that lead to the top: a video on blind and partially sighted women’s leadership” is a short video portraying the stories of ten women who are blind or partially sighted and traces the paths they followed towards pursuing their dreams.

My name is Metka Pavšič, I come from Slovenia, I am forty eight years old, I am a social worker by profession but I have always enjoyed singing and acting.

Hi, my name is Paola Morandi, I was born in the north of Italy. I have done lots of different types of work. I am a professional English teacher, a translator, a writer, I’ve published a novel and a poetry book and lots of poems in different anthologies.

Hello, my name is Barbara Martin Munoz, I am Spanish, forty two years old, and I am currently working as the manager of the technical office of European Affairs at ONCE, the Spanish national organization of the blind. And since October 2015 as the second vice president of the European Blind Union, EBU.

My name is Ellen Koudigs I am forty six years old and I am totally blind. I work as senior policy maker strategy at the National Institute of Public health and Environment.

Hello everyone, I am Luciana Loprete and I was born in Botricello on 13th of December, 1966. For thirty one years I’ve been working at the Calabria Regional government.

Hello, my name is Unn Ljoner Hagen I come from Norway and I am today the elected President of the Norwegian Blind Association. I am fifty six years old.

My name is Tytti Matsinen I’ m thirty years old. I graduate as a civil engineer tomorrow with a Master’s of Science and I also have a Bachelor’s degree in Theology. I work in Felm which is one of the biggest international development organizations in Finland. I’m a human rights advisor and I focus on the rights of people with disabilities on freedom of religion or belief and on linguistic rights.

Hello, I'm Zana Đačić, I come from Montenegro and I am forty eight years old. I am a physical therapist. I have been working at a medical center in Pljevlja for twenty nine years. Currently, I am the President of the Union of the Blind of Montenegro.

My name is Stefania Leone, I’m Italian and forty nine years old. I am a computer engineer and I work in a leading Italian ICT company.

I am Virginia Carcedo the CEO of Inserta Employment the association of Foundation ONCE expert in training unemployment of people with disabilities.

In my work I do a lot of advocacy towards the Ministry for foreign affairs and also towards different European and International bodies. We aim to change the position of people with disabilities globally, to empower the people themselves and to make sure that different legislation and different processes in the society are inclusive of people with disabilities.

I finish the regular school and I did what I wanted which was to go to university to study law. It was in 2007 when I was offered my current position and I have to say that is my dream job. First of all because it’s working in ONCE, second of all because it’s working in its international level and the things that we are dealing here are very important and third of all because I am working in the institutions of the European Union and fourth of all because I am working in English. Anyway when I was working in this position I realised that I really enjoy politics in terms of legislative procedure and how things are dealt. So I decided to start studying through the Open University in Spain politics and I am almost there. I have only one subject left and I will have my degree.
I have a Senior position in the ADV an Association of blind and visually impaired people and in FISH one of the two most important federations of people with disability. My work is to develop software and to test web sites.
My career in the Union began when I was elected for President of local organizations of the blind for Pljevlja and Žabljak. I took over a run-down establishment which was unorganized, but very quickly with my team I managed and totally transformed this organization in a healthy and successful one. This motivated some people to nominate me for the position of the President of the Union of the blind of Montenegro.
By education I am a political scientist. I have a Master and I am beginning a PhD in political science. I have had leading positions the last twenty years. I started to work in the Norwegian social security system. After that I worked also with development in foreign countries. So I started to work for the Norwegian Association for the Blind and Partially Sighted and one of my main interest was working with rehabilitation and trying to obtain political goals within the fields of rehabilitation. I’ve also been the Secretary General of the EBU.

I was president of an international club in the United States at the time and it kept on going even when I was losing my vision was very successful. I founded a family service center in the South of Italy when I moved back to Italy for military wives and families and then when I moved to Rome in 1998 I continue work as an English teacher privately I worked for an office and taught business English and I became volunteer, I founded an association in 2009 called Vivi Vejo it’s a non-profit organization that does lots of volunteer work for the community for children students elderly people and visually impaired people. Because of that, because I have concentrated on helping people in general not just blind people last year I was awarded the Women of the Year Prize called Donne Con La D Maiuscola which is translated as women with a capital W.

A few years ago, I graduated from Slovenian Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television with a Master degree in Speech forms. This was the biggest opportunity to develop my talent and resulted in a monodrama performance entitled I regret nothing that has actually become quite a hit here. Very soon I will have the one hundred performance in my home town.

In my organization I believed and managed to stand for my work, in fact, for 12 years I’ve been representing the Italian Union of the Blind and partially sighted in the province of Catanzaro with steady passion. This also led me to become the chair of a local office of the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted in 2005 where there had never been a chair woman until then a person like me, who set aside all what was his / her needs to devote soul and body to others.
I start with studying health sciences at University and after finishing my study it was quite hard to find a job. I started as a trainee at Ministry of Housing special planning and environment. This traineeship gave me great possibility to try and to work a different places for a few months and on a different subjects. After this traineeship I went on and worked as a policy maker health and environment at the Ministry and I stepped over to the National Institute for Public Health and Environment starting working as a researcher in the environment. Now I work here for four years as a senior policy maker strategy. It is about making the strategy for organizations, changes that come, how can we fit in with changes in the future what kind of research do we have to do, how to communicate with citizens and all kinds of staff.

Like every journey to success, the roads they travelled on were not always easy to follow. Oftentimes these roads were bumpy and winding, were not paved with rose petals but were blocked by many barriers and challenges that impeded their rise.

In my working life I think the biggest challenges I’ve had in terms of disability is that earlier I was mentioned disability in my CV or my application and I’ve never even got interviews. A few years ago I then decided that I’ll just stop putting or mention about my disability in any papers because I was thinking that people have a lot of prejudice and people just don’t know what the disability is and what I can do despite of my disability and that was one the sort of key changes that made the difference because when I get into an interview that’s when the people actually encounter me and they see me and they have the possibility to ask questions and I have the possibility to tell and show what I actually can do. In general I think working as a professional, as an advisor when you are a woman of thirty years old I think that’s always a challenge, there is always people who are older and wiser and more experienced.

Certainly there were more than a few obstacles, the disinterest of the institutions that are too often used to interacting with men only, the distrust of some of our members who did not believe in the strength of a woman at their service, but the most important challenge was making women and families accept what the situation of a person with a disability is, that he or she has the right to be treated on equal terms as the others and be given the same opportunities.

Being a female leader has also brought challenges I think most most difficult one is meeting with colleagues or male colleagues in more or less at the same level and it is not often the easiest task to stand up for feminine rights when you are amongst mostly men.
I am working mother so I work here for 32 hours a week and besides that I’ve family life with two kids of ten and twelve year so I have to help kids to school, join them while they have sports matches and things and also I do sports myself. Sports is one of the things that I like most to do.

When I accepted the nomination for the presidency a group of male colleagues attempted to manipulate my way of working. However, I was able to prove the truth and that justice is still possible with love for work persistence courage and good will. With the executive director and professional services I successfully managed the organization. We are a recognizable Union in the region.

When we started to put the performance together, we were choosing whether to play this role as a blind person or a seeing person. In everyday life, I try not to stand out, be as regular as possible so we choose to play a seeing person. During our study of the play, professor Gubenšek reminded me of body and face gestures that I didn’t know from everyday life. I could feel him, he described me everything very well. I trained every movement until it became natural, a part of me.

The other challenge is the attitude of journalists and people who invite to perform, because they wish to emphasise my blindness and make me to a theatre attraction. I decided at the beginning not to advertise my blindness, a play is a play. I’m very angry when I see articles entitled “Blind actress”. I understand their need to attractiveness but for me it’s a stigma.

I like my work, but it’s a tough work for a blind person, because quick revolution of technologies is too fast for our assistive technologies. So my daily challenge is to remain operational, in order to feel good and don’t be discriminated.

But these women had a reason to keep going, a path to follow and a target to pursue. They had the passion, the drive and the motivation to deploy a number of strategies in order to reach their full leadership potential.

My main important strategy I think has always been to look up on my loss of vision as not only a disadvantage but also an advantage. It can be seen as a possibility to for instance find solutions in way of thinking and also find different solutions than the most obvious one. And also I think one of my other strategies is also to lobby to be open minded and take into considerations all solutions all possibilities and try to operate in an ethical manner. I think that is very important and I do think that we need female role models.

It was not necessary to implement any particular strategy to succeed in what seems normal to me today. Does just being myself not allowing anyone to decide for me and above all striving for everybody’s welfare. Of course in order to succeed, you must always be up to date, attend specific trainings and know very well the subjects you are dealing with.

For me I ‘m normal person I’ m Barbara Martin but I ‘mm committed. I do enjoy the work I do. I do believe that equal opportunities are needed that the work for improving many lives in this world is necessary and that’s why I could manage to get where I am.

I have attended seminars that aim to strengthen the organizations of people with disabilities and also trainings to acquire self-sufficient skills that help me to be active in the work of the Union of the Blind for Montenegro.

My strategy is to work hard, to study a lot but also to ask for help to my colleagues that are very kind with me. For don’t be discriminated is important to be believable, to speak only about things that we really know and we have a personal experience about.

But I think the only way to combat that is not, is do not to care about the ideas people might have but just on pushing. In terms of disability I think for me my strategy has always been to be open. To tell people that they are allowed to ask that there is no stupid questions and then for me to answer. Of course when it gets too personal I don’t answer but in general people they are not mean they are just curious or they don’t know how much I see or what I need for a meeting to be inclusive. So I’ve been involved in different NGOs in volunteering since I was a teenager but for me at least it has been important to start with not paid positions. Put yourself into places where you can learn where you can participate and that’s the way that’s where you learn that’s also where you create networks and networks are really important in finding new possibilities.
The most important thing is to keep busy and to make your life useful. You can always make your life useful when you are blind. It doesn’t matter if you don’t see you can still touch and feel and smell. There are so many other things you can do.

There were a lot of times in my life that I hit bottom. Luckily there is something in me that resists difficulties and wants to go on, to go up. I am lucky to be stubborn, curious, hard-working, to expect a lot of myself. I learn from books, spirituality, psychotherapy, people with similar experience.

Use your strengths choose your battles it seems a bit easy maybe to say so but it’s important that you think about what are your strength and what are your weaknesses. When you are clear what they are it can help you. Ask for help if you need so and think positive and easy. One of the simple challenges that I had was to take my cup of coffee every day because they use a touch screen at coffee machine. We made a very simple thing so I can do it myself.

As visually impaired women we are thought that to see life is a challenge, to face and fight for own independence, we are training on a daily basis, has principles to success, that are to challenge the status quo possess, confidence without attitude, think beyond themselves and be lifelong learners. But we have to feel confident on our capability and work every day to achieve our personal and professional goals. We need more women in the leadership circle to achieve these ends. But the truth and more important fact is that the challenges of yesterday are the opportunities of today.

At times when things might get tough and the road ahead might not seem that easy, it is always motivating to listen to some inspiring words that might empower you and guide you forward towards that journey to the top.

My message for other blind and partially sighted women is keep on going and think positive. Be flexible, be positive and make your disability help you in reaching your targets.

You need to believe in yourself. You need to keep on trying you need to challenge others. You need to show that you are able you are capable no matter the disability.

When you lose your vision life doesn’t just simply stop. It just keeps on going and there is just so much we can do and we can do even more. Life goes on even if you can’t see.

Prove to the world that women are capable, that women with disabilities can go wherever they want and can work wherever they want. There many women that are very courageous at this point, that they give their lives and showing and proving that a better word is possible.
The message that I want to convey to women is that you should never fall, you should bear on ethical values and above all feel alive and part of something that might seem bigger than us but in the end it shrinks to be what we have been created for. That is to give life and above all give the relief that everyone deserves.

My message to women who want to engage in this business, is that you have to be well-intentioned, be brave, have a vision, a mission, a strategy, to completely commit to your work and that your work will be successful and useful.

I have a universal advice to give I just think that to be considered as a “normal” woman also if blind, it’s important to work hard and to study a lot, to be prepared better than the others but at the same time remaining simple, honest and strong.

I learn to live life as it is, with all its troubles, but with time I cherish a small moment of beauty and joy more and more. When it gets hard, I remember the words of Tone Pavček our poet: “If you fail once or twice what you like to do, try again and once more and anew”.

Be authentic inside of your insights our wealth or knowledge waiting to surface trust in your own knowledge experience and accomplishment don’t play into impostor syndrome do have what it takes, find instrument’s and support all the blind and visual impaired woman colleagues. Work smart to make the world a better safer and fair place and do not forget that as Gandhi said “strength do not come from physical capacity it comes from an indomitable will”.

I would like to advice all women to take chances, be prepared and it’s a saying that says to compete with men you must make sure that you are always the best one you must always prepare yourself to be a little bit better, a little bit more knowledgeable than your men colleagues but on the other hand that is not really so difficult. So, good luck to you.

For further information please contact [EBU](http://www.euroblind.org)

EBU the voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

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