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**European Blind Union  
Press release  
Paris, 10.03.2016**

# Access to online services: 20 European NGOs tell EU ministers ‘no one should be left behind’

**Today the European Blind Union (EBU) and several other European NGOs published an open letter** [[1]](http://bit.ly/1RRsnux) **warning the 28 EU Ministers in charge of Digital Affairs that their current plans for the web accessibility directive could deny millions of disabled and older citizens equal access to the digital world, exclude them from full participation in society and create unacceptable digital barriers to employment.**

The open letter, co-signed by 20 European NGOs, including the European Disability Forum, AGE Platform Europe and ANEC, raises concerns about EU governments’ proposals [[2]](http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15127-2015-REV-1/en/pdf) on the EU Directive on Accessibility of Public Sector Bodies’ Websites and warns that these could stop millions of disabled and older EU citizens from accessing the kind of digital content that everyone else now takes for granted.

Far-reaching exemptions proposed include intranet services, downloadable documents, public broadcasters’ websites and even publicly funded NGOs’ websites. In addition, some governments want a very narrow definition of ‘public sector body', which would only cover the State, regional or local authorities. This definition would exclude public services provided by private entities in many countries, such as energy, water and transport services.

EBU President Wolfgang Angermann said “***We go online, we use smart phones and we use apps, just like everyone else. This is about our right to access online information, content and services. This is about investing in our common digital future. This is about equality. I am shocked to see that some governments are prepared to go to great lengths to exclude us from the digital world.”***

As the organisation representing 30 million blind and partially sighted European citizens, EBU is urging all EU Ministers to uphold the rights of disabled people [[3]](http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml) - we are calling on legislators to take on board our recommendations [[4]](http://www.euroblind.org/media/position-papers/EBU-recommendations-to-Council-public-sector-bodies-websites-directive-May-2014.doc) and work with civil society to ensure an inclusive future for all citizens. The Digital Single Market cannot be a success if millions of disabled and older consumers are excluded. Everyone needs access to online public services. No one should be left behind.

Angermann warned ***“Governments have a unique opportunity to make a difference. They must seize this opportunity. We will not accept measures that would ultimately exclude millions of blind and partially sighted citizens from society.***”

Ends

Notes to editors

[1] Link to the open letter <http://bit.ly/1RRsnux>

[2] <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15127-2015-REV-1/en/pdf>

[3] [http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml (External link)](http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which the EU has ratified, includes detailed binding provisions on equal access to information and communications - see, inter alia, articles 4, 9, 21, 27, 29 and 30

[4] European Blind Union Recommendations to Council  <http://www.euroblind.org/media/position-papers/EBU-recommendations-to-Council-public-sector-bodies-websites-directive-May-2014.doc>

**About EBU**

EBU is a non-governmental, non-profit making European organisation founded in 1984. It is one of the six regional bodies of the World Blind Union. It protects and promotes the interests of blind and partially sighted people in Europe. It currently operates within a network of national organisations of the visually impaired in 44 European countries.

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