

EBU

Annual Report

2019



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

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Dear EBU Members, Dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to write a short introduction to the 2019 EBU activity report. I am drafting these few lines at home where I have been confined for 8 weeks already. In the Italian region of Lombardy, where I live, COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged tremendously and lockdown here is very severe. So, my contacts with the external world and with EBU staff, who are all working from home, are absolutely virtual, after my last face-to-face meeting on 5-6 March. I would like to thank our staff in Rome and Paris for their commitment in these difficult times because the office management is running smoothly and effectively. This very good report is an example of that.

I have taken over the office of EBU President after the 11th General Assembly last October in Rome, and since then the situation in Europe and all over the world has worsened dramatically. The health, economic and social emergency created by the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting heavily on this year's activities of EBU. We will probably have no face-to-face Board

meetings, most of the conferences and events have been cancelled or postponed, and contacts in person are difficult. My intention to pay a visit to some EBU members in Eastern Europe is now not realistic.

The current crisis will also hinder the implementation of the Strategic Orientation Plan approved by the General Assembly. Unfortunately, financial issues and social exclusion of blind and partially sighted people and their representative organisations have been increasingly reported by our national members.

In this context it is encouraging to see how much has been achieved in 2019. This report is a clear and consistent picture of that work. Of course, I will not go through the single paragraphs that you will certainly read carefully, but highlight the main aspects only.

With the recruitment of a professional campaigning officer the visibility and impact of EBU on the European and national Institutions has strongly improved and the voice of 30 million blind and partially sighted people in Europe has been heard loud and clear.

There has also been a strong commitment to improve the internal and external communication tools so that our constituency, the media and the general public have been reached more effectively. All planned activities have been carried out and this is the positive outcome of our collective effort.

EBU pursued its main objective to defend and promote the rights of blind and partially sighted persons to achieve that society supports and includes them at all levels. The theme of our General Assembly “Leaving no one behind: EBU driving full inclusion through the SDGs” seems already limited in front of the new reality, as the SDGs need to be re-focused into feasible and inclusive life-saving actions that can be and are carried out for people everywhere. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent policies are affecting persons with disabilities in grave ways and the SDGs can survive only if they address the critical situation faced by many communities globally, including persons with disabilities. As I said in my speech at the General

Assembly, I believe that our society needs a radical shift towards a rights-based socially-sustainable development strategy, based on public and social investment.

The COVID-19 pandemic is putting the European social and integration system under threat. Serious human rights violations have been perpetrated against persons with disabilities and older people in the practical response to the epidemic and the crisis seems to be an excuse to go back to deplorable segregation and neglect practices. In this sense, there is a need for in-depth reflection. In most of the European countries there is a lack of structures and financial support to Disabled People’s Organisations which are under pressure just to survive. The only strong and effective tool we have in our hands remains the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and we must believe in it. All European countries have ratified the UNCRPD and they are bound to its’ fundamental principles.

Also in 2020 the European Commission is supporting EBU's work through the Rights Equality and Citizenship programme, covering almost 50% of our yearly budget but we must implement the relevant projects, otherwise there is the risk of losing part of the funding. To do that we need your collaboration, your participation, your active engagement. Keep in mind that EBU is a community, a network of partners all fighting for the same common goal: emancipating blind and partially sighted persons from discrimination and exclusion.

Rodolfo Cattani,
EBU President



EBU President Rodolfo Cattani

Getting ready for change

2019 was an excellent year for EBU in terms of the wide range of issues it managed to address, its adaptability, its problem-solving capacity and its vitality. As you will read from this report, EBU was able to conduct many actions and campaigns to solve issues generally facing the blind and partially sighted community in areas as diverse as accessibility of ICTs, employment, transport, the built environment... Work also focused on meeting the needs of specific groups of the visually impaired population (women, persons with low vision, youth...). It goes without saying that we had problems implementing some of these activities but we were able to solve them thanks to effective decision-making. Worth signalling is the increasingly active participation of our members, including those outside the EU, in particular through the appropriate use of the newly-established EBU Solidarity Fund.

2019 was also a decisive year in that it introduced changes that lay the basis for our work in the four years to come. The EBU held its 11th General Assembly in October last year. This was an opportunity to take stock - what worked and what did not - and to look prospectively at our future. This exercise culminated in the elaboration and adoption of a strategic orientation plan for the period 2020 – 2023. It is a well-balanced compendium of objectives and actions started in previous years and of brand new ones. Its implementation should open wider perspectives for EBU and make our organisation stronger. The EBU 11th General Assembly also elected a new Executive Board of 13 members. It will be responsible among others for turning ideas into deeds, ensuring the effective implementation of the strategic orientation plan. Finally, the Executive Director is retiring and his replacement was hired earlier this year.

These developments, together with the amount and quality of the work carried out, have prepared the ground for this new work period 2020 – 2023.

Mokrane Boussaïd,
EBU Executive Director



EBU Executive Director
Mokrane Boussaïd

The European Blind Union is a non-governmental organisation protecting and promoting the rights and interests of blind and partially-sighted people in Europe. The large number of member organisations we reunite provide us with a great deal of knowledge, expertise and experience related to visual impairment and its implications in the daily life of millions of persons with sight loss. Membership of the European Blind Union is globally stable. EBU currently has 41 members.

While the General Assembly of Members held every four years is our governing body, our work is directed by an Executive Board of up to 13 members. In 2019, the Board held 3 meetings, as follows: Tirana, Albania, 01-03 February; Moscow, Russia, 23-26 May; and Rome, Italy, 27 and 30 October. In addition the officers of the Board held meetings over Skype at regular intervals to address issues requiring urgent action. The officers' decisions were reported to and confirmed by the Board at their face to face meetings.

EBU's activities are also facilitated

through Networks, established to address various work areas, including ICTs, Road safety and access to transport, rights..., as well as the needs of specific segments of the visually impaired population, including persons with low vision, women...

EBU also participates in campaigns and activities which have a broader scope than Europe itself, in particular as the European member of the World Blind Union, a global organisation representing the interests of 285 million blind and partially sighted people in 190 member countries worldwide.

The EBU Central Office supports the Board, national members, Commissions and Networks in their work. It is also the main contact point for information to the general public, members and partner organisations. Ever since it was established, the Central Office has been located in central Paris.

Headed by the Executive Director, EBU's central office team is composed of four other staff members. In 2019 the permanent EBU staff members were:

Executive Director

Mokrane Boussaïd

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Project Officer

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Head of Campaigning

Antoine Fobe

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Information Officer

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Office Assistant

Valérie Vivancos

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While the European Blind Union's 2019 financial statements show a slight deficit for the year of €5,667 (0.96% of revenues), which has not occurred since 2014, the situation is not overly concerning and is mainly explained by short-term expenditure that was not fully covered by additional revenues.

A Expenditure

Our fixed costs remain well controlled and overall, in line with our budget estimates. The main items are:

- Salaries and social-security contributions, which totalled €340,900 against a forecast of €325,500 (57.5% of expenditure).
- Numerous fees, totalling €82,700, for the translation of regular publications of our brochures and videos (€29,900), accountancy fees (€15,600), two studies on relocating the EBU's Paris office (€18,900) and payments to individuals for report writing or presentations (€8,700).
- Travel costs, totalling €66,700, most of which were related to projects that are 80% funded by the REC programme (€59,100) or various meetings attended by employees and members of the EBU Board.
- The General Assembly generated expenditure of €19,000, while the rent on the Paris offices costs €13,700. We also awarded prizes and grants totalling €18,300 and finally, the Solidarity Fund made awards totalling €12,100.
- Our general expenses (communications, insurance, purchase of supplies, bank charges and depreciation) totalled just €39,000, or 6.57% of our expenditure, which is very reasonable.

Our total expenditure was therefore €593,125, exceeding our budget estimates by €35,700

B Revenues

Our main funding sources remain very stable from one year to the next, and are as follows:

- The grant we receive from the European Commission, currently as part of the REC programme. Thanks to the excellent preparatory work on our application and monitoring of the progress of various projects carried out by Romain FERRETTI, it was once again accepted unreservedly. As a result, we received €291,830, €38,480 more than in 2018, which represents 50.3% of our resources.
- Contributions, which were paid by our members with remarkable promptness once again this year. The amount received was therefore identical to 2018, at €232,700 (40.1% of our resources). I would like to express my warmest thanks to all our members, whose contribution reflects their genuine interest in the work of the EBU.
- Sponsors, who supported us in 2019 with funds totalling €15,800: this is a new source of funding that we hope to develop. On the other hand, donations fell from €7,000 to €1,540 and I am very

sad to note that none of our members contributed to our Solidarity Fund. The ONKYO and PASCAL projects brought in €19,000 and €17,560 respectively and interest on our investments increased from €3,100 to €4,600.

- Our total revenues were therefore €587,458, €30,000 more than our estimates, which explains the small deficit of €5,667.42 for 2019.

C Balance Sheet

At 31 December 2019, we had €679,542 in our various bank accounts. The total reserves shown on the balance sheet before the income appropriation for the year was €633,560; €166,826 remained allocated to the Solidarity Fund and €22,740 to help African associations providing support for visually impaired people.

D Conclusion

We note the following with satisfaction at the end of 2019:

- The promptness with which our 41 members paid their annual contribution.
- The very significant increase in support from sponsors, a source of funding which, we hope, will continue and increase in line with the recommendations made during previous audits of our accounts.
- The exceptional effort made this year by the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted, which drew heavily on its own resources to organise our General Assembly in Rome last October, limiting the costs of this major event for the European Blind Union. We would like to express our warmest thanks to them.

On the other hand, further efforts are needed to ensure that:

- All members understand the importance of the Solidarity Fund and agree to show their solidarity with those who are most disadvantaged, even if they are only able to make a modest contribution, in line with their resources.

As the Board agreed at its meeting in February 2020, the Aid Fund for blind people in Africa is able to get quickly back up to speed and return to normal operation.

Philippe CHAZAL

Treasurer, European Blind Union

EBU And Its Members - Internal Communication

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As a European network, EBU wants to improve internal communication with its members through transparent and harmonised use of EBU technical terminology. Young European and national leaders attended a [“Getting to know EBU” e-workshop in March](#).

The recruitment of our Head of Campaigning resulted in an increase in communication on campaign topics, in particular through regular and detailed ‘campaign updates’ in our monthly member’s newsletter.

Discussion Lists

In order to facilitate and boost in-depth exchange of information, experience and good practices among members between meetings, we have developed email “discussion lists” according to areas of interest.

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It is equally important to maintain and increase our visibility and to make the needs and aspirations of blind and partially sighted people known to decision-makers, partner organisations, industry and the general public. Communication tools we use to that effect include:

1 Internet

The EBU Website.

The website is regularly updated, and the homepage was improved with a live Twitter feed, reflecting our increased campaigning activity on Twitter. EBU continues to use Facebook as an additional and more varied communication to enable a wider audience to remain aware of EBU activities and issues related to the visually impaired community.

2 The EBU Newsletters

The Member's newsletter is made up of contributions from our members, general news and information on issues relevant to our target group and a new feature is the regular campaign

updates provided by the newly recruited Head of Campaigning. The monthly EBU Member's newsletter is also one of the vehicles used to promote the EBU Access Cast technology podcast.

The three-monthly EBU [Focus newsletters](#) were also related to a mix of campaigning topics, ongoing activities and specific projects. The topics for the Focus newsletters in 2019 were:

- March - The Importance of Braille,
- June - Accessible Elections,
- September - The 2019 EBU Gender Equality Awareness Raising (GEAR) conference,
- December - The 11th EBU General Assembly.

The Focus newsletter is an excellent means of involving and thus making the most of both experts from EBU member countries (for example in the issue on Braille), and staff members, such as the issue on the Gender Equality Conference, which was edited and in part written by the Office Assistant.

As a reminder, the Focus newsletters are now produced in seven languages, the four original online versions, English French German and Spanish, and, as Word documents only, in Polish Serbian and Turkish.

3 EBU Responses to EU Consultations

In 2019 EBU published 3 [Position Papers](#) on topics including the European Elections and accessible lifts.

As a complement to this work, we developed a second how-to memo on advocacy meetings as a concrete and multilingual resource for our members when approaching and meeting decision makers and other key stakeholders.

4 EBU Press Releases

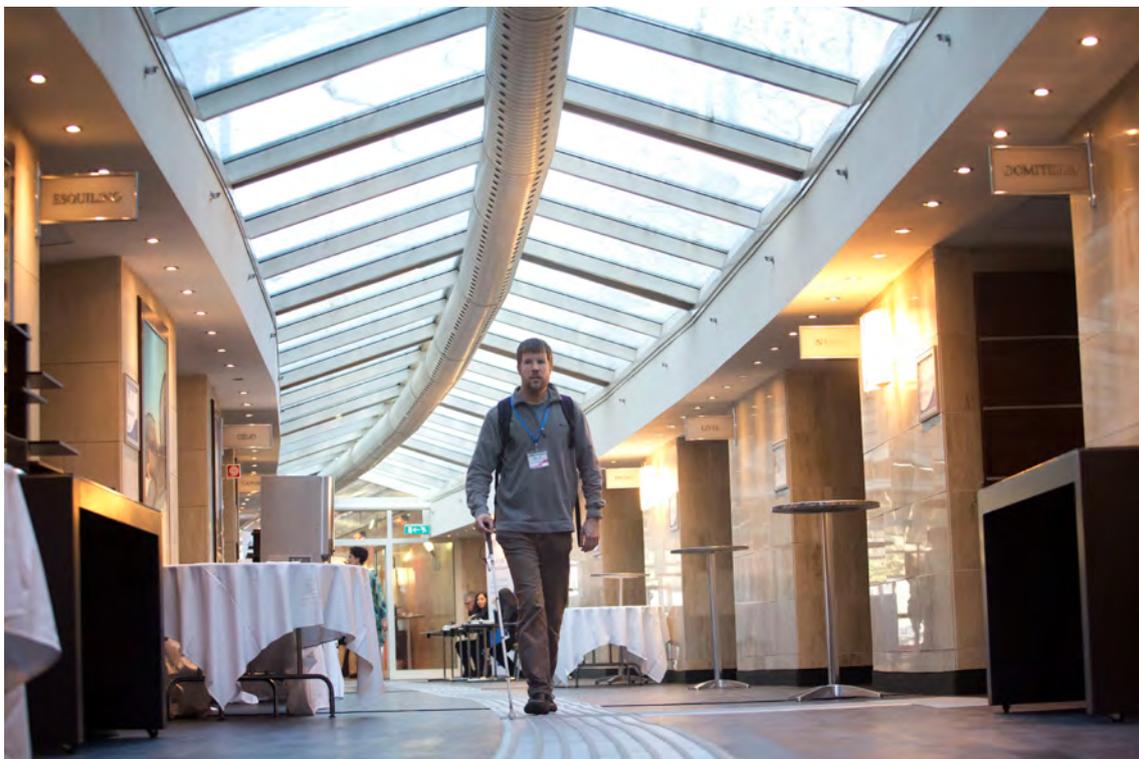
3 [press releases](#) were published in 2019, covering essentially campaigning topics. The use of press releases has a tendency to diminish, as the use of Twitter, a more direct, targeted and immediate tool, increases.

5 The EBU Access Cast

The [EBU Access Cast](#) is now fully operational. 11 podcasts were produced in 2019 (with a summer break in August) by the same team of 4 experts in the field of assistive devices for blind and partially sighted persons. Three major changes were operated in 2019: 1/ every month the lead producer rotates, 2/ interviews are now made and 3/ a sound editor has been subcontracted, thus enabling the team to concentrate efforts on the very content of the podcast.

With an average number of unique listeners of 133 (75 in 2018), the podcast audience is steadily increasing. The episode recorded live from the Sight City event, the biggest international fair for blindness and low vision aids, held every year in Frankfurt (Germany), was the most listened to (165 downloads at the time of writing).

A special edition of the podcast was also produced for the EBU General Assembly (Rome, 28-30 October 2019) with a member of the team being invited to the event to report on the Assembly itself and specifically the accompanying Techfair organised by our Italian hosts.



Bart Simons, of the podcast team, was present at the General Assembly to record material for the special edition

6 Twitter

Central to our external communication in campaigning, the EBU Twitter account, managed by our Head of Campaigning, has consistently and steadily increased its number of followers over the months in 2019, to reach 4,661 followers (a 28% increase compared to April 2018). Peaks

in audience and interaction on Twitter were effectively achieved when reaching out through this social media to decision-makers, in particular MEPs and political groups, about our EU policy and legislation related concerns. A significant illustration was our Twitter activity around our Statement on European Elections 2019.

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The 11th EBU General Assembly

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The 11th EBU General assembly was held in Rome, Italy from 28-30 October 2019. A full report, the composition of the new Board elect, details of the assembly and resolutions passed were the subject of the last [EBU Focus Newsletter](#) of 2019. The Assembly was hosted by the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted (UICI) and EBU would like to sincerely thank them for both their organisational skills and their warm sense of hospitality. The venue was the Mercure Roma West Hotel just outside Rome, which was spacious as a conference venue and also offered plenty of opportunities for delegates to socialize in the evenings. Special thanks should be offered to all the team from UICI who worked tremendously hard to make this event a resounding success. Financial support was also offered by Google, and EBU offers its gratitude to them for their generosity



Delegates and speakers in the hall at the General Assembly

The theme of this Assembly was **‘Leaving no one behind: EBU driving full inclusion through the SDGs’**. A number of key documents were presented and debated on the first day, including the Board report 2015-2019 and draft Strategic Orientation 2020-2023, the Treasurer’s report, and amendments to the constitution of EBU.

During the assembly, keynote speeches were made and panel discussions were held on the following Sustainable Development Goal topics: Good Health and Well-Being; Industry; Innovation and Infrastructure; Decent Work and Economic Growth; Gender Equality; Quality Education; Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; Partnerships.

Key speakers included representatives of three pharmaceutical or medical technology companies, Santhera Pharmaceuticals, MedTech Europe, and Vanda Pharmaceuticals.

Gender equality was also high on the agenda with important and timely presentations on the EBU GEAR project and subsequent [Malmo declaration](#).

by Karin Hjalmarsen, Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired, and Stefanie Steinbauer, Officer for International Cooperation, Austrian Federation of the Blind, and on the impact of the #Metoo movement by Unn Ljone Hagen, President, Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted.

Other key elements of EBU's work were also discussed, including accessible voting and braille teaching and literacy. Google, who generously sponsored the event, spoke about Google's Approach to Accessibility.



Delegates listening to speakers during the General Assembly

Outside of the SDGs, brief sessions were also held on the possible relocation of the EBU central office, and a team talk was given by members of the central office staff, during which Executive Director Mokrane Boussaïd announced he would be retiring in spring 2020.



Participants relaxing at the Gala Dinner

A special Gala dinner was held on the evening of the 29th of October and included the presentation of the Vision for Equality award by outgoing EBU President Wolfgang Angermann (more on that below). It was a convivial and relaxed evening which all present seemed to enjoy.

1 Election Results from the 2019 General Assembly



Braille voting slips in use at the General Assembly

The new Board comprises: Prof. Rodolfo Cattani (Italy), President; Alexander Neumyvakin (Russia), first Vice-President; Bárbara Martín-Muñoz (Spain), second Vice-President; Maria Kyriacou (Cyprus), Secretary-General; Philippe Chazal (France), Treasurer.

The ordinary Board Members are: Mario Barbuto (Italy); Tytti Matsinen (Finland); Emin Demirci (Turkey); Sinan Tafaj (Albania); Maria Thorstensson (Sweden); Vaclav Polasek (Czech Republic); Rodrigo Santos (Portugal), and Wolfgang Angermann (Germany).



Members of the newly elected EBU Board meet for the first time just after the General Assembly

In addition to the above, the President proposed the conferment of an Honorary Life Membership to Geert Joosten who had dedicated his time and energy to the Liaising Commission and to blind and partially sighted people in the Netherlands through his presidency of his organisation.

2 The Vision for Equality Award

This award was instituted by the European Blind Union (EBU) and presented for the first time in 2007. The EBU Vision for Equality Award is given every four years to

European organisations, institutions, policy makers, enterprises or individuals in recognition of their commitment to protect and promote the rights of blind and partially sighted people and to improve their living conditions.

The 2019 award, which consists of a certificate and a piece of art by a visually impaired artist, was given to the Bavarian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted (Bayerischer Blinden- und Sehbehindertenbund e. V, BBSB) for their project “We go to school”, which started in 1993.

The project offers information material on visual impairment and sight loss for schools across Bavaria.

Judith Faltl, chairwoman of the BBSB, was present to receive the award from outgoing EBU President Wolfgang Angermann.



Outgoing EBU President
Wolfgang Angermann
presenting the award to Judith
Faltl

The key campaigns conducted by EBU and the LC in 2019 included:

1 The European Accessibility Act

On 13 March 2019 the European Parliament plenary approved the text resulting from the inter-institutional negotiations (“Trilogue”). The EU Council approved it in turn on 9 April, leading to its formal adoption. EBU has lobbied for a strong and comprehensive EAA since 2015, and continued to do so till the very end, namely by inviting MEPs to approve the text in Plenary despite its limitations. We were content however that some key MEPs pointed at the insufficiencies of the text and invited the next legislature to address these.

In a [press release](#) and through social media, we welcomed the end result as very positive in that the EAA tasks EU Member States to ensure that a wide range of goods and services on the European market are accessible. Disappointing is the fact that EAA largely focuses on the digital world, to the detriment of the real, material world.

We underlined our intention to follow what is a new chapter of the EAA: its implementation through national law and European standards. We refer in particular to the section “The Right to Read”, regarding the accessibility of e-books.

We circulated the European Disability Forum’s detailed [Analysis of the EAA](#) and translated it into German for our Austrian, German and Swiss, member organisations. We started the production of an EBU toolkit promoting the maximum achievable national transposition of the EAA stipulations, which we plan to finalise in the first quarter of 2020, building on the result of a DBSV-led two day workshop gathering various experts (lawyers, technicians, responsible of the ministry for justice and consumer protection and experts on ICT and accessibility) and comments from our wider membership.

In parallel, we continued to advocate for a filling of the gaps in accessibility requirements left by the EAA, focusing namely on the built environment and public urban transport. This point was prominent in our Statement on European Elections 2019 (see below). This campaign is led by EBU’s member in Germany, DBSV.

2 “Right to Read” (Marrakesh Treaty) Campaign

This campaign is led by EBU’s member in Spain, ONCE.

In 2019, after the EU ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty in 2018, we focused within the EU on monitoring the transposition of the Marrakesh Treaty Directive in the 16 Member States that had still not adopted transposition laws. We also supported our member organisations in their efforts to obtain – where relevant – a more satisfactory implementation of the Treaty and related EU directive in their respective national laws, in particular as regards the following two issues:

- The use of the option sadly left by the Directive to provide for financial ‘compensation’ for authors and rights-holders;
- The requirement, for authorised entities to enjoy the rights defined in the Treaty, to be recognised as such in a registered list (which is contrary to the Agreed Statement on Article 9 of the Treaty).

At the end of the year, 2 EU Member States still needed to adopt national legislation: Greece and Luxembourg. Among those who had done so, only 5 appeared to provide for compensation rights: Austria, Germany, Greece (only for pedagogical works) and – only for audio-books – Denmark and Finland; and 5, to oblige to be registered as authorised entity: Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Hungary (to be confirmed) and Italy.

On 8 October, our Spanish member ONCE announced the international availability of its digital library, the largest in the world of excellent quality texts in accessible formats in Spanish, as a concrete result of the Marrakesh Treaty.

In 2019, jointly with the European Disability Forum, EBU started liaising with the Federation of European Publishers (FEP) to exchange information about the practical implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty and the European Accessibility Act (EAA), and to discuss cooperation with regard to the challenge of creating accessible e-publications. Joint contacts with Adobe and Amazon have started in follow-up.



Delegates and speakers at the Marrakech Treaty Conference in Montenegro

In wider Europe, we concentrated on obtaining participation to the Treaty of non-EU European countries, with still scarce concrete progress on that front. On 28 February, we participated in an international conference in Podgorica (Montenegro) on the Treaty. The conference was part of the project “Easier Way to the ratification of the Marrakech Treaty in the Western Balkan Countries” funded by EBU through its Solidarity Fund programme, in partnership with our member organisations in Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Republic Srpska. The conference was attended by representatives of the Montenegro Minister of Culture. A conference was also organised by our member organisation in Macedonia on 27 November, with EBU input.



Goran Macanović, Katarina Bigović and EBU Second Vice President Bárbara Martín Muñoz at the conference in Montenegro

3

“Silent Vehicles” Campaign

This campaign was led by EBU’s member in Germany, DBSV.

In January, in [response](#) to a Commission consultation, EBU assessed the final proposal for the Commission’s delegated regulation to ban the possibility to pause the AVAS on silent cars, in accordance with UNECE Regulation °138.01. We expressed disappointment that the full pause switch prohibition is delayed for two further years, until 2023.

Since 1st July, under EU Regulation 540/2014, all new types of electric vehicles have to be equipped with an Acoustic Vehicle Alert System (AVAS). It will take two further years for the obligation to extend to all new vehicles regardless of their type. The obligatory ban of a pause switch which can suspend the AVAS will enter into force for all new vehicle type approvals from 2021 onwards and for all new produced vehicles regardless of their type from 2023 onwards. Until these dates it lays at the discretion of vehicle manufacturers to omit or install a pause switch into a newly produced vehicle.

Based on these successful results and after 7 years of action, it was decided at the 2019 meeting of the Commission for Liaison with the EU to terminate the Silent Cars campaign.

4 Accessibility of Payment Terminals

The confirmed inclusion of payment terminals in the scope of the EAA, and the formal adoption of this act (see above) put an end to our successful advocacy for EU legislation on the accessibility

of payment terminals through the dedicated 'Pay-Able' platform.

We started talks with a developer of payment terminals, as part of promoting a good standard for payment terminals on a European level.

5 Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS)

The new EBU Head of Campaigning directly coordinated activity in this area, in the absence of leadership by a member organisation.

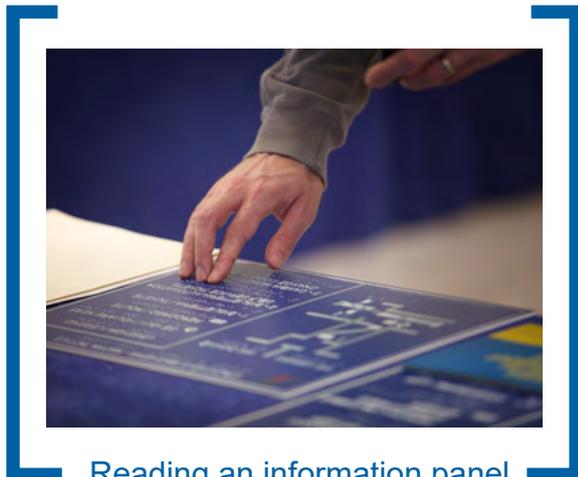
For the first time, on 17-18 October in Dublin, EBU – represented by our German member organisation DBSV – participated in the annual meeting of accessibility experts of the European Broadcasting Union, as the only organisation representing the interests of disabled persons. This was an opportunity to engage with this other 'EBU' on the new, stronger requirements set in Article 7 of the AVMS Directive.

We shared with them a draft toolkit prepared by EDF for the Directive's transposition, and used informal talks to elaborate on accessibility difficulties and achieved progress in terms of the accessibility of audio description.

Visibility was given in the meeting to a sensitisation campaign, carried out by our UK member organisation RNIB jointly with TV broadcasters, to advocate for the provision of audio description in private and public television formats.

In 2019 we had not yet started to monitor, through our member organisations, the national implementation of the Directive, also because it had just started.

6 The Campaign for Full Accessibility of Lifts



Reading an information panel in Braille

This campaign is led by EBU's member in Austria, BSVÖ, in close collaboration with ANEC (European

consumer voice in standardization), EDF and AGE Platform Europe.

We hoped that a revision of the European Lifts Directive would provide another opportunity for influencing legislation, but learned in December 2018 that, based on the final report on the evaluation of the Lifts Directive, the Commission would not revise the directive. However, before proceeding with the publication of the reference to EN 81-70:2018 in the OJ, the relevant unit invited us to provide a technical position paper explaining why we are not satisfied with the revised EU standard for accessible lifts. Which we did on 28 February 2019, after consulting with our partners ANEC and EDF.

In the [paper](#) we argued that the revised standard CEN 81-70:2018 does not provide sufficient guidance for the implementation of lifts to be used by the widest possible range of users (including blind and partially sighted persons) and to meet the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and of the Lifts Directive, and fails to seriously take into account the views of societal stakeholders, namely EBU.

On 6 March the European Commission's relevant unit informed us that they had rejected the publication of references of EN 81-70:2018 in the Official Journal of the EU under Directive 2014/33/EU on lifts and safety components for lifts, and that a likely consequence is that CEN will need to further improve the standard. In doing so, the Commission expects CEN to "carefully listen to all concerned parties".

On 12 and 13 August, our Austrian member BSVÖ hosted an ANEC meeting, to re-discuss documents and revise the CEN Working Group 'Contrast Study' draft report on the matter. It was agreed to submit four proposals for possible solutions of the contrast issue in EN 81-70 to the Steering Committee at CEN for decision.

EBU asked and obtained to participate in the CEN/CLC/JTC 11 on a European Standard (EN) on functional European accessibility requirements in the built environment (prEN 17210), in Madrid on 26-28 November. The aim was to avoid that the faulty Accessibility to Lifts standard (EN 81-70: 2018) reappear through this more general standard as far as lifts are concerned; also to recall the importance of Braille.

The results of this meeting were

quite good. It was agreed that the following would become requirements:

- Provision of Braille (which is just a recommendation in the Accessibility to Lifts standard)
- Accessibility of touchscreens
- Audio announcements
- Alarm system
- Audible information

We will continue to follow the ongoing revision of the accessible lifts standard, feeding into the ANEC participation in that work. The fact that the EU standard is expected to form the basis for an ISO 8100 worldwide standard in the making, makes it all the more important.

7 Miscellaneous

Other areas of campaigning included:

- Flagging an EBU list of 10 key concerns and related demands for the new European Parliament legislature and the new Commission, in the form of a [Statement on European Elections 2019](#). This document was sent by EBU and most of its national members

respectively to political group leaders and individual candidates ahead of the elections. Our statement was also progressively made available on Twitter through a set of 10 “flyers” corresponding to the 10 demands. We have provided national models of this, which our members on Twitter used to tweet in their own national languages and to target their own contacts at national level.

- Publication of a practical [Manual on Accessible Elections](#) on 9 May (Europe Day) 2019, just a few days ahead of the European elections, with clear recommendations for policy makers and elections officials to provide visually impaired citizens with an independent and secret vote in future elections. Together with a video showing barriers that visually impaired voters currently face in elections and underlining the right for each vote to count, this complement the EBU’s Accessible Voting Awareness-Raising (AVA) report published in November 2018, see below for more information on the [AVA project](#). The 2019 Work Forum on the Implementation of the UNCRPD by the EU and its Member States,
- which included a session on political participation, was used as a timely opportunity to communicate on our AVA activity output
- Writing to incoming MEPs, asking them to support the re-establishment of the **European Parliament Disability Intergroup** and to join it. This goal eventually was achieved, with currently over 80 MEPs on board.
- Responding to the Commission consultation on the evaluation of the **European Disability Strategy 2010-2020**.
- Producing on 2 September, upon invitation from the European Commission’s DG MOVE, a report on ‘[Most frequent problems experienced by blind and partially sighted persons when travelling by air](#)’ in the perspective of the revision of the interpretative guidelines for the current Regulation on passenger rights of persons with disabilities when travelling by air, and of the evaluation of the Regulation itself. Report also sent to the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) facilitation sub-group on transport for persons with reduced mobility.

- Co-signing, together with other organisations (including Transport & Environment), some MEPs and a number of individuals, an EDF [open letter to EU leaders](#) published on 16 September, about the on-going revision of the Rail Passengers Rights Directive, concerning pre-notification delays for assistance. Our national members in the opposing countries were involved in signing and circulating the letter and pressing their governments.
- Participating, through our Hungarian member MVGYOSZ, in an ITU Panel Session and Workshop on “The Turing Test for Autonomous Driving - A Global Performance Standard for AI on our Roads” (Budapest, 10 September).

7.1 Events

On 11 December we organised a **cocktail reception at the European Parliament**, kindly sponsored by French MEP Chrysoula Zacharopoulou (Renew Europe Group), for our national member organisations to meet with

MEPs and exchange around our Statement on European Elections 2019. The cocktail reception was attended by MEPs from 12 EU Member States and from a variety of political groups and committees, with a good share of newly elected MEPs and MEPs not having yet expressed or confirmed interest for the Disability Intergroup. Besides the sponsor MEP and our President, a representative of the Commission’s unit for Disability and the EDF President delivered introductory speeches. This event was a first contact to put EBU on the scene with the new MEPs and give an overview of our demands to the new legislature.

7.2 Meetings

As every year, the members of the EBU Commission for Liaising with the European Union also exchanged on the directions to give to EBU’s top campaigns. Held in Tirrenia (Italy) on 20-22 September, the meeting was attended by delegates from 17 countries.

1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

The [EBU UNCRPD database](#) has existed since 2008 and, since then, our members have regularly contributed despite very limited resources and the particular difficulty to identify English-speaking legal experts.

A [report on UNCRPD article 33](#) “National implementation and monitoring” was delivered as planned. Based on the contributions from 19 European countries, the report highlights:

- the persistence of limitations in the priority given to the CRPD by governments and the role of people with visual disabilities in monitoring implementation.
- the very limited resources of organisations of people with visual disabilities as a major obstacle towards efficient and ongoing UNCRPD monitoring.

In 2019, decision was made to cancel the collection/update of data on the implementation of

article 9 “Accessibility” considering our national members’ increasing workload. Instead, from 2020 onwards, EBU will support its members in collaborating with their national disability councils/umbrellas also in the drafting process of alternative reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2 Accessible Voting Awareness Raising (AVA)



A vote being cast at the EBU
General Assembly

This multi-annual activity was led by EBU’s member in Germany. As planned, a module consisting of a video, a brochure and a briefing guide was developed to raise awareness on accessible voting.

The [video and the brochure](#) are available in Bulgarian, English, Greek, Polish and Slovak to support our members in these countries approach policy-makers and election commissions in 2020.

The briefing guide (internal document) provides guidance to members on how to use the video, the brochure and the AVA report (produced in 2018).

The [AVA report](#) and awareness-raising module will increasingly and naturally support EBU's advocacy initiatives in the field of accessible voting in the future.

3 Blind and Partially Sighted Women

In order to encourage the involvement of women and youth in EBU's work and decision-making process, we initiated the GEAR (Gender - Equality Awareness - Raising) activity. In 2019 this activity was the focus of EBU's annual conference in Sweden. The GEAR conference took place in Malmö, in June, coordinated and hosted by the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired (SRF).



Delegates speaking at the GEAR Conference

With 50 participants (including 20% of men) from 15 countries, a wide range of lectures, discussions and working groups, the conference was a vibrant and successful meeting, enabling national leaders to improve the Gender Equality work in EBU, as well as for blind and partially sighted women to gather useful examples, tools, practices and tactics for implementation in their respective countries.

The conference started on Friday 14 June and was streamed live on radio.srf.nu. Participants were greeted by Maria Thorstensson, Second Vice-President, Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired (SRF) and Barbara Martín Muñoz, EBU Second Vice-President, who launched the conference with the catchphrase: "EBU changes to a higher GEAR in the gender equality battle."

Karin Hjalmanson, Advocacy Officer Gender Equality for SRF and Stefanie Steinbauer, Officer for International Cooperation, Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted, presented the detailed results of the [GEAR Report](#). Unsurprisingly, its main findings stated that visually impaired women continue to be underrepresented in national boards and positions of power, that they face higher discrimination in all walks of society and systematically get lesser valuable jobs.

After three intense and stimulating days, The GEAR Conference 2019 came to an end with a roll call on expectations towards EBU and concrete steps within member organisations.

The EBU Malmö Declaration was also drafted as a reference text for the EBU Board and all [members](#) to help implement concrete measures towards Gender Equality with the European Blind Union and its ramifications.

The way forward seems to lie in perceiving both genders as equal and to empower women's aspirations. Integrating gender equality adds value to visually impaired persons' organisations.

In short, "Get involved and create equal opportunities for women!"

This multi-annual activity is lead by EBU's member in Sweden.

4 Low Vision



Low vision aids in use at the EBU General Assembly

As a continuation to the EBU 2018 Low Vision conference, focus groups were held in Croatia (Zagreb, 8 November, 19 participants) and Cyprus (Limassol, 5 October, 18 participants). Prepared and lead with the support of the EBU Low Vision Network coordinator, their objective was threefold: 1/ to collect the needs of partially-sighted persons, 2/ to present EBU's recent work in the field of low vision, especially in the light of the UNCRPD, and 3/ to strengthen national low vision committees.

A semi structured approach was followed, in particular through the WIBGI methodology (“Wouldn’t It Be Great If...”) to help focus people’s minds on important issues in a positive frame.

National reports were delivered and compiled into a European report. Most of the needs expressed require clear political responses which EBU and its national members have been advocating for years now, e.g. web accessibility, accessibility of built environment (incl. lifts), audio announcements in public transport, creation of specific rehabilitation services, financial grants for assistive devices, deinstitutionalisation.

National Board members attended the FGs, which should result in increased consideration of low vision in the political agendas of these organisations. Low vision committees are also expected to be set up to help structure and prioritise the information collected, thus offering more efficient lobbying perspectives for partially-sighted persons in Croatia and Cyprus.

5 Collection of Best Practices on Accessibility



Moving around with a guide dog at the EBU General Assembly

Best practices for Safe and Independent Mobility for Blind and Partially Sighted Persons in Europe were compiled into a brochure. The brochure is available (pdf files) in [English](#), [French](#), [German](#), [Italian](#), [Polish](#), [Portuguese](#), [Russian](#), [Serbian](#), [Spanish](#) and [Turkish](#).

This brochure documents best practices towards independent and safe mobility from across Europe. It is structured in three clusters, which reflect important and interlocking areas of accessible mobility: legislation and standards, built environment and infrastructure and lastly digital solutions.

A short discussion section complements these chapters in order to contextualise some pertinent issues on the safety and independence of mobility for visually impaired persons.

The selected best practice, submitted by our Slovenian member, on [Strategic Accessibility Planning](#), is available (pdf document).

6 Employment and Working for Younger People

6.1 EByouth

This multi-annual activity is led by EBU's member in Italy.

As planned, the national and European young leaders with a visual impairment previously identified in 2018 participated in the three following trainings:

- e-workshop 1 “Getting to know EBU” on 28 March – 15 participants. The EBU team explained how the European Blind Union and its office work (incl. EBU technical terminology) and presented the constraints and limitations of

our network. The expectations of the 7 evaluation respondents were met, either fully or partly.

- e-workshop 2 “Improving your written communication skills” on 09 July – 12 participants. After being introduced with the different types of communication, participants learnt more on addressing different targets in official letters, in press releases as well as on social media. The expectations of the 7 evaluation respondents were met, either fully or partly.
- face-to-face training course 1 “Becoming the voice of visually impaired persons” on 12-13 December in Okroglo (Slovenia) – 4 participants (including one on-line). The session focused on 3 skills to be mastered by future leaders representing their blind and partially-sighted peers at European level, namely public speaking, effective communication and knowledge of EU institutions.

Young leaders will receive further training in 2020 and 2021, along the lines set out in the training outline devised in 2018.

6.2 ADVISE (Aiding Young Visually Impaired Seeking Employment)

This multi-annual activity is led by EBU's member in Spain.

In 2019, pilot countries organised each two training courses (TCs) aimed at 83 young blind and partially-sighted job-seekers as follows:

- Graz (Austria): on 07 February (19 participants) and 11 February (11 participants).
- Podgorica (Montenegro) on 15 May (7 participants) and 18 July (7 participants).
- Warsaw (Poland) on 13 June (8 participants) and 25 September (12 participants).
- Madrid (Spain) on 19-20 November (8 participants) and 29 January 2020 (11 participants).

Further to the TCs, job-seekers were followed individually by coaches who focused their support on the following four areas:

- What I like to do
- What others say I do well
- Tasks I will be paid for
- Tasks needed around me

As a complement, each participant could rely on the EBU manual for inexperienced job-seekers with a visual impairment (now available in English, French, German, Montenegrin and Polish).

A debriefing meeting was eventually held in Paris on 2 December. Feedback received and experience shared between experts, national trainers and/or coaches will enable to improve the quality of the ADVISE trainer manual and the EBU job-seeker manual. Both documents are currently being revised by experts from Finland and Spain before pilot countries train a third group of job-seekers.

EBU's member in Montenegro was willing to carry out this activity. They benefitted from financial support from the EBU Solidarity Fund to implement ADVISE in Montenegro.

In order to share our specific experiences and expertise, promote exchange within networks and combine our voices on common dossiers, we regularly work with partners and friends. These fruitful and friendly collaborations take the form of exchanging expertise to prepare joint position papers, articles or press releases, or responding together to consultations.

Our wide range of activities also allow us to collaborate with third-party organisations (universities, industrial partners, other NGOs).

The collaboration with EDF, the European Disability Forum, is ongoing as we were one of the founder members, together with other disability organisations. EBU is represented in a number of EDF working bodies so that the visual impairment dimension is fully considered. EBU continues to collaborate closely with EDF on a number of important campaigns, and this has proved to be an effective collaboration.

1 International Council for Education of People With Visual Impairment (ICEVI Europe)

In addition to collaborating with EBU on the above-mentioned report on the accessibility of student exchange programs, ICEVI Europe continued to work closely with us, and the two organisations regularly share information through their respective newsletters.

2 Beyond Europe - Worldwide Solidarity

In October 2016, EBU set up the "Solidarity Fund" mainly to support the EBU member countries who are experiencing difficulties in paying their Membership Fees, organizing or participating in projects or meetings.

As repeatedly expressed last year, our members' reduced resources limits the impact of EBU activities. Public support being constantly reduced, some of them are dedicating more time to raise private funding (sponsors, philanthropy).

Any EBU member not eligible for EU (REC) funding now also has the opportunity to join our activities by applying for financial support from the EBU Solidarity Fund. Further details are available from the EBU central office.

In 2019, the EBU Solidarity Fund intervened in the following 3 ways:

- 1.** To support the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty in the Western Balkans. This activity was co-ordinated by the EBU member in Montenegro. Capacity building round tables were held in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. National delegates met with authorities and a final event was held in Podgorica (Montenegro) in February 2019.
- 2.** To fund the participation of our member in Montenegro in a meeting held under ADVISE (see above).
- 3.** To fund the participation of our member in Albania in the 22nd meeting of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

3 Other Activities:

The Onkyo Braille Competition



Reading Braille

EBU runs the European strand of the [Onkyo World Braille Essay Contest](#), an international initiative to promote Braille literacy and to encourage the sharing of social and cultural information among visually impaired people. The contest is sponsored by Onkyo Corporation, a Japanese consumer electronics manufacturer. It was created in 2003 and has been a great success ever since.

In 2019 the First Prize was awarded to **Tamara ANDREEVA**, from Russia, who wrote an original and moving essay entitled '**My Saviour**'.

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The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe



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