

EBU

Annual Report

2018



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

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This annual report will provide an overview about the variety of EBU's activities. It will show the continuity of our many efforts to advance and promote the struggle of blind and partially sighted people throughout Europe for their participation in political, cultural and social life, for equal opportunities on the labour market, for a safe environment in order to gain the best of independent mobility, and many other issues of our work.

After the long and so impatiently awaited Ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty on October 1st 2018 by the European Union, which provides essential relief to the accessibility of literature in standard print to people with a reading disability, EBU members consequently took on the task of lobbying for the implementation of this treaty on national level. Beside this, in this annual report, you will find an overview of the projects that EBU began or continued in order to implement the challenges of its strategic plan for the current work period. You will read about measures to increase gender balance within our organization and our national members, measures to strengthen our campaigning capacity, and you will find descriptions of outstanding targets like - among others - the European Accessibility Act.

The mutual collaboration with organizations who work at similar and/or related issues is another important part of our annual activities to be mentioned in this report.

I like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the EBU board, to thank all those friends and colleagues, who on a volunteer or professional basis have given their reliable and steady support to carry on EBU's mission and fulfill EBU's tasks.

Wolfgang Angermann,
EBU President



EBU President Wolfgang Angermann speaking at the 10th General Assembly

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Introduction By The Executive Director

In 2018, EBU's campaigning picked up significantly thanks to the creation of a new position of Head of Campaigning. This was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Commission. Antoine Fobe was recruited for this position and started in May. A dual Franco-Belgian national, he is a lawyer by training and he is specialised in EU law. He has been active in EU public affairs (lobbying, campaigning and communication) for over 20 years. His experience is essentially in the area of citizens' rights and fundamental rights, with a variety of organisations in Brussels and in Paris.

Before joining the EBU he was employed successively by: the European Commission, to inform the public about EU legislation in the area of employment and social affairs; the European Citizens' Action Service (ECAS), to voice the concerns of EU citizens and their associations to the EU and promote free movement of persons; Amnesty International, to influence the positions of France within the EU, the Council of Europe and the United Nations on human rights matters; the Council of Bars and

Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), to lobby the EU institutions on issues such as minimum common rules for fair trials in Europe; the French data protection authority (CNIL), to influence the text of the General Data Protection Regulation.

Antoine's role is to coordinate the overall campaigning activity of EBU. This involves closely following the campaigns led by some of our Members, leading a couple of campaigns not yet covered and to ensure that the EBU and its campaigns are visible on Twitter. He particularly engages with the members of the Commission for Liaising with the EU (LC).

The [campaigning strategy](#) he developed and tabled at the last meeting of the LC (Obzor, Bulgaria, 29/30 September 2018) looks at a wide range of key campaigning elements, such as, to mention but this one, the decision to campaign on a determined matter. As he puts it, some campaigns will be provoked by initiatives of policy- or law-makers in our area of interest. Other campaigns will be to proactively push the agenda. Ideally there should be a bit of both types of approaches, to underline that the EBU is a partner as well as a pressure group.

Other elements include: defining campaigning goals; the strategy for a campaign; the internal organisation and coordination...

It is the first time in EBU's history that we have a paid member of staff specifically dedicated to managing our campaigning activity. Due to limited resources, our campaigning has so far been conducted based on the so called decentralised approach. Our campaigns were led by our national members, which has its own advantages in terms of membership involvement. It also has its drawbacks – e.g. lack of coordination. From now on, the head of campaigning will coordinate our overall campaigning, he will lend his support to the campaign leaders and he will act as campaign leader for those campaigns which do not have one.

Things are already improving in 2019. 2018 has opened up new perspectives for EBU and for the over 30 million blind and partially sighted persons whose rights will be better protected and promoted thanks to effective campaigning.

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 12 members. In 2018, the Board held 3 meetings, as follows: Prague, Czech Republic, 02-03 February; Lisbon, Portugal, 22-23 June; and Barcelona, Spain, 19-20 October. In addition the officers of the Board held weekly meetings over Skype 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 2018 the permanent EBU staff members were:

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Our financial performance in 2018 leads us to two contradictory conclusions and signals that we must be prudent as we look to the future:

- On the one hand, it is somewhat disappointing that our surplus of €75,974 in 2017 fell to just €5,349 in 2018, for reasons we will explain below;
- On the other hand, and more importantly, we can be satisfied that we adhered rigorously to our budget forecast, which was approved by the Board at the start of the financial year, on both income and expenditure;
- Finally, we must be extremely cautious, since unless we take care, it is likely that we will post a deficit in 2019, forcing us to dip into our reserves, which, while they are adequate today, are not necessarily guaranteed in the future.

If we look first at our main items of expenditure, we can see that:

- Salaries and social security contributions were €309,644 compared with €256,946 last year, i.e. an increase of

€62,698. The figure in the budget forecast was €324,500, which included hiring a new employee, so our estimate was very close to our actual expenditure;

- The rent for our offices in Paris and accountancy fees were in line with our forecasts and remained within very reasonable limits: €30,520 compared with €30,465 in 2017;
- Our other external expenses totalled €127,523 compared with €112,838 in 2017, i.e. an increase of €14,684. Our forecast had been €144,590. The main increases can be explained by greater participation in congresses/conferences (€6,853 compared with €930) and a significant rise in travel costs (€59,627 compared with €23,778). We should remember, however, that a sizeable share of some of these expenses is covered by European funds which, as we will see below, are increasing significantly. A few expenses are decreasing, notably project-related, postal and phone costs.

- Our various projects (ONKYO for €13,822), subsidies (including a grant of €21,385 from the Solidarity Fund compared with just €4,000 in 2017) and depreciation totalled €48,797 compared with €34,612, an increase of €14,185;
- Our total expenditure was therefore €523,884, an increase of €85,423 compared with 2017 but €14,507 lower than the budget forecast.

As in previous years, our main sources of income were:

- The subsidy we are granted by the European Commission, which increased by 28%, from €197,958 to €253,354;
- Member subscriptions, which remained stable at €232,900;
- The ONKYO project for €22,728;
- €3,096 in interest received compared with €347 last year.

- It is sad to see that contributions from our members to the Solidarity Fund have been steadily falling, from €10,000 in 2016, to €7,000 the year after and just €4,300 this year. The donations we received in 2018 totalled just €7,000, compared with €27,000 the previous year.

Our total income (estimated at €535,490 in the budget forecast) was €529,233 compared with €514,436, an increase of €14,797.

As indicated at the start of this document, our surplus was €5,349.

If we look at the main figures on the balance sheet, we see that at 31 December 2018:

- We had €621,825 in our various bank accounts;
- Our reserves were €166,826 in the Solidarity Fund, €22,741 in the African Solidarity Trust Fund and €438,447 in our own reserves, which is very satisfactory.

Conclusion - While we can be reasonably optimistic in the short and medium term, we must continue to exercise caution and in particular:

- Adhere to the budget forecast agreed each year and avoid any additional or non-essential expenditure;
- Continue the work to implement the sponsorship policy that we began in 2018, thanks to the efforts of our Project Officer;
- Remind our members that our activities in Europe concern the day-to-day lives of all blind and partially sighted people on the continent and that they rely on the active involvement and financial and moral support of everyone. I would like to end this report by warmly thanking each of our members for paying the subscription requested from them in 2018, which is greatly appreciated by your Treasurer.

Philippe CHAZAL

Treasurer, European Blind Union

As a European network, EBU wants to improve internal communication with its members through transparent and harmonised use of EBU technical terminology. To this end, a “Glossary of terms and acronyms in common use by the European Blind Union” was developed with a view to ensuring that EBU members, staff and close associates understand the same thing when specific terms are used. As a complement, 35 participants from 8 countries attended a “Getting to know EBU” e-workshop on 5 July. They were shown how the European Blind Union and its office work, the constraints and limitations faced and current campaigns and projects.

Also, with the aim of empowering our members and helping them in both their national and EBU-related international campaigning work, we developed the first of many future how-to memos, focusing this year on drafting position papers, and later held a complementary e-workshop.

1 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.

2 Flash News

The Flash news, a tool designed for internal communication purposes, is aiming at rapidly informing all our members about important news and ongoing activities. This tool allows for regular communication on our day-to-day activities in a quick and convenient way. In 2018, 6 flash news were produced and released.

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, which was completely redesigned in 2017, is now a modern and accessible communication tool adapted to use on mobile devices. It used for news updates, offers details of our campaigns and activities, as well as general information concerning the role and function of EBU.

2 The EBU Newsletter

In 2018 the [EBU newsletters](#) were completely reconsidered, in order to better reflect the needs of its members, with a monthly members-only newsletter, and a three-monthly newsletter named EBU Focus, translated into 4 languages and aimed at a much wider audience. Each Focus newsletter is an in-depth examination of an

issue of importance for the blind and partially sighted community. Following this new plan, in 2018, EBU produced 11 members newsletters, (there is no newsletter in July to account for the holiday period). 4 EBU Focus newsletters were produced and looked at the following topics, 'Young Blind and partially Sighted People; Challenges and Opportunities', the Marrakesh Treaty, Rail Travel and finally 'Blind and Partially-Sighted persons' Employment in Europe'.

3 EBU Responses to EU Consultations

In 2018 EBU published 4 [Position Papers](#) on topics including the European Accessibility Act and employment measures.

As a complement to this work, we developed the first of many future how-to memos, focusing this year on drafting position papers, and we held a complementary e-workshop.

4 EBU Press Releases

9 [press releases](#) were published in 2018, covering a wide range of issues from the EBU and European agendas.

5 The EBU Access Cast

A new and innovative communication activity was launched by EBU in 2018; a podcast by and for blind and partially sighted people focussing on new technological developments. As with any entirely new media project, adaptations had to be made as the podcast evolved, nevertheless [6 podcasts were produced in 2018](#). These looked at both niche and mainstream products of particular

interest to BPS users but also on EU legal developments (web accessibility directive, European Accessibility Act, revision of EU Standards for public procurement of ICT products and services are available). With an average number of 75 listeners per episode, the podcast, recently quoted in a [CNN article](#), will continue to evolve and become a feature of EBU communication. In the future, it is expected that guests will also contribute and contributions are welcome and encouraged.



Screenshot of the EBU access Cast.

The key campaigns conducted by EBU and the LC in 2018 included:

1 The European Accessibility Act

The European Parliament and the EU Council entered in informal ('trilogue') negotiations in March 2018. The Council's text for the directive was far from meeting our expectations, while the Parliament's text – better on most issues – nevertheless presented some important gaps.

We promoted the better of the three texts while underlining insufficiencies, and at the same time called on the Parliament to hold strong to their position where it was better than the Council's. We had regular contacts and some meetings with the Parliament's Rapporteur and Shadows, and we incited our national members to write to their governments and MEPs (particularly but not only in the lead committee IMCO). We used Twitter to communicate with the rapporteurs and the most vocal MEPs, as well as with the Bulgarian and Austrian presidencies of the Council, and also to build pressure through visibly gathering messages of support from various stakeholders.

Those of our members active on Twitter were also incited to target their own national decision-makers through Twitter. We published a [position paper](#) jointly with a [press release](#) in February, as well as a "[fact-sheet](#)" in April to inform the trilogue negotiators. After a few rounds of trilogue, just before the summer, it appeared that the negotiations were stalled due to the absence of negotiating mandate for the Bulgarian presidency on the pending and most problematic issue: the scope of the EAA. Our campaigning efforts then concentrated on pushing the negotiators to reach an agreement by the European Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), and to deliver on the expectations raised among blind and partially sighted persons by the initiative of a 'horizontal' accessibility act. We issued a [press release](#) in July to urge the Austrian presidency, and again in September an open letter with EDF and 20 other European organisations, with a [press release](#), ahead of the relevant COREPER meeting at the Council. A provisional political agreement was eventually reached on 8 November by the negotiators of the two institutions, under the impetus of the Austrian presidency.

We welcomed this positive development, after difficult negotiations, but expressed disappointment that the agreement falls far short of the horizontal act initially contemplated – see our press release of 11 November.

The informal political agreement resulting from the trilogue has already been approved respectively by the IMCO committee and the Committee of Permanent Representatives EAA. It looks set to be formally adopted in the first quarter of 2019, after approval by the Parliament Plenary and the Council of Ministers. This campaign is led by EBU's member in Germany, DBSV.

2 “Right to read” Campaign

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

In 2018, we continued to focus on the EU ratification of the WIPO Marrakesh Treaty, aiming to facilitate access to published works for, amongst others, blind and partially-sighted persons. Our efforts also concerned the transposition at national level of the EU's Marrakesh Treaty-related Directive.

We issued and circulated to key MEPs a [press release](#) ahead of the European Parliament's discussion and vote, on 18 January, on whether to enable the ratification of the Treaty. The vast majority of the European Parliament voted in favour, opening the way for the Council to ratify the Treaty; and on 13 February the Council adopted a decision approving the conclusion of the Treaty, effectively enabling the EU to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty. The focus of our campaigning then shifted on the transposition of the directive laying out the rules for the implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty in national legislation. In joint lobbying efforts, the EBU central office and our national members called EU countries not to opt for “compensation rights” – denounced as a “tax on accessible works” – for rights-holders and publishers, and not to impose a requirement for authorised institutions to be on an agreed list. Eventually the EU ratified the Treaty on 1st October, shortly anticipating the date (12 October) of entry into force of the related EU regulation and directive, as well as the deadline (11 October) for the transposition of the directive in the laws of the EU countries.

EBU was represented by our Spanish campaign leader at the ratification ceremony at WIPO and we issued a [press release](#) on that occasion. At the end of the year, we continued to urge the EU countries that had not yet implemented the directive despite the 11 October deadline, to do so without delay – at the end of the year, there were still five – and to voice our recommendations for the implementation.

To our knowledge, so far, only four countries have opted for a scheme of compensation for rights-holders: Austria and Germany, as well as – only for audio-books – Denmark and Finland. We have less visibility on which countries are imposing a requirement for authorised institutions to be on an agreed list and will continue to monitor this into 2019, after that the Marrakesh Treaty became binding on its Member States on 1st January 2019.

3 “Silent Vehicles” Campaign

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

At the beginning of 2018, the EU had adopted most of the updated UN

Regulations on Acoustic Vehicle Alert Systems (AVAS) into its legal framework. The only missing legal element was a definitive ban on the pause switch. In addition, there is a general lack of awareness regarding the dangers of silent vehicles for visually impaired road users.

In May 2018, represented by our German campaign leader, we addressed this topic in a presentation at the International Transport Forum in Leipzig. In October 2018, we commented via ANEC on the first draft of the delegated regulation by the European Commission regarding the ban on the pause switch. In November 2018, we released an awareness-raising document [Questions and Answers on AVAS](#) and the relevant legal framework in EU Regulation 540/2014, clearly describing the issues, the legal progress and state of play, and our ongoing concerns; this document has been translated by several EBU Members for national use. In December 2018, the EBU Campaign Lead contributed an editorial to the magazine “Government Europe”, spelling out remaining demands for the coming years.

We also circulated the Q&As in connection with an animated Christmas/New Year greetings card sensitising on the danger of silent cars, playing with the tune “Silent Night”.

At the turn of the year, 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 N°138.01, and prepared its response to the corresponding consultation in January 2019.

4 Accessibility of Payment Terminals

At the end of 2017, both the Council and the Parliament had included payment terminals in the scope of the EAA, partly due to our related advocacy efforts in 2017 through the dedicated ‘Pay-Able’ campaign.

Our action in 2018 therefore consisted essentially in monitoring developments and recalling our position every once and then, to make sure that this achievement would not be questioned in the ongoing legislative process. In fact it never was and at the end of 2018 we were waiting for the EAA to be formally adopted (see above).

In parallel, we also continued to lobby for accessibility-minded standardisation of payment terminals on a European level, particularly in the context of the Austrian presidency of the EU. The Pay-Able campaign was presented during the 16th International Conference on Computers Helping People with Special Needs (ICCHP) in July Linz, as well as at the first Accessible Europe: ICT for ALL conference in Vienna in December.

5 Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS)

The new EBU Head of Campaigning acted as leader in what was essentially a lobbying activity.

Given the failure of previous non-legislative approaches, EBU had called for a strengthening of article 7 on accessibility in the revised AVMS Directive. Unexpectedly the Commission had proposed to delete the article, leaving to the newly proposed European Accessibility Act to set the obligation to make AVMS accessible for persons with disabilities.

Fortunately, in their respective amendments, both the Parliament and the Council agreed to keep and strengthen the article. The trilogue negotiations ran well into 2018.

In 2018, our lobbying consisted in monitoring the largely satisfactory state of play of the negotiations on Article 7, while expressing support for the Parliament amendments for consultation of disabled people's organisations – but not to the point of putting the agreement reached so far at risk. Eventually, when a final provisional political agreement was reached in April, we expressed our support with rapporteurs and shadows and key MEPs within the CULT committee of the Parliament, in e-mails jointly with our relevant national members as well as through Twitter. In July, the lead committee of the Parliament approved the agreement, and we continued to express our support for the text ahead of the plenary vote. After the European Parliament's approval on 2 October, the EU Council approved in turn, on 6 November, leading to the formal adoption of the revised directive – which we welcomed a [press release](#) of 8 November.

The new directive entered in force 18 December, date from which Member States will have 21 months to transpose it into national legislation. We will support our national members to secure a meaningful transposition.

6 The Campaign for Full Accessibility of Lifts

This campaign is led by EBU's member in Austria, BSVÖ in close collaboration with ANEC (European consumer voice in standardization), EDF and AGE.

Following the Conciliation Panel in December 2017, which rejected ANEC's request not to publish it, we anticipated that the updated EU standard for accessible lifts (EN 81-70), eventually published on 16 May 2018, would be disappointing, namely due to insufficient colour-contrast requirements for operating buttons.

We nevertheless continued to support ANEC, through providing expertise on the perspective of blind and partially-sighted persons, to maintain pressure on CCMC (CEN CENELEC Management Centre) about the Conciliation

Panel's decision to revise the standard should the study to be conducted by an independent research organisation confirm that the contrast values are insufficient.

However, our lobbying in 2018 also (increasingly) targeted the basic lift standard (EN 81-20) as part of the "Design for all" approach – which requires to mainstream accessibility standards – asking for accessibility requirements to be included in the basic lift standard EN 81-20 instead of having a separate standard for accessibility largely ignored by business anyway. Besides, we closely monitored and supported the approval in national standardisation organisations of the European Draft standard EN 17161 about Accessibility following a Design for All approach (yet to be published).

We hoped that a revision of the European Lifts Directive would provide another opportunity for influencing legislation, but we learned in December that, based on the final report on the evaluation of the Lifts Directive, the Commission finds no reason to revise the directive. However, before proceeding with the publication of the reference to EN 81-20:2018 in the OJ, the relevant

unit invited us to provide a technical position paper explaining why we feel the revised EU standard for accessible lifts does not meet the test of universal design and was not elaborated taking into account the views namely of disabled persons organisations. We started to prepare our response, to be submitted by the end of February 2019. It is crucial to improve EN 81-70 as it is expected to form the basis for an ISO (EN 8100-XX) world-wide standard in the making.

7 Campaigning Capacity-Building Training

On 5-6 October, 12 national campaigners from 8 countries attended a Training Course (TC) on effective campaigning skills in Paris (France). Although each campaign requires a different approach and different tactics, they were trained to use common rules summarized into a step-by-step guide and an influencing toolkit. The second day was the opportunity for participants to design a mock campaign. An internal evaluation revealed that 75% of participants reported feeling ready to use what they learnt back in their countries.

The e-workshop on the Marrakesh Treaty (MT) was eventually replaced by a physical TC held in Okroglo, Slovenia, on 30 November and 1 December.

Co-funded by the Open Society Foundations and attended by 37 participants and speakers from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and Spain, the TC aimed to provide support to stakeholders involved in the MT ratification and implementation in the Balkan region. Representatives from national visual impairment organisations, libraries for the blind and ministries discovered the treaty in-depth (including the long-standing EBU campaign) and support tools (e.g. WBU guide) were presented to them. They also exchanged on the situation in their country and how to improve it, in particular through regional coordination. Skype presentations from WIPO and the Electronic Information for Libraries network (EIFL) also enabled the perspectives to be broadened and mainstreamed the discussions to other population categories directly

befitting from the Treaty. An internal evaluation revealed that 100% of participants reported feeling ready to use what they learnt back in their countries.

8 Other Campaigning Topics

EBU's campaigning work also included:

- [Response to a Commission consultation on long-term unemployment;](#)
- Response to a Commission consultation on Implementing Decisions of the Web Accessibility Directive;
- [Response to a Commission consultation on automated driving;](#)
- Lobbying the European Parliament jointly with the Federation of European Publishers for an accessible books-mindful Horizon Europe Regulation – see [joint press release](#) in May;
- Preparation of an EBU Statement for the European elections 2019;

- Support of the petition launched by the European Disability Forum on 3 December, calling for action from EU Governments to ensure accessible voting in 2019.

Held in Obzor (Bulgaria) on 28-29 September, the meeting was attended by delegates from 20 countries.

Twitter – Illustrating the importance taken by this social network in campaigning, the management and running of the EBU Twitter account was entrusted to the new Head of Campaigning. The twittering is a combination of reaching out to decision-makers and the press on our EU policy and legislation related concerns, and connecting with as wide a public as possible of stakeholders, to hear their views and inform them of our activities. We successfully experimented an EBU-coordinated sensitisation campaign in November and December with a set of 10 “digital accessibility tips” prepared by the French Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted and translated by most of our other members present on Twitter.

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.

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

To continue its long running work on the UNCRPD, EBU delivered an [analytical report on article 26](#) of the UNCRPD ‘Habilitation and rehabilitation - Monitoring the Rights of Blind and Partially-Sighted People in Europe’ based on data collected from 17 countries.

During the same period new data was collected on article 33 “National implementation and monitoring”, with a view to producing a future report.

The result of the questionnaires and all EBU work on the UNCRPD can be found on the EBU [UNCRPD webpage](#).

1.1 UNCRPD Training and Awareness-raising

Following up on the publication in 2017 of the EBU publication entitled [“The UNCRPD - A new look at our human rights”](#) and the subsequent information sessions in the second half of 2017 to inform blind and partially sighted citizens on their

fundamental rights as enshrined in their national legislation and deriving from the UNCRPD, further sessions were held in Portugal and Lithuania. A total of 11 people participated in the three sessions in 2018.



Participants at a UNCRPD information session in Lisbon

2 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.

To begin this work, 24 out of the 41 EBU members responded to an internal survey on gender equality. From a governance perspective, while EBU organisations'

women membership is 55% on average, only 9 responding countries have at least 41% of women elected as national board members. Also, the share of women presidents is higher at the regional level than at the national level. From an operational perspective, 14 out of 24 survey participants have or have had activities during the past years intended specifically for women. Respondents also made the following 4 recommendations to improve gender equality within EBU work: /1 empower women within EBU member organisations, 2/ arrange equal representation in decision-making bodies (e.g. changing the meeting procedures to make them more transparent and logical), 3/ involve men in the process, 4/ reaffirm gender equality as a cross-cutting issue.

Following on from this phase, an e-workshop was held in October. Aimed at the members of the EBU Nominations Committee, it highlighted their instrumental role in rebalancing women's

representation in the EBU Board to be elected during the EBU 2019 General Assembly.

Finally, a face-to-face training course was organised in Vienna (Austria) on 10 and 11 November. Board members from 7 EBU member countries discussed the survey report and learnt concrete gender equality empowerment practices (such as master suppression techniques).

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

3 Low Vision

It was decided that from 2018 onwards EBU should organise an annual conference to federate its members around a specific theme. The first of these conferences was on low vision. Held in Lasko (Slovenia) on 15-17 June it was entitled "Low Vision Services, A Global Right - Setting the Standards in Europe".

The conference aimed to both facilitate the implementation of EBU Standards for Low Vision services throughout Europe and to help create/strengthen national low vision networks.



A group photo of participants in the conference

70 low vision and partially-sighted persons, rehabilitation professionals, ophthalmologists, optometrists and orthoptists from 25 countries attended the event and exchanged on a wide range of topics including improving access to and delivery of low vision service delivery (e.g. through better staff training and multidisciplinary teams), increasing lobbying towards their full implementation (in particular following a human rights-based approach), broadening the membership of national visual impairment organisations to individuals with moderate low vision. Good practice and experience sharing was a core feature of the event



Participants discuss on stage at the low vision conference

4 Working for Elderly Blind and Partially Sighted People

A new activity entitled AGEBU was implemented to collect blind and partially sighted seniors' needs at grassroots level and develop tailor-made programmes so as to increase their independent living and participation in society.

6 focus groups on elderly blind and partially-sighted persons' needs were held in Austria, Croatia and Romania, and information collected was then compiled into 3 national project concept notes which noted the differences resulting from national contexts. In Croatia, blind and partially sighted seniors favour social empowerment and experience sharing. In Romania, they focus on formally learning and improving use of technologies accessible to blind and partially sighted persons. In Austria, elderly visually impaired persons wanted their leisure opportunities (e.g. accessible tourism) to be increased.



Participants in an AGEBU focus group

Experts then met in Vienna on 14 September to discuss further transnational project opportunities.

5 Working for Younger People

5.1 EByouth

In order to broaden awareness of EBU amongst member organisations and encourage the involvement of young people in our work and decision-making procedures, EBU initiated the EByouth activity. This helps to identify future leaders in the up-and-coming generation of our members.

Following the call for young BPS leaders launched amongst our members in June, 16 appointments for national leaders were automatically accepted. Also, 10 applications for the position of EByouth Team Member (i.e. European leader) were received out of which 7 (written application stage) and then 4 (interview stage) were selected. Finally, the successful candidates from Bulgaria, Croatia, Iceland and Slovenia and their nominating associations were asked to confirm their commitment, a preliminary step before the official announcement to the EBU Board in February 2019.

6 Employment

6.1 Good Practices

Good practices on blind and partially - sighted persons' employment in Europe from 14 countries were compiled into a brochure available in 10 languages (CZ, DE, EN, ES, FR, IT, PL, PT, RS, TR). The brochure covers a wide range of themes including coaching, peer mentoring, measuring distance to labour market, awareness-raising amongst colleagues, intermediation between employers and job-seekers, comprehensive database of lifelong learning opportunities or pre-employment training (mobility, ICTs). It also provides a list of positions occupied by visually impaired persons. This activity was lead by EBU's member in France.

A jury also voted to decide the most pertinent contributions from the 14 received,



Members of the jury with a representative of RNIB, first prize winner

based on the following criteria: originality, transferability and report clarity. The winners of the competition were, 1st UK, 2nd Germany and 3rd Italy.

6.2 Aiding Young Visually Impaired Seeking Employment (ADVISE)

As part of its ongoing work to improve the employment prospects of blind and partially sighted citizens, and youth in particular, employment experts from Finland and Spain devised a 15-page training manual for future national trainers. It explains how to be a trainer and implement a successful coaching approach, and provides an agenda for a 1-day training course aimed at 9 to 15 blind or partially-sighted job-seekers. They will also be able to rely on the updated version of the [EBU manual for inexperienced visually impaired job-seekers](#), now including a specific section entitled "New ways of job searching in the digital age".

5 trainers from 4 pilot countries (Austria, Montenegro, Poland and Spain) then received specific instructions in Paris (France) on 13/12 with a view to organizing their first courses in 2019.

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

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. The chairman of our Commission for Liaising with the EU is also a member of EDF's Executive. 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 - Solidarity with our friends worldwide

As mentioned above in the finance section, 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. Further details are available from the EBU central office.

3 Other activities:

3.1 The Onkyo Braille competition

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 blind and visually impaired people. The contest is sponsored by Onkyo Corporation, a Japanese consumer electronics manufacturer and the Braille Mainichi, part of Mainichi Newspaper Company in Japan. It was created in 2003 and has been a great success ever since.

In 2018 the First Prize was awarded to Annette Akkerman from the Netherlands, who wrote an essay entitled '**Kasfia, a girl with a dream**'.

3.2 'Dine in the Dark' Event at the European Parliament

On 28 November, at the initiative of our Irish member NCBI and with EBU support, a blindfolded dinner was organised by Austrian MEP at the European Parliament,

gathering some 60 participants (MEPs, business representatives namely from the healthcare sector, a representative of the Austrian Permanent Representation to the EU). The aim was to sensitise the participants to the difficulties of blind and partially sighted persons. The event was attended by the Executive Director together with the head of campaigning of EBU who presented our current main concerns. USB key sticks with EBU logo and a selection of relevant recent EBU publications were handed out to all participants.



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe



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