



Compensation rights for visual disabilities

● The current situation

Blindness and severe sight loss have always been considered by the World Health Organisation as particularly serious disabilities. People receive 80% of information in visual forms, and this figure is almost certainly under-evaluated in a world where images are omnipresent in our daily lives through Internet, multimedia, software and imaging applications;

The end of the 1970s was an important stage in the social integration of people with disabilities; society finally became aware of their needs and aptitudes. Many countries, especially in Europe, adopted laws encouraging educational and professional inclusion to improve the daily lives of disabled people.

In more recent times the concept of “universal accessibility” has appeared and this works towards the same goals, creating obligations to make public highways, transport, buildings and the digital environment accessible to people with disabilities.

In spite of this undeniable progress, blind people and those with serious sight loss still encounter obstacles to complete autonomy which they can only overcome with the assistance of a third party and/or assistive devices which are often very expensive.



What follows are just a few examples showing how difficult or often impossible it is for a blind person to carry out the basic acts which form a part of everyone's daily life:

- sewing, ironing, housework, preparing meals;
- bookkeeping, reading and filing mail and administrative documents;
- daily upkeep of a home: minor plumbing electrical or decorating work;
- orientation in large shops or on unknown routes, driving a car;
- helping young children to do homework, cultural activities...

This is far from being a complete list.

To overcome these difficulties, the following methods have to be used:

- employment of a third party, often for two or three hours a day, and having to use tradesmen even for minor jobs;
- use of specialised adapted transport services if these are available in the local community, or otherwise having to use taxis;
- living in the centre of towns, shopping in local shops and having shopping delivered;
- getting around with the help of a guide dog involving all the related costs of upkeep;
- permanent use of technical aids with braille or vocal applications: scales thermometers, watches and alarm clocks, adapted toys, screen reader software, braille printers...

2 EBU's position

THE EUROPEAN BLIND UNION ASKS:

- a That the numerous countries that have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, apply it strictly and without delay in particular articles 9, 19, 20 and 21 in order to enable blind and partially sighted people to become autonomous in their daily lives;
- b That a flat-rate allowance, based on the living standards of each country, be given to all blind people to compensate for the specific costs related to their disability;
- c That people with serious visual defects also receive a similar allowance, the amount of which should be based on their real compensation requirements;
- d That these flat rate allowances, which may vary according to the age of the person (child, adult or elderly), should be completely independent to the financial situation of the person and that of their family, so as not to discourage those who are able to do so from working;
- e That these allowances should cover expenses related to:
 - the employment of a third party for a minimum number of hours per week, paid on the base of a regularly reviewed hourly rate;
 - specific costs (upkeep, transport, accommodation) calculated in a reasonable way;
 - the acquirement of the necessary technical aids, sophisticated and simple, or specific items which a blind and partially sighted person needs in their daily lives, based on current market values;
 - use of a guide dog, and all the related costs faced by the owner: upkeep, food, veterinary costs;
- f That these minimum allowances can be increased according the specific needs of the person objectively evaluated by an independent multidisciplinary team composed of medical, paramedical and social staff and members of associations representing blind and partially sighted people;
- g That specific schemes, independent to the individual compensation allowance, be made available to cover costs incurred by the blind or partially sighted person in their working environment. These schemes should be financed by the employer;
- h That these allowances, once established, cannot be reduced simple due to an economic crisis such as that which is currently affecting many countries.

3 What needs to be done

MANY COUNTRIES IN EUROPE HAVE ALREADY ESTABLISHED AN ALLOWANCE FOR BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED PEOPLE DESIGNED TO COMPENSATE THEIR DISABILITY:

- In France, the monthly amount of the "Disability Compensation Allowance" allowance is 620 euros;
- In Italy, the "Assistance Allowance" for totally blind people is 864 euros per month, it's 200 euros for visually impaired people with a degree of vision less than 1.20; a higher allowance is also paid for deafblind people;
- In Switzerland, the "Disability Compensation Allowance" is monthly 385 euros;
- And last, in Serbia and Montenegro, a monthly allowance is paid for blind people, the amount is 260 euros.

These examples of good practice should be used to encourage all countries which do not yet have such schemes to put them into place. EBU will continue to play a major role in this procedure.

contact us :

www.euroblind.org
ebu@euroblind.org

