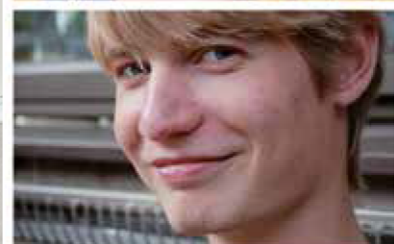
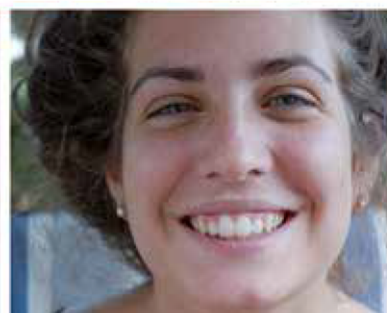


# EBU

# Annual Report

# 2014



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

Pictures: Soffis textbyrå, ArtCo, Sight Savers International,  
Harry Geyskens, EBU archive

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# A Word From The President

The European Blind Union (EBU) is a non-governmental, non-profit making European organisation founded in 1984. It is one of the six regional bodies of the World Blind Union, and it promotes the interests of blind people and people with low vision in Europe. It currently operates within a network of 44 national members covering virtually the whole of geographical Europe and including organisations from 27 European Union member states.

EBU aims at a community where people who are blind or partially sighted are empowered to participate on an equal basis in any aspect of life they choose. Therefore EBU's major mission and role is:

- To promote and represent the interests of all blind and partially sighted people in Europe, including those with additional disabilities, with the goal of achieving the full enjoyment of their rights as citizens and their active participation in society.
- To promote improvements in the quality of life of blind and partially sighted people in Europe.
- To provide a European forum for exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of blindness and partial sight.
- To encourage, carry out and coordinate research into all aspects of blindness and partial sight.
- To work in partnership with other international organisations to promote the prevention and cure of visual impairment.
- To assist and empower organisations working in the field of blind welfare throughout Europe.

This mission and role implies the following values and principles:

- A particular focus on the human rights and needs of blind and partially sighted people while fully cooperating with those with other disabilities on issues common to all disabled people.
- Equality of participation and treatment as between persons of both genders, all ages and all degrees of visual impairment.

## A Word From The President

- Concern for the welfare and advancement of blind and partially sighted people in developing countries.
- A double-track approach to enable a society for all and to promote the provision of best in class quality of specialist services in support of an inclusive society.
- A balanced approach based on human rights, non-discrimination and positive action.
- The availability of information in format of choice at the same time as sighted people and without extra cost.
- The accessibility of ICT, manufactured goods, television, transport systems and the built environment, and the development of standards on the basis of design for all principles.
- The full inclusion of blind and partially sighted people in all educational settings, ranging from the classroom to the web and distance learning.
- Pursuit of our goals in partnership with those with similar objectives whilst retaining our specificity.

- In all our activities we commit ourselves to a most effective and economical usage of all financial means that are at our disposal.

This annual report for 2014 will outline EBU's efforts and measures taken to ensure the best possible implementation of our constitutional goals, values, and principles.

Wolfgang Angermann,  
EBU President



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# Introduction

## By The Executive Director

As you will read from this report, 2014 has proved an active year full of developments and achievements.

EBU will hold its four-yearly general assembly in London on 26/28 October 2015. The Board started work in 2014 to prepare for this milestone in the life of EBU and engaged in discussions with our host, the Royal National Institute of Blind People, UK, to agree arrangements to be made.

It also looked at structural changes to be approved at the 2015 assembly, with a twofold objective:

2014 ended with a deficit. Although the situation is not critical and our finances are sound, being proactive is of the essence.

The Board worked on a new financial structure with a view to securing more funds to maintain and develop the work of EBU.

It also looked at ways to make our working structure more effective and achieve even more than we do. So 2014 was a year of active strategic thinking which should result in structural reforms to be implemented in 2015 and beyond.

One outstanding development is the strengthening of EBU's campaigning. In 2014 we resolutely engaged in making our voice heard on Twitter. This has had an immediate effect on the quality and force of our campaigns. We have won significant battles but the state of play regarding our major issues – the European Accessibility Act, the accessible website directive, the Marrakesh Treaty... is still one of opposition and reluctance to listen to our asks. But we know that political campaigns seldom bear fruits overnight and we will continue fighting until blind and partially sighted people's rights are addressed in fit for purpose EU and national legislation.

Another outstanding achievement in 2014 is the amount of research conducted by EBU commissions and networks. This covers a variety of topics, ranging from rehabilitation standards for people with low vision to combatting violence against women with a visual impairment and the rehabilitation of elderly visually impaired people with acquired sight loss. It has not been possible to report on all activities but this

## Introduction By The Executive Director

is not to mean that the bodies not mentioned did not work well in 2014. Most of them provided a useful platform for the exchange of information and expertise.

A number of work items were initiated in 2014 and even earlier and will be continued or concluded in 2015. So be on the watch for next year's report!

Mokrane Boussaïd,  
EBU Executive Director



EBU Executive Director Mokrane Boussaïd meeting  
French MEP José Bové in Brussels

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# How EBU Works

The European Blind Union is a non-governmental organisation promoting the 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. However in early 2014 the Latvian Society of the Blind decided to discontinue its membership of EBU for financial reasons. Also during 2014 the Belgian Confederation for the Blind and Partially Sighted, our member in Belgium was dissolved. As a result of this we are pleased to welcome the new Belgian national member, Ligue Braille, based in Brussels. EBU now has [44 members](#).

While the General Assembly of Members held every four years is our governing body, our work is directed by an Executive Board of 13 members. In 2014 the number of Board members went down to 11 following the resignation of Tommaso Daniele, Italy, on 16 January and of Peter Osborne, UK, on 04 March. It was agreed not to

fill the vacant seats. In 2014, the Board held 5 meetings, as follows: Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 24-26 January, Larnaka, Cyprus, 7-8 June and Prague, Czech Republic, 12-14 September. It also held 2 “virtual” meetings on 8 April and 4 December.

EBU works on a wide range of areas through various Commissions who lead the work and provide advice and expertise. The Executive Board appoints the Commission’s chairpersons and selects the members for their knowledge, skills and expertise in the relevant field.

For the 2011-2015 period the Executive Board appointed nine Commissions to provide advice in different areas of expertise and to ensure that all the strategic objectives assigned to them are properly addressed in their work. For 2014, the priorities and activities of these Commissions greatly varied from one to another, depending on the relevant developments in their respective areas.

EBU’s activities are also facilitated through Networks, established to address the needs of specific segments of the visually impaired

## How EBU Works

(VI) population, as well as to collect and share information and ideas that can support EBU's work. Finally, part of the work is also carried out with the direct support of national member organisations.

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.

### **1** The role of the EBU Central Office.

EBU Central Office supports the Board, 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, within the offices of the French Federation of the Blind and the Visually Impaired, à verifier (FAF).

Headed by the Executive Director, EBU's central office team is composed of three other staff

members and exceptionally in 2014, EBU welcomed for 6 months Victoria Armitage, on a part-time internship. Victoria works for RNIB in England and spent her time with EBU in Paris compiling a report on EBU membership to enable us to know more about our members. In 2014 the permanent EBU staff members were:

#### **Mokrane Boussaïd**

Executive Director

E: [ebudirector@euroblind.org](mailto:ebudirector@euroblind.org)

#### **Romain Ferretti**

Project Officer

E: [ebuprojects@euroblind.org](mailto:ebuprojects@euroblind.org)

#### **Gary May**

Information Officer

E: [ebuinfocom@euroblind.org](mailto:ebuinfocom@euroblind.org)

#### **Michèle Rasolofo**

Office Assistant (**Michèle will be leaving EBU in June 2015**)

E: [ebusecretariat@euroblind.org](mailto:ebusecretariat@euroblind.org)

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# Finances

The final audited accounts for 2014 show a deficit of 31673 €; we had a surplus of 1882 € in 2013. This is a significant tendency inversion we had forecast in our 2014 provisional budget, but we had assessed the deficit to be at 17000 €. So it increased much faster than we expected.

This deficit is mainly due to a fall in the operating income, from 637729 € in 2013 to 590339 € in 2014.

The project grants slightly increased to 199365 € in 2014, against 195989 € in 2013.

Collected membership fees and contributions slightly increased from 182390 € in 2013 to 188751 € in 2014. However they account for less than one third of the operating income of our organisation and remain far from the threshold of 40% that we consider to be indispensable to ensure a greater stability of our financial resources.

Salaries are stable: 174845 € in 2014 against 174307 € in 2013.

The Project expenses increased from 297592 € in 2014 to 265931 € in 2013. In addition, EBU now rents its offices and subcontracts its accounting to the French Federation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

The total expenses went up from 584562 € in 2013 to 628910 € in 2014.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014, our cash at bank amounted to 483791 €, against 602747 € in 2013. This is nothing to worry about since this apparent deterioration is the result of anticipated payments for project activities. Our reserves amount to 516378 €.

The following Three conclusions can be drawn:

The finances of EBU are well managed, with a notable containment of expenditures including salaries.

Although we still have good reserves, the financial situation of EBU is deteriorating.

Our income remains insufficient and it is becoming urgent that we come up with solutions regarding both the membership fees and the search for diversified sources of funding.

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# EBU And Its Members - Internal Communication

EBU is mindful of the need to establish good communication between its constituent bodies. This is essential if we want to ensure optimal participation, avoid duplication and create synergies. We are using the following communication tools to achieve this.

## 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 2014, 19 flash news were produced and released.

## 3 The Liaison Commission “Bulletin”

Produced by the Spanish member of the Liaison Commission to explain and give information on actions carried out in the framework of the European institutions, the Bulletin is prepared on a quarterly basis and is a valuable tool for informing members of the Commission on the work in progress. Divided by working areas, such as non-discrimination, information society, transport or employment and social affairs, depending on news and progresses, it provides deep insights on the latest relevant EU legislative developments and an overview of the actions carried out by EBU. The last chapter generally contains a selection of brief news of interest for our members. In 2014, four Bulletins were produced.

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# EBU's External Communication

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 [Euroblind website](#) provides quality information, key updates and news on our work. Regularly updated, it represents a key element of our communication activities. Its sections include organisational and historical aspects, how we are organised and how we work, as well as a presentation of our priority working areas and projects. It is also a central source of useful documents and publications in relation to the blind and partially sighted community throughout Europe.

During 2014 EBU considerably reinforced its presence on social media, continuing regular updates of its facebook page while becoming much more engaged in Twitter, which is proving to be a valuable campaign tool.

## 2 The EBU newsletter

Our Newsletter is one of our most important tools to share information. Its content covers relevant news items from all EBU members and key lobbying projects and campaigns. Displaying a common structure, the newsletters are divided into varied sections, including EU updates, a selection of national news items from EBU members, events and ongoing projects, announcements, and other feature articles on issues of international importance. Published online every two months in four languages (English, French, German and Spanish) with the financial support of the EC, the English version is also available for download in accessible Word “.doc” file. In 2014, EBU produced six newsletters.

The “EU updates” focused on several key issues such as the developments related to the accessibility of public websites, and on public procurement where EBU won a longstanding European campaign as the European Parliament approved the final draft of a new Directive on Public Procurement. A major part of this



## EBU's External Communication

section was given over to the EBU Blind Date event in the European parliament, which will be detailed below.

The features included a details of a French survey on guide dog users' access to public places, showing the problems which are still to be overcome. We also published The Noise File, a feature on EBU's ongoing campaign to improve to safety of silent electric vehicles. Other issues focussed on the 2014 Onkyo World Braille Essay Contest, and on the successful completion of the VISAL project to improve the independence of elderly people suffering from sight loss, more on this project, which is an important strand of EBU's work, below.

### 3 EBU position papers and responses to EU consultations

In 2014, we published responses to the Public Consultation on the review of the EU copyright rules, to the EC Green Paper on mobile health and to the European Central Bank consultation on recommendations for the security of mobile payments.

We also published a set of EBU recommendations to the Council on the Directive on accessibility of public sector bodies' websites, and then published a detailed position paper on Rehabilitation and Older People with Acquired Sight Loss, as part of our ongoing work on the key topic of age-related sight loss. Finally, we published the 'Access Denied Report', on the occasion of our blind date event in Brussels. This document and its annexes show how blind and partially sighted people struggle to access everyday goods, services and information and what the EU can do about it, specifically showing the shortcomings in the EU Commissions own services.

### 4 Action Sheets

Our Action Sheets, designed to support our external communication efforts and to spread information on key EBU issues to journalists or policy-makers, are now a familiar element of the EBU armoury of campaigning and lobbying tools. Produced in an accessible A4 PDF format, they give the essence of the information in an appealing way, providing a quick overview of our priority issues. This year we

## EBU's External Communication

produced two new Action Sheets, on access to on-line content and services, produced by the Access to Information and Technology, and on compensation rights for visual disabilities, produced by the Rights Commission.

These Action Sheets were distributed on various occasions, and are also available in our [press room](#).

### 5 Press releases

In 2014, EBU produced [eight press releases](#) based on input from our Commissions and Networks and staff. These announced the launch of new EBU documents which will be detailed below, information concerning EBU involvement in projects, and key information on our ongoing campaigns for accessible websites and safe electric vehicles.

### 6 EBU in the news

Our media relations work in 2014 was centred for a major part, on our Blind Date event in Brussels. This event generated almost thirty articles in the European media,

with extensive coverage in Spain, Portugal and Italy, as well as the more traditional Anglophone media sources. This shows the impact of our long-term strategy to develop our media relations and improve our visibility. This event was not the only reason that EBU was featured in the news, however, as we also had an article on silent cars published in Pan European Networks 'Government' magazine, as well as coverage of the WIPO signature ceremony. The French online magazine [vehicules.com](#) carried an interview and last but not least an article on web accessibility appeared on the Euractiv website. On the whole, 2014 was a very good year for EBU in terms of media visibility.

The full list of articles can be consulted on our [EBU in the News](#) page.

### 7 Annual Reports

We also produce annual reports to present our activities, challenges and achievements, [available on our website](#).

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# Our Campaigns



EBU opened its Twitter account and started to use twitter as a campaigning tool in mid-2014. Our twitter campaigns are supported by the EBU Campaigns Network which was also started in 2014.

The results we have already achieved via twitter have convinced us that we could become one of the most powerful voices in digital campaigning in the sector. By the end of 2014 our @euroblind account had over 520 followers. What is clear is that Twitter is the medium of choice for active

campaigning, in conjunction with the pre-existing EBU website and Facebook page.

Over 75% of MEPs are on Twitter, 24 of the outgoing 28 Commissioners were on Twitter and all new Commissioners are expected to have an account. Most senior EU officials also have twitter accounts and all analysts say that Twitter is where battles will be won. This doesn't mean that we won't do all the things that we have been successfully doing for years (e.g. consultation responses, engaging with MEP and so on) but this will have to be strategically shared on Twitter in order to achieve the outcomes that are important for EBU. The success of our flagship event in the European Parliament (see below) was in part due to our high profile on twitter, and served to reinforce our positive image as a force to be reckoned with.

The above-mentioned campaigns network enables coordinated lobbying and campaigning to be prepared at pre-set dates. To reinforce this, a Twitter training session was organized in London at the end of 2014. EBU social media campaigning will continue to go from strength to strength.

## Our Campaigns

The key campaigns conducted by EBU and its commission for Liaising with the EU in 2014 included:

### 1 The European Accessibility Act

Back in 2011, the European Commission promised it would propose an EU Accessibility Act in 2012. Since then, month after month, year after year, we have heard promises that the publication was ‘imminent’ but unfortunately, this has not happened. EBU continued to campaign actively for this in 2014. At the beginning of December 2014, during the European Days of Persons with Disabilities’ event, which the European Commission hosted in Brussels, a Commission official promised, again, that the Act would ‘soon’ be published.

We are not alone. Over the last two years, several Members of the European Parliament have repeatedly supported the EBU campaign and asked the European Commission questions about its timetable for publication of the Act but to no avail. Successive Commissioners have failed to provide answers to the specific

questions asked by MEPs. Instead, they chose to refer to ongoing preparatory work needed on this dossier. EBU continues to campaign on this key topic

### 2 “Right to read” campaign

EBU, our friends in WBU and many other organisations campaigned hard for years to get agreement on a treaty at the World Intellectual Property Organisation, WIPO. The campaign succeeded, against the odds, in June 2013, when the Marrakech Treaty was agreed.

The Marrakech Treaty will help remove some of the unnecessary barriers visually impaired people face due to the “book famine”, in which only some 5% of books published are accessible in richer countries, and around 1% in developing countries where 90% of the world’s visually impaired people live.

However, for visually impaired people and their organisations to use the Treaty, it first needs to be ratified.

We are dismayed to say that in the twelve months following Marrakesh, the EU remained at

## Our Campaigns

the stage of deliberating the legal process by which it might ratify.

In October 2014 the Commission formally proposed to ratify on behalf of itself and all the 28 EU Member States. If the Member States agreed to this proposal, EU ratification could follow swiftly. That way, accessible books in France could soon be sent to French speakers in Haiti, or from the UK to Kenya, or Spain to Nicaragua, for example.

However, we hear that the Member States are questioning the right of the Commission to ratify on their behalf. Again, keeping things simple, EU Member States appear to be saying that both the Commission and they should jointly ratify. We understand that such a process would take many years to complete, and that blind and partially sighted individuals and their organisations will not be able to use the treaty until that process were complete and all 28 Member States had ratified.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December in the European Parliament, we expressed our frustration at this delay at a meeting organized by the European Blind Union, the World Blind Union, Knowledge Ecology International-

Europe and the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue.

This campaign is a key part of EBU's long-term strategy. While we wait for these deliberations to conclude, millions of blind and partially sighted people are still waiting for books they want to read. Books which everyone else can read. Books which the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities says blind and partially sighted people have a right to read

### 3 Accessibility of public sector bodies' websites

One of the main asks flagged up by EBU at our blind date event in the European parliament and in our Access Denied! report is the adoption of a fit for purpose and future-proof Accessibility of public sector bodies' website directive.

92% of Members of European Parliament voted for a strong directive on accessible websites in February 2014, extending its scope to private sector websites providing services of general interest (online banking and shopping) and to apps which are becoming the most



## Our Campaigns



EBU web accessibility experts  
at the Blind Date event in  
Brussels

popular way of accessing contents and services provided on the Web. In May 2014 EBU published a set of [Recommendations to the Council](#).

We want the Directive to uphold the right to access information set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), ratified by the EU and the vast majority of Member States.

However the Council and Commission are strongly opposing such an extension. This means excluding apps and some contents, which would void the directive of its substance. We want a directive that is both fit for purpose and future-proof – we need governments to work with us

to ensure that blind and partially sighted people are not left behind. EBU believes that any upfront costs of providing accessible online services should be weighed against potential future efficiency savings by reducing the need to maintain and resource alternative channels to access services (e.g. telephone help lines, face to face interaction).

This campaign was actively supported by the EBU Commission on Access to Information and Technology which provided valuable technical advice.

### 4 “Silent vehicles” campaign

On 3 April 2014, the European Parliament rubberstamped the second reading of the final text of the Regulation on the Sound Level of Motor Vehicles (COM(2011)856) which had been negotiated between the European institutions by a trialogue procedure in November 2013. While the new legislation is heralded by European politicians, environmental activists and car makers as a major breakthrough in reconciling the clashing demands of environmental concerns and

## Our Campaigns

safety needs of “vulnerable road users”, some questions still remain open from the point of people with sight loss.

The EBU Commission of Road Safety and Access to Transport wrote a position paper which the Liaising Commission used as a campaign tool in its lobby work with the Parliament and the Council. This paper identified a set of risk scenarios and presented a number of requirements for quiet vehicles which EBU felt needed to be in place to make electric and hybrid cars a safe automotive technology.

Given the great threats posed by quiet vehicles to blind and partially sighted people, EBU called for the regulation to include a mandatory clause requiring car manufacturers to equip their hybrid and electric cars with an Acoustic Vehicle Alerting System. The AVAS would clearly and easily indicate the vehicle’s mode of operation, i.e. acceleration, deceleration, direction, reversing and temporarily stationary, for instance when the car is idling at a traffic light.

The legislative text adopted by the plenary contained two key elements which impact the safety of blind and partially sighted

pedestrians:

- AVAS: Car manufacturers will be required to install the system in new types of hybrid and electric cars by 1 July 2019 and in all new hybrid and electric cars by 1 July 2021.
- Pause switch: The on-off switch which permits the driver to stop AVAS will become mandatory as well.

With the adoption of the new regulation by the plenary the EBU quiet car campaign will now have to focus on the EU member states and car manufacturers to ensure a viable solution to the pause switch which will help improve the safety of people with sight loss and restore their confidence to be out on the streets again. It is encouraging to see that the EBU has managed to raise awareness of these issues in talks with the European Car Makers Association (ACEA) earlier this year. ACEA pledged to raise these issues with its members and encourage them to look for solutions which are acceptable to blind and partially sighted people. One option might be a menu-controlled embedded pause switch.

## Our Campaigns



Blind and partially sighted participants in eVADER tests

### 4.1 eVADER



EBU complemented this legislative work by pursuing its collaboration with car manufacturers, automotive suppliers, universities and research institutes, in the framework of the [eVADER project](#).

This EU-funded project developed an innovative AVAS which detects vulnerable road users at risk and warns them by emitting a sound directed at them and them alone. The timbre of the sound has been optimised in order to get

the best compromise between high detectability and low noise pollution.

A final public workshop was held in December 2014 in Barcelona to demonstrate the capabilities of the eVADER prototype and provide the opportunity to assess the overall performance of the system in a controlled environment and real life conditions in cities. VI testers from the EBU RSAT commission as well as from ONCE participated in the event.

## Our Campaigns

### 5 A Blind Date in Brussels



The Blind Date event  
in full swing

EBU's campaigning in 2014 culminated in a large event which EBU organized inside the European Parliament in Brussels on 11 and 12 November 2014. Our aim was to help newly-elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) understand the challenges we face when using everyday goods and services, including online information and apps. Over 2 days we met with more than a hundred MEPs, researchers and journalists.

EBU colleagues from many EU countries took part in high-speed blind dates with MEPs and other visitors who were blindfolded and then lead through a series of tasks, such as using a TV remote control,

or reading a website CAPTCHA code with glasses simulating sight loss. The aim of the activities was to highlight the need for future EU legislation to ensure that all manufactured goods and services are accessible to visually impaired people; our members also talked about the need for websites and apps to be accessible, including on mobile devices such as smartphones or tablets. The event was sponsored by Catherine Stihler MEP (S&D, UK) and co-hosted with Rosa Estaràs Ferragut MEP (EPP, Spain), whom we thank most sincerely for their continued support.



Sponsoring MEP  
Catherine Stihler is greeted by  
EBU Executive Director  
Mokrane Boussaïd



## Our Campaigns

On the same occasion we also released our [‘Access Denied!’ report](#). This document details the unjust and unnecessary barriers faced by 30 million blind and partially sighted Europeans when trying to access everyday goods, services and information, especially online barriers which include inaccessible ATM and ticket machines, inaccessible websites and apps, televisions and household goods such as microwave ovens or washing machines. The report also sets out what the EU can and should do about it.

Shockingly, research that we commissioned - annexed to the report - has found that even the EU institutions themselves are routinely failing to make their information accessible to blind and partially sighted people. In particular, the European Commission and Council website pages tested were found to be respectively “far from” and “extremely” inaccessible.



MEP Ramón Valcárcel with  
EBU's Bárbara Martín Muñoz

Our Blind Date event and the report received [extensive media coverage](#) in the EU and beyond.

This event was also the occasion for a newly developed twitter campaigning resource to show its effectiveness.

This was the first time that EBU organised such a large-scale public event in a venue like the European Parliament, and the press coverage received show that it was successful in both raising awareness amongst decision makers in the institutions and also in raising EBU's public profile on a wider scale.

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# Specific Areas Of Activity

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

As part of its ongoing work on the effects and implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and the database of information that we have compiled through questionnaires sent to our members, EBU mandated an external consultant, Anna Lawson, to compile a report which aims to present and analyse the information relating to political participation rights contained in the European Blind Union CRPD online database. This information has the potential to equip campaigners, policy makers and others with valuable data and analysis that will support their efforts to enhance the political participation of blind and partially sighted people. The report can be downloaded from the [EBU UNCRPD webpage](#).

EBU also reinforced its members' crucial role in monitoring the UNCRPD through the creation and coordination of a European network of national UNCRPD Champions and the organisation

of a capacity-building session on "How to monitor the implementation of the UNCRPD through article 33" organised in Tirrenia, Italy, on 25 October. This session was part of EBU's broader capacity-building strategy consisting of two other sessions on "How to monitor the ratification of the WIPO Marrakesh Treaty" (Tirrenia, Italy, 25 October) and "Campaigning and Twitter" (London, UK, 10 December). As a result of the UNCRPD session the EBU Commission on the Rights of Blind and Partially Sighted People, produced a summary report on '[How to monitor the implementation of the UNCRPD through articles 33/35](#)', based on the replies of 15 of our members to the questionnaires previously sent.

The results of the questionnaires for which we received replies are on line on our website on the same page as the above report, and they form part of our much wider [information database on the UNCRPD](#), which we encourage you to consult.

## Specific Areas Of Activity

### 2 Blind and Partially Sighted Women - The Right to Live Without Violence

On November 26, 2014 on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Women's Network of EBU, with the financial support by the European Union Program for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013), launched an information package entitled "[The Right to Live without Violence](#)" consisting of a poster and two brochures.

A working group, consisting of five women, all members of the Women's Network, was set up to carry out this activity. The working group had the opportunity to hold a face to face meeting in Larnaca, Cyprus from June 3 -5 2014 during which the context of the information package and its content were agreed.

The brochures were created in a format that is printable and editable at the same time. There are links that allow easy navigation within the text as well as a back to contents button at the end of each chapter.

The first brochure aims to raise awareness among professionals in services and programs that support victims of violence. Increasing the professionals' understanding of the high risk and specific needs of women with visual disabilities, enables them to better support, protect and assist (potential) victims in an efficient way. The second brochure aims to raise awareness among girls and women with visual disability and their organizations on the fundamental right to live without violence. It stresses the importance of how to recognize signs of violence, what can be done and ways to support women with visual impairment through cooperation with support services and prevention programs.

Guidelines on how to use the information package were also produced encouraging National Organizations to support the initiative and take action by widely sharing all of the information or even parts of it in an attempt to combat violence. A checklist was created to help either to set up or improve campaigns for the right to live without violence.

## Specific Areas Of Activity

### 3 Low Vision

There are more than 30 million blind and partially sighted people in geographical Europe, and with the ever increasing elderly population this number will only grow in the coming years.

The vast majority of people with sight loss have low vision or partial sight, two terms for the same condition. Individuals with partial sight can have very different amounts of vision and ways of seeing and therefore have very different needs for support and services. Their specific needs can only be met adequately in a personalized way.

EBU, through its low vision network, therefore produced a brochure which recommends a set of [ten minimum standards and recommendations for low vision services in Europe](#). These ten key elements for adequate low vision support and rehabilitation services were based on good practice in EBU countries. This is in line with Article 26 “Habilitation and rehabilitation” of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

### 4 Employment

Amongst other activities, the Rehabilitation, Vocational Training and Employment Commission looked at the difficulties faced by blind and partially sighted people in accessing educational and training programmes to qualify as physiotherapists. As physiotherapy remains an important job outlet for people with visual impairments, the commission lent its support to the organization of a conference on this topic by the Finnish Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted in June 2014.

The commission also worked on the revision of the paper “The golden standards of rehabilitation” which resulted in the production of the EBU Position Paper [‘Political Positions Concerning the Labour Market from Self-Help Organisations of Blind and Partially Sighted Persons in Europe’](#) in early 2015.

## Specific Areas Of Activity

### 5 Working for Elderly Blind and Partially Sighted People

In 2014 the network suffered the great loss of its coordinator Alan Suttie. He will be remembered as driven and gentle, tenacious and modest. Alan was a wonderful and very kind man with a passion to make this world a better place for people with visual impairment, especially older people, people with dual sensory loss and with acquired brain injury. He has been a pioneer in these fields and

a person who really succeeded in putting projects into practice, in particular to face the ageing of the European population and subsequent increasing prevalence of age-related sight loss. Until the very end he stayed actively involved in the projects he initiated and which are mentioned below.

#### 5.1 VISAL came to an end in 2014



This non - profit - making EU - funded project aimed to promote elderly



VISAL project participants in the UK

## Specific Areas Of Activity

VI seniors' active involvement in society by providing them with a non-formal training course tailor-made to both their age-related and disability-related specific learning needs, thus increasing their self-esteem and active participation in their local community. In addition to 4 national conferences held in Austria, Croatia, Slovakia and the UK, a European closing conference took place in October 2014 in Bratislava to present the toolkit, practice VISAL sessions, listen to former participants' stories, and find concrete solutions to help participants organise courses as new VISAL ambassadors.

Nearly 200 elderly visually impaired persons attended VISAL sessions in 2013 and 2014. The VISAL project had a very positive impact on participants' confidence and self-esteem, mental well-being and civic engagement. The course also had a concrete impact on participants' decision-making processes, closely linked to their level of isolation. The external evaluation of the project also shows that participants are positive about the effect of the programme on different aspects of their lives, i.e. involvement in community associations, groups, clubs, in

contacts with friends and family. Three months after the last VISAL session, participants reported an important increase in their social skills. A less important impact was also identified in their involvement in voluntary work.

The toolkit deriving from the course is currently available to all private and public organisations and institutions keen on taking concrete actions to help elderly VI people escape their isolation and loneliness, and engage with civil society.

[The VISAL toolkit](#) offers step-by-step guidance to planning, organising and following up a VISAL course and help a group of older people with sight loss to gain in confidence, skills and awareness to the best of their individual abilities. It is available in Croatian, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Slovak and Spanish.

More info on the [VISAL project website](#).



## Specific Areas Of Activity

### 5.2 A policy paper on rehabilitation and older people with acquired sight loss

The European Blind Union wants to develop a concrete response to the challenge of ageing of the European population that leads to an increasing prevalence of age-related sight loss. It will be essential that society and governments are aware of the threats to the quality of life of older people with sight loss and of the high costs if these threats are not averted. Therefore governments need to be able to deliver cost effective rehabilitation solutions that: target the specific needs of these older people with visual impairment, support rehabilitation, facilitate less reliance on expensive health and social care support and reduce the need for supported or residential care.

In the [position paper on rehabilitation and older people with acquired sight loss](#) the magnitude of this challenge is supported by figures and specific problems of visually impaired older people are addressed (multimorbidity, psychosocial problems). The role of health care

professionals is highlighted (early recognition, prevention, referral) and rehabilitation considerations are suggested that deviate from conventional interventions for younger (adult) people with a visual impairment. Recommendations for service provision are offered, divided into three themes: (1) how should rehabilitation services be offered; (2) what rehabilitation services should be offered; and (3) where should rehabilitation take place.

With this paper EBU underlines the necessity for governments and health care professionals to take measures that will increase self-reliance and quality of life of older people with visual impairment. EBU advocates the setting up and maintenance of rehabilitation models specifically aimed at older people with acquired sight loss.

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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, responding together to consultations or representing each another at important events.

EU-funded projects such as VISAL or eVADER 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 the Secretary of EDF.

Collaboration also takes place with other EU level disability networks: The EBU Commission for Deafblind People and its new Chairperson were instrumental in

reactivating our cooperation with the European Deafblind Union (EDBU) to promote equality and the full participation of deafblind people in society. In particular, EBU and EDBU are working towards the recognition of deafblindness as a unique disability.

We also work on mainstreaming disability issues, in particular visual impairment and accessibility, to other sectors. To this end, we regularly collaborate with ANEC, the European consumer voice in standardisation, via its Design for All Working Group. We also cooperate with other European mainstream organisations such as the European Women Lobby (EWL).

We also regularly support and join campaigns or projects lead by other institutions promoting the rights of blind and partially sighted people. These include the Council of Europe, the International Council for Education of People With Visual Impairment (ICEVI Europe, that promotes equal access to education for all visually impaired children and youth), with which under the impulse of our Commission on Access to Culture and Education a memorandum of understanding was developed to

## EBU's Networks & Friends

foster our partnership, and finally, of course, as a member of the World Blind Union (WBU).

### 1 Beyond Europe - Solidarity with our friends worldwide

Solidarity is one of EBU's guiding values. Over the years, we have given much-needed support to our fellow blind and partially sighted in the developing world, Africa in particular. In 2014 an overall US\$15000 were made available to the African Union of the Blind to support small income generating projects: piggery for blind and partially sighted persons in Kenya; poultry and piggery in Lesotho; and bee-keeping in Gambia.

### 2 Other activities: 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.

All Braille users residing in an EBU member country and in Israel can take part by submitting an essay in digital format. The essays are required to relate either to how the individual gains independence or knowledge through the use of Braille or to an individual concept about the world from the viewpoint of a person with visual disabilities.

In 2014, the winners were selected from among a total of 62 essays by participants from 21 countries. The highest Otsuki Prize (2000 USD) went to Anna Fusz from Hungary for the essay entitled "Mom's telling tales", a story told from the perspective of a sighted child with a blind mother and the natural role that Braille had in their lives and the happy memories it created.

## EBU's Networks & Friends

### 3 List of Commissions and Networks

- Commission on Road Safety and Access to Transport (RSAT Commission)
- Commission on Access to Information and Technology (AIT Commission)
- Commission on Development
- Commission on Access to Culture and Education
- Commission on Rehabilitation, Vocational Training and Employment (RVTE Commission)
- Commission on the Rights of Blind and Partially Sighted People (Rights Commission)
- Commission for Liaising with the EU (Liaison Commission, or LC)
- Commission for Deafblind People
- Commission for People with Visual Impairment and Additional Disabilities
- Network of Elderly Blind and Partially Sighted People (Elderly Network)
- Network of Blind and Partially Sighted Women
- Network of Blind and Partially Sighted Youth
- Network of People with Low Vision (LVN)
- Network on Blind and Partially Sighted Children

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**The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe**





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