

EBU

Annual Report

2016



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

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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 42 national members including organisations from all 26 European Union member states, candidate nations and other major countries in geographical Europe.

EBU offers 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.
- 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.

It was one of the major tasks during the period of this annual report to implement the new, project-based working structure of EBU, as adopted by the General Assembly in October 2015. So the priority areas, as defined in the strategic plan 2015 – 2019 were set up, the respective projects were allocated, the national members and experts in charge were identified, and all areas and projects were given a board link to secure the necessary system of feedback and guidance.

While the economy of this world is increasingly organized on a global level and gaining more and more political power, we are facing a growing movement of people throughout Europe, seeking their fortune in shrinking their country back to a stage which, in the past, has never proved to bring about peace, lasting prosperity, and justice.

As a strongly convinced European I am deeply concerned by this development.

Now, the people of the United Kingdom have decided to leave the European Union. So, as soon as the separation is completed, our national member from this country, who, in the past has played a major role within EBU, will be a non-EU member of the European Blind Union. Proudly we can state that, from the very beginning, EBU has defined its structure and strategies as a community of national members that represent blind and partially sighted people from all over Europe, regardless of the cultural, social or political structure of their country. However, with regards to our campaigns, most of which aim at binding EU regulations for the benefit of blind and partially sighted people, we have lost an essential part of our resources to do the work needed. In order to compensate for this loss, the EBU board took measures to encourage our national members from EU countries to offer additional involvement and assistance.

This annual report for 2016 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



EBU President Wolfgang Angermann speaking at the 10th General Assembly

In 2016, EBU was able to develop the level and quality of its activity, focusing on the priority projects identified by the Board to implement its strategic plan. This was done mainly through campaigning, capacity building, awareness raising and research.

The results of our campaigning were uneven. The adoption of the Web Accessibility Directive is an outstanding achievement made possible thanks to well-coordinated and active lobbying. However, we are well into 2017 and in spite of several years of intense campaigning, we are still struggling to secure the adoption of a fit for purpose European Accessibility Act and the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty by the EU. We know that it is difficult to convince decision makers, in particular at times when industry and business are favoured over citizens' rights. We also know that campaigns are not won overnight and require determination and relentless efforts. EBU and its national members who play a decisive role in lobbying their governments

and MEPs will continue fighting to ensure blind and partially sighted persons can enjoy their rights fully.

Capacity building was geared at supporting our campaigns, in particular through a more effective use of Twitter and a better understanding of EU decision making processes. In addition training courses were held to empower elderly and young people with a visual impairment. This was complemented by awareness raising activities, including a video depicting what it means to live with low vision, and webinars on gender equality geared at EBU, its Board and its national members. A wide range of themes were researched: braille training and braille propagation, visually impaired students' access to educational exchange programmes, blind and partially sighted people's employment after 10 years of the CRPD (only started in late 2016 and to be completed in 2019)... Information was collected to feed our CRPD database. Details of these and other activities are provided in this report.

2016 was also a year of far-reaching structural changes. The shift to the project-based approach, which meant the dismantling of most standing commissions, was successfully implemented with a few adjustments and will probably require more fine-tuning. Also noteworthy is the setting up of the EBU Solidarity Fund to support those EBU members who face economic and financial hardship. It is hoped this will make them contribute more actively to our work as full members of the EBU community.

So EBU is doing well. Our finances are sound as confirmed in the treasurer's note. This was made possible thanks to the support, dedication and hard work of all who devote time and energy to our work, often on a voluntary basis. There is room for improvement but we are determined to face up to the challenges of tomorrow to make sure the blind and partially sighted of Europe can enjoy their rights and exercise their citizenship fully.

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 42 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 2016, the Board held 3 meetings, as follows: Madrid, Spain, 16-17 January; Berlin, Germany, 18-19 June; and Paris, France, 29-30 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. As mentioned in the

«word by the president» section, high on the Board's agenda was the implementation of the new project-based approach to EBU's way of working. [Priority projects](#) were identified and progress reviewed at each Board meeting. This report will briefly present the results of the priority projects that have been finalised in 2016.

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 three other staff members. In 2016 the permanent EBU staff members were:

Executive Director

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On the financial front, 2016 was a good year for the European Blind Union, with a surplus of € 57,543. Membership fees as determined by the 2015 General Assembly added up to € 226,955, an increase of more than 20% compared to the Membership fees and voluntary contributions received in 2015. They represent 53% of our revenues.

Our projects received € 197,124 in funding from the European Union for, i.e. 46% of our revenues.

Although a document was drawn up to find sponsors, it was not possible to attract new funding, which is unfortunate.

On the expenditure side, the Provisional Budget (whose presentation was revised to match reality) has been strictly respected. Since November 2015, the Treasurer has been sending the Board a monthly summary of the revenues, expenditures and financial situation, which allows a better follow-up. The expenditure amounted to €411,347, down from the 2015 financial year (which

included the expenses related to the organization of the General Assembly and a few adjustments linked to previous years).

Salaries and employee benefits amounted to € 244,035, i.e. 57% of the expenditures, which was stable compared to the previous year. In 2016, the rules for taking into account seniority in the calculation of EBU employees' salaries was revised, which will lead to a slight increase in 2017.

At its meeting in October 2016, the Board 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. This new fund replaces the one exclusively intended for "developing countries", the support to African countries has not been changed.

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 2016, 10 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](#) 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. Due to the evolution of new technologies such as use of internet on mobile phones, EBU realised that its website is not always easy to adapt and may look into a redesign of the site in 2017.

During 2016 EBU developed its use of social media, with regular updates of its Facebook page while continuing to use Twitter as 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. In 2016, EBU produced six newsletters.

In a new feature development for 2016 EBU decided to dedicate articles to certain member organisations, in order to make them more visible, promote a greater sense of community amongst EBU members, share best practices, and raise awareness of the activities and history of the different organisations of blind and partially sighted people in Europe. Three countries were thus featured in 2016, Croatia, Lithuania, and Serbia. A feature article was also produced on the definition and use of audiodescription. The newsletter continued to be a key source of information for updates on all our campaigns and projects.

a response on the Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services, and also published a response to Public Consultation on reduced VAT rates for electronically supplied publications. Other position papers were on EC proposals to implement the Marrakech Treaty and finally and a Response to the European Commission Public consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

3 EBU responses to EU consultations

In 2016, we [published responses](#) to the eGovernment Action Plan, the European Commission Consultation on the proposal for a European Accessibility Act, the European Interoperability Framework. We also published

The key campaigns conducted by EBU and the LC in 2016 included:

1 The European Accessibility Act

On 02 December 2015, the European Commission proposed an “EU Accessibility Act” (EAA), to address the lack of accessibility of a wide range of goods and services. One of the priority projects for EBU in 2016 was to secure the adoption by the EU of the strongest possible accessibility act.

EBU worked together with the European Disability Forum (EDF) and ANEC (European Association for the Co-ordination of Consumer Representation in Standardisation) to lobby for a really strong, effective EAA. This involved meetings with representatives of the European Commission, the Council of Member States (the Council) and members of the European Parliament (EP). We spoke at and/or attended parliamentary events and EBU’s members lobbied their national governments to support a future-proof and broad directive.

IMCO (Internal Market and Consumer Protection) the main responsible parliamentary committee dealing with the EC’s legislative proposal submitted a draft opinion which did not reflect EBU’s concerns and essential requirements for a strong, wide and robust Accessibility Act, which would take into account the needs of disabled persons for an accessible environment in areas of public transport, ICT, buildings and attached products and services. The IMCO draft opinion watered down the tabled proposal and established vague and unspecific performance criteria, which undermine the benefits of the Act and leave to much room for interpretation for product manufacturers and service providers, acting within the scope of the Act.

The Council’s progress on devising an opinion on the proposal is indeed very slow and procrastinating. The Council prefers a sectorial approach and wants to exclude a broad range of products and services, which are partly covered in other Union Acts. Further they tend to exclude Small and Medium size companies, claiming that the production of accessible goods would establish a disproportionate financial burden for them.

EBU and its partners will continue to lobby for an Act which reflects the interests and needs of our target group. To achieve a positive outcome we will engage with responsible EU institutions and with industrial stakeholders.

2 “Right to read” campaign

One of EBU’s priority projects for 2016 was to work get the EU and its Member States to ratify the Treaty by the end of the year. At the beginning of 2016 21 EU member states had expressed their consent to ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty, however 7 member states had formed a blocking minority to prevent ratification on the grounds of an unsubstantiated lack of EU competence to ratify. Nevertheless, all legal experts, including the legal services of the EC, the Council and the EP insisted that exclusive EU competence to ratify was beyond any doubt.

EBU sent an official letter to Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, EC President, and Mr Andrus Ansip, EC Vice-President to express our great concern at the absence of EU ratification of the Treaty. In response to this letter, EBU met

top EC officials:

- on May 17 Barbara Martin, EBU Vice-President, and David Hammerstein, WBU representative met with Jurgen Gren, member of the Cabinet of Andrus Ansip, in charge of the digital single market.
- on May 26 David Hammerstein met with Paulina Rouch, member of the cabinet of President Juncker, in charge of digital and copyright issues.

The outcome of the meetings was considered positive and optimistic overall as the Directive and Regulation prepared for the implementation of the Treaty had been given the green light with very minor linguistic modifications. It was hoped that the legislative process and Council approval would be “fast tracked” with very few or no controversial amendments and no “second reading”.

On 8 September the EU Advocate General concluded that it is the “exclusive competence of the EU” to ratify the Treaty. The European Court of Justice subsequently confirmed the “exclusive competence of the EU”.

On 14 September, the EC presented a Directive and a Regulation to implement the Marrakesh Treaty into EU law. The proposed regulation to be approved by the EP and the Council is generally a “one to one” transcription of the Treaty text. EBU had always made very clear its opposition to any inclusion of mandatory commercial availability or remuneration clauses (or other barriers) in the legal texts.

Through the ratification by more than twenty countries, on 30 September 2016, the Marrakesh treaty came into force, as provided in its article 18.

On 19 October, a strategy session was held in the EP to consider the Directive and Regulation. Participants all expressed their support for swift EU ratification. The first steps were taken to establish a strong cross-party coalition with civil society support for fast-track parliamentary approval of the Marrakesh legislation while at the same time opening a dialogue with EU member states in the Council who are also considering the legislation.

On 14 December, over 40 MEPs, political group advisors and EC

officials attended a “shadows meeting” in Strasbourg. All the MEPs present expressed their overall support for the EC proposals.

To conclude, through continuous campaigning and lobbying, at the end of the year, EBU is happy to note significant progress and a positive political development towards the ratification.

3 Accessibility of public sector bodies' websites

EBU fought a long and was able to secure a strong EU directive to make public sector bodies' websites and mobile apps accessible, and this was one of its priority projects for 2016.

EBU campaigned in 2016 to ensure that all policy makers understood that most people now consult web content on mobile devices and through apps, and that apps are often the easiest way to access a service or information, including for blind and partially sighted people. We lobbied the Parliament, Council and Commission intensively in 2016 to ensure the fullest possible scope for this Directive.

After adoption by the Council in July 2016, the European Parliament approved the directive on 26 October 2016. The final directive was published on 2 December 2016.

The Directive should ensure that people with disabilities - especially persons with vision or hearing impairments - will have better access to the websites and mobile applications of public services.

Member States will have 21 months to transpose the directive into national legislation, after it entering into force on 22 December 2016.

4 “Silent vehicles” campaign

Securing a UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) Global Technical Regulation including a fit-for-purpose Acoustic Vehicle Alerting System (AVAS) which cannot legally be turned off was one of EBU’s priority projects for this year. In February 2016 the QRTV (working group on Quiet Road Transport Vehicles), in charge of devising an UNECE regulation specifying

technical requirements and testing procedures for an AVAS for Electric and Electric hybrid vehicles, met to discuss the concerns of WBU and EBU. These concerns were: the prohibition of a pause switch, a stationary sound (which constantly indicates the presence and operation of a silent vehicle) and the establishment of a minimum sound level which ensures a sufficient audible detectability of a vehicle to make safe crossing decisions. Immediately after the QRTV working group a GRB (Working Party on Noise) meeting was held to discuss all UNECE matters related to vehicle sound production and emissions. In this context the UNECE regulation was discussed but our essential requirements were not embedded into the draft regulation text. It was agreed that our concerns will be further reflected and that a study will be carried out, which may prove the necessity of a stationary sound.

This was partly carried out as GRB’s meeting conducted from 05 to 07 September 2016 approved Japan’s proposal to ban the pause switch in all electric-and electric-hybrid vehicles. This will ensure a constant operation of the AVAS as an alerting and warning acoustic device for vulnerable road users.

WP.29 the supreme body entitled to adopt all UNECE regulations targeting vehicle requirements has to adopt the amendment in its March 2017 session. Therefore it is likely that the prohibition of the pause function will be adopted by WP.29 in March 2017.

The recently extended working mandate of the QRTV focuses also on carrying out an in-depth study about the necessity of stationary sound. The study aims at scientifically proving if a stationary sound increases the detectability of electric and hybrid-electric vehicles for vulnerable pedestrians.

The Technical University Dresden is assigned to conduct the study. In September 2016 it started to draft a first study design. In November 2016 the acoustic and traffic research department presented their first results to members from car companies, security advisors and the EBU campaign lead. It is expected that the study design will be finalized in April 2017 pursuing the study performance.

Further the QRTV intends to conduct a demo workshop to demonstrate the use, the detectability and the applicability

of an AVAS in real life traffic situations. The workshop will probably take place in the second half of 2017. It is intended, that participants from all over Europe can participate in the workshop. This campaign is led for EBU by its German member, DBSV.

5 Accessibility of payment terminals

To strive for barrier free access to payment terminals for all, a single-issue platform [Pay-Able](#) was set up. The platform was officially launched on June 22, 2016 in European Parliament and gained the support from EBU and other disability organisations.

On November 17, 2016, EBU held an e-workshop on accessible payment terminals, which was moderated by EBU member organisation Oogvereniging (Eye Association Netherlands), who is leading this campaign for EBU. The workshop was attended by 20 representatives of EBU members, from 14 different countries. It contained presentations with information in relation to payment terminals from different perspectives.

In our newsletter [number 111](#), a feature article was devoted to accessible payment terminals and the Pay-Able project in particular.

6 The campaign for full accessibility of lifts

During the last months of 2015, a comprehensive EBU joint statement responding to the draft of standard EN 81-70 was prepared and made available to national standardisation organisations for public enquiry.

After the public enquiry, no action in relation to EN 81-70 was required until September 2016, when EBU was made aware of CEN/TC 10/WG 7's intention to reduce requirements for contrast of signage on operating elements (e.g. buttons) in lifts in the standard. EBU drafted a statement responding to a ballot of the CEN/TC 10 secretariat among national standardisation bodies on the issue and explained why the intended reduction was unacceptable. EBU members also lobbied the national mirror committees and ANEC supported the position. Special emphasis was put on the

violation of e.g. provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In the ballot of November 2016 the majority of CEN/TC (10 members) voted for the reduction of contrast requirements. Following EBU's and ANEC's objection a second ballot was circulated to confirm the results and launch the Formal Vote. EBU members intensified their efforts to convince the national mirror committees to vote against the reduction of contrast requirements. The number of negative votes increased but there were not enough to avoid the adoption of the intended reduction of contrast requirements in the draft and launch the Formal Vote.

Regrettably, in spite of all its efforts, EBU has not been successful in avoiding the imminent reduction of contrast requirements in EN 81-70 so far. Next steps will be considered in February 2017 and action will be taken as soon as the Formal Vote is launched.

BSVÖ, EBU's member from Austria, is leading this campaign on its behalf.

7 Campaigning capacity-building training

A Twitter masterclass was held on 15-16 September in Brussels with a view to equip members of the EBU campaigns network with skills on how to directly interact through Twitter as individuals with EU legislators and national governments on issues of importance to EBU. Hosted by EBU's member in Belgium, Brailleliga - Ligue braille, it offered a training opportunity to 10 new participants from 6 countries. This was one of EBU's priority projects for this year.

A training course (TC) on the EU policy-making process, to improve EBU members' campaigning skills at EU level, was also held on 1-2 December in Paris (France). 15 EBU volunteers or staff members of EBU organisations from 10 countries participated in the first edition of this TC, to be reproduced in 2017.

8 Conclusion

EBU campaigns were reported on and discussed during the yearly meeting of the EBU commission for Liaising with the EU. Held in Paris (France) on 24-25 September 2016, the meeting was attended by delegates from 23 countries.

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

Following on the process initiated in 2015, EBU:

- produced an analysis and comparison report on article 28 “Adequate standard of living and social protection” based on data collected within 21 countries in 2015. One of the main conclusions of this [EBU 2016 UNCRPD report](#) is the existence of concern at the low levels of social protection in Eastern European countries compared with established EU member states.
- collected data on article 7 “Children with disabilities” through a specifically-designed questionnaire.

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

1.1 UNCRPD training and awareness-raising

EBU plans to produce an awareness-raising brochure in 2017, and so in 2016 preparatory work was carried out, including discussion of the target groups, topics to be covered and overall structure. The working group consisting of experts from Austria, Portugal and Serbia should deliver the brochure in 2017.

2 Blind and Partially Sighted Women

In 2016, two training sessions on gender equality were offered:

- A face-to-face session prior to an EBU Board meeting in Paris on 28 October. Conducted by the European Women Lobby (EWL) and attended by 5 members of the EBU Board and by the office staff, it raised awareness on the importance of gender mainstreaming: how to do it, working in groups around some key issues.

- An e-workshop on 8 December attended by 20 participants from 10 countries. Entitled “The future we want: promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming”, the session was moderated by the EBU Secretary General and benefitted from contributions from EWL and the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired.

Both training sessions were conducted in the light of the [EBU toolkit](#) “The future we want” aiming to promote gender equality and developed in 2015.

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 personalised way.

3.1 The Low Vision Video

EBU, through its low vision network and as the second of its priority projects for 2016, produced [an awareness-raising video on low vision](#). The video features testimonials from a diverse selection of partially-sighted (PS) Europeans. It presents several forms of partial sight, examines the obstacles and challenges faced by partially sighted persons every day and looks at solutions, as well as examples of PS persons’ attitudes which colleagues might misinterpret. Particular emphasis is also put on the need to move from a medical definition of low vision to a functional one relying on the principle of useful vision. Finally, the video presents EBU’s standards on low vision services in Europe developed in 2014 and their close link with the UNCRPD.

3.2 The [PRO4VIP](#) (Innovation Procurement for visually impaired people) project

The project, which came to an end in 2016, aimed to define/revise public procurement policies to develop new innovative solutions for the early diagnosis and clinical treatment of partial sight as well as the development of assistive technologies. It focussed on the collection and prioritising of the needs of both partially sighted persons in terms of assistive technology and of clinicians in terms of instruments for diagnosis.

The PRO4VIP final conference entitled “Public demand driven innovation to tackle specific public needs: the project PRO4VIP-Innovation procurement for visually impaired people” was held on 23 November in Trieste, Italy.

EBU was a full partner in this project, full details of which can be found on the official [pro4vip](#) website.



4 Working for Elderly Blind and Partially Sighted People

Though its official duration has long since ended, the VISAL (Visually Impaired Seniors Active Learning) project continues to prove useful and provoke interest. This was further demonstrated as EBU chose the organisation of a further VISAL course in 2016 as one of its priority projects. Initiated in 2015, a new VISAL facilitators TC was held on 19-20 May in Premantura (Croatia).

VISAL facilitators trained in previous years held additional courses in Hungary (Budapest, November, 10 participants) and the Netherlands (Vught, 5 courses all along 2016, 29 participants)

A feature article was also produced in our [newsletter number 106](#) explaining amongst other things how the VISAL project was selected as a “success story” by a panel of experts from the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.



5 Working for younger people

5.1 Employability Training Course

EBU organised a training course on the employability of young blind and partially sighted people in Tirrenia (Italy) from 19 to 21 May, similar to that already organised in 2015. For the 11 participants from 7 countries the same non-formal methods were used: ice-breakers, role playing, exercises, work in small groups and mock interviews. As suggested by participants in the 2015 course, EBU introduced a new topic: non-verbal communication and body language, a sensitive issue for blind and partially-sighted persons. Once back in their own countries, participants organised local discussion sessions with a total of 207 participants in 6 countries.

Also in 2016, the EBU “Manual for inexperienced job-seekers with a visual impairment” first produced in 2015, [was fine-tuned](#) and officially circulated within the EBU network. Some EBU members spontaneously translated it or funded its translation into [French](#) and [German](#).



Discussion session participants from the Netherlands in a workshop situation

5.2 Accessibility of exchange programs for blind and partially sighted students with ICEVI Europe

Following on from its “State-of-the-art report on the accessibility of exchange programs for students with visual impairment” produced in 2015, and in collaboration with ICEVI Europe and the Comenius University of Bratislava (Slovakia), the working group continued the work by carrying out an on-line survey aimed at disability and Erasmus coordinators in universities. 63 responses were received from 17 countries in Europe.

Two focus group meetings were also held in Slovakia and Hungary with a view to collecting qualitative data from blind and partially-sighted students participating or having participated in the Erasmus exchange programme. Subsequent to data collection, the two following reports related to Erasmus+ Mobility of Students with visual impairment were delivered:

- [Report 1](#): Pilot Survey among Erasmus+ and Disability Coordinators
- [Report 2](#): Accessible Universities for Erasmus+ Students with Visual Impairment.

The main conclusions were:

- the low level of participation of students with visual impairment in the Erasmus program
- the varying support provided from a university to another (with better and more services in Northern European countries compared to Southern European ones)

- the varying costs for using such services from a university to another.

The main recommendations are to:

- inform and train Erasmus coordinators on VI students' specific needs
- inform Erasmus coordinators on the already-existing services offered by the university as support required by an incoming VI student may already be provided to national students
- to improve the accessibility of universities' website
- to improve the collaboration between disability coordinators and Erasmus coordinators

6 Report on Access to Braille

The first of EBU's priority projects for 2016, a project group of braille experts from Nordic countries, led by the EBU member from Denmark, was set up to establish a desk study and literature review and develop a data collection questionnaire, with the support of a Danish evaluation institute.

A Nordic Braille workshop was held in Fredericia (Denmark) on 24-25 October with a view to getting to a clear picture of challenges faced by the braille learning community, as well as to identifying and analysing strengths and drawbacks in various pedagogic approaches on braille training for different groups. Each country shared its experiences, thoughts, observations and best practices, mainly on the basis of the questionnaire answered prior to the workshop by all participating countries. Main topics discussed were braille teachers and instructors, the availability of braille, and the already-existing joint

policy paper (World Blind Union and ICEVI). The questionnaire was fine-tuned by participants and will be circulated in 2017 in Austria, Estonia, France and Italy, countries where fact-finding visits will also be performed.

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 PRO4VIP 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. 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 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 2016 the First Prize was awarded to Teresa Dederko from Poland, who wrote an essay entitled 'I see with my fingers'.



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe



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