

EBU in Action Episode 15: Inclusive melodies: teaching music to people with visual impairment

Intro

(Music)

(Neven): Hello, dear listeners. It's a pleasure to welcome you back to another episode of the "EBU in Action" podcast, your go-to space for the latest news and updates from the European Blind Union and the blindness and partially sight community.

My name is Neven Milivojevic, and I'm joined once again by my wonderful co-host and friend, Paweł Masarczyk. Hey, Paweł. How are you?

(Paweł): Hello, Neven. Doing great, thanks. And you? It's quite hot over here.

(Neven): Well, yes, because you're in Austria. Here in Sweden, it's very pleasant.

(Paweł): Ah, yes. Still, I don't know if I would swap. I guess this will normalise for the time being. I'm more of a warm person, so let's stay, let's put it like this, and let's make it stay like this for a while. I hope it will come down a little bit. A couple of degrees will be enough.

(Neven): Well, the temperature will be quite warm in Europe soon, all over. But before we go to all these leisure and vacation times, let's get down to some business. Because as the title of our podcast says, the European Blind Union never stops advocating for the rights of our community across Europe.

And, as always, we will bring you the latest news from our organisation, and this time, I have to say there's been quite a lot of things happening, including that we can hear about the European Commission's announcement about the second half of the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021 to 2030. So Paweł, this is a lot to take in, isn't it?

(Paweł): Yes, definitely. Not just on the policymaking front, but also when it comes to our own disability advocacy, as the European Disability Forum has just closed in the elections for their board for this period, so 2026 to 2030.

So, I guess a lot of exciting changes coming up ahead right there as well. But aside from the typical news, we also have our focus section, and Neven, I hope you're tuning in to this one because we'll be talking about music.

I hope we all like some kind of music. Music is fun to have in your life. But we can, of course, talk about different facets of music, but this time we'll talk with a very special guest. We'll speak to Boris Moine, from INJA, the National Institute for Young Blind People in Paris, France, about different aspects of teaching music.

Because Boris is a guitar teacher, if I'm not mistaken, and he will tell us, for example, how difficult it is to teach blind people when it comes to music, what are the special considerations to be made or, also what science tells us about the implications and the effects of studying music with blind people.

So, I don't know about you, Neven, but for me, this is the sound of music to my ears, and the sound of inclusion. It has nothing to do with me being in Austria at the moment but I hope you're as excited as I am.

(Neven): Oh, I am really excited and, I mean, I really can't wait because I'm a big music lover myself and I love music, and I truly hope that our listeners enjoy this fascinating conversation we will have with Moine.

Now, of course, for those of you who want to stay up to date with what's happening across EBU's Members, we will also bring you another edition of our correspondent' section.

But this time, we will travel actually not that far from me, because we will travel to Norway and talk to our dear friends from the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted, and they will let us know more about what's happening in their association.

So, what do you say, Paweł? Maybe with all these interesting topics and with such a musical episode ahead of us, are you ready to dive into this beautiful sound of inclusion?

(Paweł): I definitely am, especially because there is one more thing I haven't revealed yet. And I would like to give you a bit of an appetiser, dear listeners; we're going to have a bit of a surprise at the end of the interview, so listen in to that.

(Neven): Great. Let's roll on

News section

(Neven): Let's start with a rundown of our latest news. As said in the introduction, there are important subjects that concern our communities to be discussed in this section.

And as always, we are delighted to invite back to our podcast our dear friend and colleague, Nacho Lopez, who will be guiding us through what's been going on in the EBU lately.

So hola, Nacho. How are you doing?

(Neven): Hola, Neven. How are you doing? I'm fine. As Paweł already said, the summer is getting closer and I can already tell you that it's been very hot in Paris lately. But, yes, I'm quite on a summer mood, and I'm ready, as always, to present our dear listeners the latest updates around the EBU's Advocacy activity.

(Neven): Great, well, I'm very excited to hear. So, let's start. I mentioned something about the EU Commission. Now why don't we start there?

(Nacho): Yes, it's actually about the second half of the Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030. On 6th May, the European Commission launched a public announcement concerning the enhancing of the EU Disability Rights Strategy up to 2030.

Through a press release, EBU reacted to the EU Commission's announcement by underlining the moderate ambition of the update. EBU's President, Tytti Matsinen, said that it is a good thing that the Commission decided to strengthen the Strategy after remarkable progress in its delivery in the first half of the decade.

However, she also underscored that we regret that the update focuses on implementing existing legislation, already forcing actions and studies, preparatory work, and exchange of best practices, falling short of the new legislative and funding initiatives we called for.

Among other things, EBU expressed in its press release that many of its demands remain largely unaddressed, such as the reforming of the EU electoral law to ensure accessible elections, deleting in the Marrakech Treaty Directive the possibility for Member States to provide for compensations of right holders or reviewing the Regulation on the Passenger Rights of persons with disabilities to uphold the right of persons with disabilities to travel without needing approval or pre-notification and to travel with an assistant dog.

However, our organisation welcomed some upcoming developments, such as the announced study to assess obstacles for persons with disabilities in assistive technologies and AI, and to identify relevant solutions or the announced measures to achieve higher employment rates for persons with disabilities in the open labour market, including the setting of national employment targets, ensuring reasonable accommodation and rehabilitation, and research to quantify the extra cost of living with a disability.

(Neven): Interesting, really. But I also heard that the EU Commission presented some Anti-Poverty Strategy. Do you know anything about that?

(Nacho): Yes, sure. In fact, together with the enhanced Disability Rights Strategy, the European Commission presented its first ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy with a comprehensive approach to eradicate poverty.

Of relevance to us is the identification of quality employment as the first way out of poverty for those who can work, combined with the adequate design of social benefits and in-work benefits. Francesca Sbianchi, Chairwoman of the EBU Advocacy Committee, said, "This resonates with EBU's analysis of a disability benefits trap in many Member States."

(Neven): Great. Well, you're really very active in the EBU Office because I also know you hosted a webinar lately.

(Nacho): Yes, and this kind of links up with the subject of employment that we mentioned a few moments ago.

On May 20th, EBU hosted its webinar, "Unlock Our Potential: Creating Inclusive Workplaces for Blind and Partially Sighted People."

Through an enriching online session, our organisation covered this subject through multiple angles. EBU's Board Member, Anja Uršič, made the presentation about the main barriers that people with visual impairment encounter when accessing the labour market, as well as about the main ways to help overcome those.

Attendees also had the chance to listen to the testimonials from Paweł Mazarczyk, one of our dear co-hosts, from Poland, Loredana Dicsi from Romania, Galina Krasteva from Bulgaria, and Ani Sargsyan from France, who provided examples of how to provide reasonable accommodation for blind and partially sighted people at the workplace.

For this occasion, EBU also invited Beatriz Bastião, a Project Technical Officer at the International Labour Organization (ILO) who made the presentation about collecting data on persons with disabilities.

As underlined by our organisation in the past, enhancing statistical tools is an essential part of addressing the subject of access to employment for people with visual impairment.

In her presentation, Beatriz highlighted ILO's commitment to help the EU Commission in promoting the implementation of the EU Disability Employment Package.

(Neven): Oh, that's really great, and this is so important, to stress these things. And, yes, I'm really impressed by all these commitments.

And, yes, well, talking about commitments, I also know that there have been talks about some visuals which you've been preparing some communication around.

(Nacho): Indeed. This webinar also served as an excellent forum for launching our “Be A Visionary: See our Qualities” video. It's basically a video produced by EBU which focuses on the benefits of hiring a blind or partially sighted person.

Our dear listeners can already find it available on EBU's YouTube channel, and they will find it available in [English](#), [French](#), [German](#), and [Spanish](#).

(Neven): Great. Well, let's see if we can take one more news. I mean, I know that our excellent Chairwoman, Francesca Sbianchi, who is the Chair of the EBU Advocacy Committee, where actually I'm also a part of, she got recently elected to a very nice post.

So please, tell us a little about that, Nacho.

(Nacho): Yes. Ma “Certo”, like our Italian friends would say.

Yes, Francesca Sbianchi, the Chairwoman of EBU's Advocacy Committee, was elected as a new member of the European Disability Forum's board for the 2026-2030 period during EDF's General Assembly that took place in Cyprus on 9th and 10th May.

With a strong disability advocacy background in her home country, Italy, Francesca is also known for her work to promote young people with visual impairment participation in public life and defending the presence of youth in the context of decision-making processes. In this sense, she's also a committed person in underlining the obstacles faced by young blind and partially sighted persons when transitioning from education to employment.

As she stated in an interview for EBU's Member's newsletter on April 2026, her priorities include strengthening accessibility across all areas of life, advancing inclusive education and quality employment opportunities, promoting a mutual recognition of disability status across the EU, supporting the development of accessible technologies, and ensuring that all voices within the disability community are heard and represented.

(Neven): Well, that's really great, and I'm convinced that Francesca will be a great representative there. Well, thank you very much, Nacho. So, could you please stay on a little for our focus interview because you have been our correspondent in that part?

(Nacho): Yes, sure. I will not be moving from here. So; I'll talk to you again in a few seconds.

(Neven): Great. So, Paweł, aren't you impressed by all things happening and going on? And actually, you were mentioned too.

(Paweł): Yes, Neven, it was very much fun to take part in the webinar, and there were so many excellent guests. I heard so many stories of other blind people who had it difficult to find a job in the beginning and shared their insights on how they finally get there, to having a long-term stable employment.

I always like listening to those. So, it was very great to meet other fellow blind once-upon-a-time job seekers. But all the other updates sound really promising too. So, I'm really looking forward to these policies developing in the long term.

(Neven): Wonderful. So now, I can't wait anymore. So Paweł, should we, start with this interesting music part of today's podcast?

(Paweł): Yes, let's tune into that.

Focus interview: Inclusive melodies: teaching music to people with visual impairment

[Music]

(Paweł): Who doesn't enjoy a good jazz piece or a well-played guitar performance? Music is such a universal language that we all find something to enjoy about it. With current advances in teaching methodologies and the tools that come with them, we have slowly been given access to music education on par with sighted musicians.

So, since we are talking about this educational aspect of music, Nacho, you have spoken to Boris Moine from INJA, who is a music teacher and a blind person himself. So, I'll hand over to you. I'm looking forward to Boris' story and his view on teaching music to blind people and, as I mentioned, to the surprise coming at the very end.

(Nacho): Yes, I have to say, Paweł, that it was really a pleasure to pay a visit to Boris Moine at INJA's facilities, which have been featured quite a lot in our podcast.

We've been there to do some interviews in the past. Actually, discovering how you teach music to blind and partially sighted people was a very enriching discovery for me as a sighted person because there are so many aspects to bear in mind, and there are so many factors to study.

I mean, in the past, I had the chance - and I can already inform our listeners about that- I had the chance to attend to some concerts of bands of blind and partially sighted people that either made their studies at INJA or are music teachers at INJA themselves. And I can tell you that that was a nice and wonderful, let's say, ode for inclusion.

The same thing came when we talked to Boris. We discovered a lot of things regarding the learning process of that discipline for people with visual impairment. So now, I think I'll just stay silent, as people are usually asked to in concerts.

And now, I'll just let our dear audience listen to the great talk that we had with Boris Moine, guitar teacher at INJA.

[Music]

Interview with Boris Moine, Guitar Teacher at INJA

(Nacho): Improving accessibility in educational systems has allowed blind and partially sighted people to get taught in many subjects: maths, arts, science. I would like to focus on music, our key subject today.

What makes teaching music to visually impaired people different from teaching music to sighted people? On a technical level, are there any instruments that are more difficult to play as a person with visual impairment?

(Boris): Actually, as far as the music itself is concerned, there is no difference. Music in braille, music in standard notation, it's actually the same thing.

It's just the system that's different. But in fact, the text remains the same. The meaning of the symbols in braille is the same as those in standard print. When it comes to learning music, and I'm not talking about the instrument, but just the music itself, the learning process is more specific.

Writing in black, for a sighted person, thanks to their vision, will actually have an overview of the text, and if they focus their gaze on one or two places, they'll have a precise view of what they want to read.

Braille is a linear system, point by point, sign by sign. And to symbolise everything that is polyphonic, we use specific ligature signs, which means we write one voice, then another, and it is up to the blind musician to superimpose these two voices that they have to read one after the other

There is actually this specific aspect where in fact the blind musician will actually have to make the text their own before being able to play it on their instrument.

To make it your own, we actually rely a lot on singing. We'll be singing a lot. In my lessons, I get my students to sing a lot so that they can easily make the music their own, and that's how they can then perform it on the instrument.

The Braille notation is a linear system which enables a blind musician to have a more complete understanding, a more complete perception of the music than sighted people, because they are forced to go through a mental representation of the music before playing it. Whereas a sighted musician can play it straight away, but without necessarily understanding what they are going to play, a blind musician will understand the progression of each voice.

They will also easily grasp the structure of the score. However, the learning curve is much longer. For a sighted person, of course, reading is simultaneous once one knows the music symbols naturally. For a visually impaired person, that learning time is needed to be able to play.

As for visually impaired musicians, many visually impaired people obviously have residual vision. And with that regard to residual vision, we need to assess together what is in order to determine the learning method.

Does the student have enough vision left to be able to read while playing? In which case, they can be very well, so to speak, play just like a sighted person.

On the other hand, if their vision isn't sufficient, they will need to learn. Learning a piece of music or a score can take a long time because if, for example, the student has tunnel vision, they need to orient themselves on the score so as not to miss any notes.

As for the question: "are some instruments more difficult than others?" Personally, I don't think so. Just as with sighted people, there isn't really one instrument that is more difficult than another.

I believe it's all a question of hard work. It's a matter of practice, repetition, and time spent mastering all the technical nuances of the instrument.

On the other hand, and this applies to sighted people too, but you have to be a bit more careful with blind and partially sighted people. You have to pay extremely close attention to posture. The person needs to have a clear mental picture of their body, of the parts of their body, of the instrument, of their arm, their hand, and their fingers.

For example, I am a guitar teacher, so on a guitar, you see we have a neck that is offset from the body's axis, so it's not necessarily obvious straight away how to master the left-hand technique. The instrument, in fact, rests on the body, so you have to make sure the instrument is stable. In contrast, a piano is, so to speak, a piece of furniture.

It's not going to move. So perhaps, at the start it might be easier to play the piano. Having said that, the technical skills required to become a very good pianist are quite significant. Actually, every instrument has its own specific characteristics, and there isn't really any instrument that's particularly difficult.

After that, it has to come from a desire. When you want to do things and you are given the means to do so, you always manage to get there.

(Nacho): It's well documented that music helps developing the human brain in a way that it triggers benefits at a cognitive level. What does research say about the same process for persons with visual impairment?

(Boris): I'm a bit stumped by that question because I'm not a doctor. There are two or three things that I know, but they are common things that everyone knows.

We know that, in fact, in sighted people, in sighted musicians, the visual areas of the brain are somewhat overshadowed by the areas responsible for touch, because as a musician, you develop a tactile acuity through the practice of an instrument. I

I think it's the same for blind people, perhaps even more, because as they are deprived or somewhat deprived of sight, the brain, it doesn't like a void. The visual areas are effectively taken over by a whole host of other areas, the auditory areas, the areas of touch, which are right next to them. And in terms of cognition, as far as I know, there's no cognitive difference between sighted, partially sighted, and blind people.

Yvette Hatwell, a behavioural psychologist whom I had the opportunity to meet a few years ago during some talks she gave here, makes it very clear that no, cognition works very well.

And even in terms of verbal expression, a visually impaired person will even have, because they don't have sight, in fact, they have to specify exactly what they are doing. So in fact, they have access to vocabulary that can sometimes be richer than that of sighted people.

(Nacho): Of course, as for each discipline that you teach, you need to make sure that the materials used are conceived under the principles of accessibility and inclusion. What are the main tools used in the domain of teaching music to persons with visual impairment?

(Boris): I want to say that everything is good to learn. Of course, music has in fact been transmitted for several centuries through sheet music. Initially, it was handwritten. Then came the printing press. Now all of that is accessible online. But indeed, we have this sheet music. My

colleagues and I at INJA strive to pass on music via the score. The score is the key to the independence of the children in our care so that, when they leave INJA, they can buy a score, have it transcribed, and then play it.

So, we have this tool, which is the musical score. That means they need to be trained in musical braille. They're trained in braille, obviously, for those who are blind, of course, in standard braille and contracted braille. But we also give them training in musical braille, where they learn music through braille. So, there's that support

For the visually impaired, in fact, it's the same. We adapt the sheet music to suit their vision based on the magnification level recommended by the MBPH, so that it's comfortable for them to read. But we're not going to stop there because, as I said earlier, learning a score in braille is a very long process.

And so, as we're dealing with children, they don't necessarily have the same patience as an adult who can take a long-term view: "Oh, yes, if I wait a while, I'll be able to play it". But children often want to play straight away, and that's perfectly normal.

So, we make use of whatever works. Basically, we'll tell them what to play. We'll get them to sing. We'll play and practice through imitation, not visual, because they can't see, but through sound imitation. You're going to play this like this, with this rhythm and all that.

We have all these resources. Often thanks to the mobile phone, the pieces that are currently-- the pieces of music we're working on- they're often recorded somewhere on YouTube. So, you can ask them to actually go and find the music so they can picture it in their heads. So basically, anything goes to help them learn quickly.

Well, as quickly as possible and well, so they can enjoy it quickly.

(Nacho): We've spoken about teaching music. Let's now talk about creating music. We know, for instance, that the software provided by the DAISY Consortium allows you to produce music notation for blind people. What are the other main tools that are available for visually impaired people to create their own music? Are there any challenges that need to be removed to make the whole experience more accessible?

(Boris): Well, personally, I don't use software that would allow me to transcribe music because, quite simply, I learned to write music in braille, so I don't need it. And it takes me much longer to write in standard text and then convert it to braille than the other way around.

Right at the start, when I was learning musical braille, it took ages. Now, well, it's quite quick. There is actually software for sighted people. So, I'm thinking of MuseScore, which always provides a braille transcription of the score that's been entered into the software.

But at the moment, it is, after all, open-source software, so anyone can work on it. At the moment, actually, it's quite incomplete. First of all, the braille code in it, it's Anglo-Saxon braille. So you see, there are a lot of little differences in the symbols, but they can be confusing when you read them.

And then, there are things that are a bit incomplete regarding polyphony, regarding technical language specific to an instrument that won't be notated.

So in fact, there is a certain amount of information that the blind person won't have, and that's a problem. What also exists, there are MIDI instruments that let you play the instrument, and in fact, it's written as a score in software like MuseScore or others I'm not familiar with.

Actually, there are a lot of things that exist. Well, in reality, there aren't actually that many things out there, and since the years when I first came into contact with the visually impaired community, there have been quite a few companies that had the good idea of wanting to develop music software.

But unfortunately, every time, it's never really gone all the way because the target audience isn't big enough, so it's not necessarily very profitable for them either, I suppose. Well, that's just my own speculation, so that's why I think there should be more of these things. So efforts are being made, which is good.

I'm thinking of MuseScore, which is really quite good. It's really a good foundation. Then we need to develop that and take it a bit further, actually.

(Nacho): We know that INJA, the place where Louis Braille completed his studies, is well known for bringing together the talents of different blind and partially sighted musicians.

What are the key aspects to bear in mind when assembling a music group or band?

(Boris): For the successful inclusion of visual impaired people in mainstream settings, you need several ingredients. The first is that the person entering the mainstream setting must be comfortable, must be trained, must be proficient with the aids they need, optical or non-optical,

to be able to compensate for their disability in a mainstream setting. That's the first point.

But INJA really trains our students in fact very well. I find that INJA is truly a resource centre that is incredibly important, one that we really must protect and prioritise for our children who are visually impaired and who must equip themselves in this world of sighted that isn't necessarily very kind to them.

That's the first point. The children need to be trained.

The second thing is that the staff supporting them need to be trained too, and in terms of numbers, there need to be people behind it all, and for that, they need to be trained. When it comes to music at least, that's not really the case at the moment.

There's a major inclusion policy within the National Education System. In the conservatories, there isn't really much happening at the moment. For the past few years, I've been working with what are known as "Pôles Supérieurs". These are places where future conservatory teachers are trained.

I work at the Pôle Supérieur 93 in La Courneuve and also the Paris National Conservatory of Music in the teaching department, and I'm actually raising their awareness of visual impairment. Firstly, just letting them know that it exists, because unfortunately, many parents of visual impaired children don't actually dare to approach conservatories.

They don't feel entitled to do so, and that's a real shame. And so, to raise their awareness of this and to make these students and future teachers aware that they must actually welcome this group of people with disabilities, for that, there are training courses, and what I also explain to them is that there's common sense involved too.

I mean, in fact, to be able to actually teach a guitar lesson, because that's my discipline, with a lot of common sense, you can achieve a lot of great things. Then, if on top of that you are actually trained in musical braille, that helps even more

(Nacho): Finally, since music is something to be shared and since we know that you're a guitar teacher, is there anything that you would like to play to us? Is there anything that you would like to share with us as means of an ode for inclusion?

(Boris): Well, listen, I'm a guitarist. I'm a classical guitarist.

I don't play chords of accompaniment or, well, I do sometimes because I have friends and we do, you know, things like that. But, actually, I'm a classical guitarist. I play classical music on the guitar. And actually, I was

thinking of playing you a piece called "Far Away," which I composed, because I'm also a bit of a composer, and here it is, "Far Away."

(Boris plays "Fair Away" with his guitar)

End of interview with Boris Moine

(Pawel): To finish this extremely interesting and insightful interview, thank you so much, Boris. Thank you, Nacho.

Yes, it definitely resonates with me as I myself attended first grade of music school back in my school days. Actually, the music school which I attended was a part of the blindness school I attended to.

And I can remember trying to learn the music notation in braille. I can remember also the struggles to provide us with pieces. We mostly learned by heart then or by recording the pieces on tape. I know that there were some experiments into accessible music notation software, but they were, again, experiments.

We're talking about the early 2000s. Things were mostly experimental. A lot of that was available only in English. And also, back then, I wasn't that much of a proficient computer user to figure it out by myself, so it mostly failed, unfortunately. So, I'm glad to hear that this is slowly changing.

And here is to hoping for a more welcoming mainstream music scene because music is there to be shared, right? Neven, have you ever tried learning any musical instrument?

(Neven): Well, not really. I mean, you know, when you went to school you had to, you could try different instruments. But, no, I'm the audience kind of guy, so I usually say somebody needs to be in the audience.

But to the topic of today, I would say that it's really impressive because music can be so empowering of people. Not only, of course, persons with disabilities, but I think it can open doors. And yes, I do believe it also gives happiness in many ways. So, I think that there should be more access to music and to learn music in general, but also now in this context for the blind and partially sighted.

(Pawel): Definitely. So yes, here is to hoping that this is what we'll see coming up in the future. But now, let's travel somewhere else and, for that, I'll hand over to you, Neven, for the correspondent' section.

Correspondent' section: Norway

(Neven): And now, we head towards the end of today' show. It's time for another edition of our correspondent' section, where we shine a spotlight on the work of one of the EBU National Members.

And for this episode, we are really delighted to welcome Katrin Kvæl, from the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted. Most welcome, velkommen Katrin.

(Katrin): Thank you so much, Neven.

(Neven): Wonderful to have you here. Could you just very briefly tell us who you are and your position in the association?

(Katrin): Yes. I am the Vice President of the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted. I've been that for almost a year now. I'm 36 years old and I was born partially sighted.

(Neven): Talking about your association, let's start there. And maybe, you can tell us about how is the Norwegian Association organised, because it's quite a large country and, so, how is your member focus?

(Katrin): Yes, okay. So, we've been working with advocacy for partially sighted and blind people here in Norway for over 125 years and we had our anniversary last year in fact.

We have three rehabilitation centers all across Norway with some... One of them up in the north, and one down in the south, and then one in the capital.

And then, there's where we do our active rehabilitation of people from one year old until as long as they want. So, we do it for both families and people that are born visually impaired, and people that become visually impaired later in life.

And our main focus is to make people independent and to get them back into work or education, or just to enhance their life.

And we have a peer mentality, so we have other visually impaired people working with visually impaired too. Like, we have been where you are, and you can also get where we are. So, we think that's a great way of doing it. Our structure in Norway is all over the country. We are up in Finmark, which is our northernmost region, and then we are all the way down in Oslo.

And then, we have 18 regions all across with also local branches. I think it's 56 local branches, and they work with the members to help with social gatherings and the peer perspective. And then, we have the national branch, which is where I have my political part. That's based in Oslo, so here we work more with advocacy work to make changes with the government and to get our rights.

(Neven): Yes. Well, I mean, it's like quite a long country. I mean, there are several thousand kilometres, isn't it, from far north to the south of Norway?

(Katrin): Yes. It's, I don't know how far it is, but it's, for me, to get to Oslo it's almost two hours by plane, and I live in the middle part of Norway.

(Neven): Yes, exactly. OK, so back to your organisation. So, I know also, I thought we could mention that I know that you are really active when it comes to fundraising also. Could you just tell us a little, briefly, about this as some inspiration for other EBU Members?

(Katrin): Yes. Because we, the way the Norwegian Association is funded partially by the government.

Approximately 25% of our funds come from there, but the rest we have to apply for or we have to work directly to the Norwegian people. So, we have several employees that work with knocking on doors and getting sponsors or monthly donors. So, we have a donor program where you can be a support member of our organisation and give like 200 kroner a month, like 20 euros maybe, approximately.

So that's something we work a lot with. We also work a lot towards inheritance. So last year, we gained 18 million kroner in inheritance. So that's... We have three administrators that do this, and then we have people all year round that go and knock on doors and ask if they want to give us money.

And then, last year, we were lucky to be a part of the telethon that's nationally in Norway, where we got, approximately, 50 million, for our international work for humanitarian aid.

And that's something we do together with the Atlas Alliance, which is an umbrella, or a corporation for disability organisations that work with humanitarian aid, which we were a part of building in Norway in the '80s.

(Neven): Well, that's fantastic that you can get all these funds and so on. I mean, maybe you can tell us then more about this humanitarian work, because I know you actually worked with that for a very long time.

(Katrin): Yes. And that's actually something, at least for me, some of the things that we do that I'm most proud of.

We started with humanitarian work in 1978. So, in two years, it's been 50 years. Our first international project started in South Sudan and from there our work gradually expanded into long-term partnerships with organisations of blind and partially sighted people in Africa and Asia. And today, international solidarity remains one of our core commitments.

The main philosophy behind our international work is very simple: blind and partially sighted people everywhere should have the same human rights, opportunities, dignity, and possibilities to participate fully in

society. We therefore work closely together with local organisations led by blind and partially sighted people themselves.

So, we believe strongly in empowerment, local ownership, and capacity building. So, our role is not to come with ready-made solutions, but to strengthen local organisations so that they can advocate for their own rights and create lasting change in their own countries. So today, we cooperate with partner organisations in several countries, including Laos, Nepal, Angola, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, and Tanzania.

We also support the African Blind Union, and we are starting projects in Ukraine and in Palestine. So, over the years, our work has focused on several key areas. One important area is organisational strengthening in many countries. Organisations of blind and partially sighted people face limited resources and difficult conditions, so we support leadership development, advocacy training, youth participation, women's participation, and democratic structures so those organisations can become strong voices in their societies.

We can see this through the African Disability Protocol, which is similar to the UNCRPD, that we, together with APHUB, have been able to get ratified in many African countries. And to be a part of this process, has been something we are really proud of in Norway.

Another major focus is education and rehabilitation. So, in many parts of the world, blind children still have limited access to education, braille, assistive technology, and inclusive learning environments. So, we have supported projects related to schools, rehabilitation services, vocational training, and access to education because education is fundamental for independence and participation.

So, we see this, like we're going on yearly travels to our partner organisations, both in Laos and Nepal, and we can see the schools that we're building and how the children thrive and how they get... Maybe, they start to get a job afterwards and make their own money and actually get independence from it.

And one of the main parts that we work with, that not that many other organisations do, is eye health and prevention of blindness. So, that's a central part of our international work. So, through partnerships with local authorities and health services, we have supported eye care services, screening programs, treatments, and training of eye health personnel.

So, in fact, through our international efforts, we have been part of more than 300,000 eye operations that have been carried out over then the 48 years we have done this.

(Neven): Oh, that's really fantastic. Impressive. Yes. But could you tell us a little about this? Because I know about the crisis aid you do to Palestine and Ukraine.

Could you just, briefly, finally tell us a little about that?

(Katrin): Yes. That's the money we got from the telethon last year is supposed to go to Ukraine and Palestine or Gaza. So, in Ukraine, we have started the process. It's been a long process, and we're working with the organisations that also are in EBU.

So, through our network and international cooperation, we are first now starting the process of strengthening our work in Ukraine, and our aim is to support efforts ensuring that blind and partially sighted people are not forgotten in humanitarian responses. But in Palestine, we have actually managed to start our work, and we have delivered aid into Gaza, and we got some names and people from Finland, the Blind Society in Finland, so we see the importance of our Nordic collaboration, that we can get contacts from each other.

So, there we have started delivering aid, which is both canes and just food and finding better conditions for them to live. We're in the process of doing this, and we don't know how it will go, but we hope that we can be an essential part of the humanitarian aid there, and that makes people with disabilities not forgotten, because they mostly are, by other organisations that just deliver aid.

(Neven): Well, I'm really sure that this makes a huge difference for people. So, well, thank you very, very much, Katrin, for telling us about all this great work you're doing in Norway.

(Katrin): Thank you so much for having me, and I hope this was a bit inspiring, and we're always here if you want to know more and if you want to work together with us on, especially, humanitarian work.

(Neven): Yes, wonderful. Thank you so much, Katrin for participating in the "EBU in Action" Podcast. And by this, we have now reached the end of today's podcast. Before we end, I would like to say, since we have been talking about music all the episode, none of this would sound half as good without our very own maestro behind the mixer table, and that is Emile Cornelisse from the Netherlands.

So, thank you very much, Emile. And if you enjoyed today's podcast, please subscribe to "EBU in Action" on your favourite platform. And if you would like to know more about the European Blind Union or share your thoughts with us, well, all our contact details will be in the show notes.

[Music]

We would love to hear from you. So bye-bye from our team to you

(Voiceover: "EBU in Action is co-funded by the European Union")

END OF EPISODE