



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

European Blind Union asks Equality Commissioner for ambitious update of European Disability Strategy

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On 6 June an EBU delegation led by our President Tytti Matsinen met with the Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management, Hadja Lahbib, as part of engaging with the new institutional scene resulting from the European elections last year. The meeting took place against the background of the following developments: the recent adoption by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with disabilities of its recommendations to the EU, the ongoing halfway update of the European Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, and the upcoming long-term EU budget ("Multiannual Financial Framework") for 2028-2034.

Our delegation announced a future EBU awareness-raising campaign on the accessibility of household appliances, which are not covered by the European Accessibility Act due to absence of legislation at national level resulting in disparities within the single market.

Further, we raised the shortcomings of:

- The Directive that implements the WIPO Marrakesh Treaty, contrary to the spirit of that treaty, allows Member States to require authorised entities to pay compensation to rights-holders when producing and circulating accessible-format copies of books and other works.
- The Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the which article on accessibility only "encourages" Member States to bring "gradual"

progress, without setting clear targets to allow benchmarking of progress.

We expressed concern that at UN level, where the norms for acoustic vehicle alert system (AVAS) for electric and hybrid vehicles are currently being discussed, the EU is not upholding the existing requirements under EU law.

We also echoed the following demands expressed by our umbrella group, the European Disability Forum:

- The next Multiannual Financial Framework should do more to support the rights of persons with disabilities, including by ensuring better use of the leverage of EU funding to promote best practices for their inclusion. Failure by the MEDIA sub strand of the Creative Europe programme to promote audio description in its funding to the film industry was given as a negative example.
- The proposed withdrawal of the EU Directive on Equal Treatment should be reconsidered.
- There is a need for new legislation on affordable and available assistive technologies, and on accessible labelling of food products.

Commissioner Lahbib said: “My goal is to mainstream Equality in all portfolios. You can count on me to advocate for a strong budget and to protect the CERV programme in the announced simplification“. And reacting to our expressed disappointment at the announced withdrawal of the proposal for an Equal Treatment Directive: “It is a wake-up call to the Council to reach an agreement after many years of blockage. There is still hope.“

Tytti Matsinen said: “The United Nations Committee’s recommendations should be at the heart of the second phase of the Disability Rights Strategy. It was good to have a fruitful discussion with Commissioner Lahbib about some of these recommendations.”

Ends

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. It protects and promotes the interests of blind and partially sighted people in Europe. It currently operates within a network of national organisations of the visually impaired in 42 European countries.

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