

Engagement Balance Unity

40 years of EBU

Annual Report 2024



The voice of blind and partially
sighted people in Europe

Pictures: EBU Archive, Terhi Korhonen.

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Introduction from our President



The year 2024 was a remarkable and unique year for the European Blind Union. A true celebration was our 12th General Assembly in Lisbon, hosted kindly by our Portuguese member ACAPO. The assembly required a lot of work from both our office team in Paris as many members of our community in Portugal and across Europe and all the effort truly paid off. Coming together after the long pandemic years to celebrate the 40 years of the European Blind Union and to meet each other, exchange ideas and re-energise was truly wonderful.

The year 2024 was also a year of learning. Not only for me as a newly elected President but also for the EBU Board that has welcomed many new talents as well as some valued members with longer experience of carrying responsibility for our work. The new board members have worked hard to get a holistic view of our operations and together we have taken a curious look into our ways of working: why is it that we do things like this and could we actually achieve more or use our resources more wisely by doing things in a different way? We welcomed new staff members in Paris and started planning concrete steps towards opening a branch office in Brussels.

In 2024, we also focused on building community. With a brand-new strategic plan, the existing commission as well as expert and sectorial networks got restructured into committees, workgroups and forums that bring together both thematic expertise of our member organisations as well as blind and partially sighted individuals. Some of these structures started their work swiftly in the end of 2024 while others will make progress in the new year. We are in awe of the skill and talent of our community and strive to find ways to act inclusively and find new ways to engage with our members and their staff and volunteers.

Being EBU's first female President is a privilege. Leading a 40-year-old organisation that has achieved many great developments that ensure equal opportunities in everyday life for all of us is wonderful, especially as we are

systematically and constantly striving for more. The year 2024 was a year of elections globally and especially the European elections have a concrete impact on our operational environment for the years to come. The war in Europe casts shadows on all our lives, some more concretely than on others. Together we can support each other and navigate through the coming years.

Yours sincerely,

Tytti Matsinen

EBU President

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Foreword by our Executive Director



As stated by our President, the year 2024 was in many ways a remarkable one. With so many changes both within EBU, but also in the environment around us. And while many of the changes are not yet completed, or their impact is not yet fully clear, EBU, also in 2024, has continued to deliver its work to defend and promote the rights of blind and partially sighted people in Europe!

In that respect, in a fair number of policy areas, milestone achievements could be celebrated last year, and good progress could be observed in others. For example, the long-awaited adoption of a European Disability Card and Parking Card is a real highlight for which EBU fought for many years! Through our ongoing project work, many new materials, tools and publications could be realised; all of these are at our member's disposal for use in their work at grassroots level.

We were also able to feature in an increased number of media, both traditional and news ones, which is essential to improve general awareness of issues that matter to blind and partially sighted citizens. You will read in much greater detail about all our work in advocacy, project, communications, and much more in this annual report.

Before wishing you an enjoyable read, I would like to thank all our members, the many volunteers, the office staff and our leadership for their continuous commitment to the rights of blind and partially sighted people across the continent. Without their energy, time and expertise, EBU's work would not be possible. And in a fast-changing world with so many uncertainties, and where human rights and social investments are challenged, this work and commitment is undoubtedly extremely important!

And now: Enjoy reading!

Lars Bosselmann

EBU's Executive Director

How EBU works

The European Blind Union is a non-governmental organisation protecting and promoting the rights and interests of blind and partially-sighted people in Europe. Our extensive network of member organisations, which is globally stable and currently has 42 associations, provides us with a great deal of knowledge, expertise and experience related to visual impairment and its implications in the daily lives of millions of persons with sight loss.

Held once every four years, the General Assembly is our governing body. 2024 saw EBU organise its 12th General Assembly in Lisbon. Apart from gathering our national members, this event also serves as a forum to choose the 13 members of our Executive Board ahead of our upcoming working cycle. After the election of our new leadership for the 2024-2027 period, our new representatives held meetings in Helsinki and Madrid. Apart from these physical reunions, the officers of the Board had online meetings on a regular basis too, in order to address issues requiring urgent action. Afterwards, the officers' decisions were reported to and confirmed by the Board at their face-to-face or virtual meetings.

Before our General Assembly last year, EBU's activities were carried out through several thematic Networks. Following the guidelines of the organisation's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, EBU re-considered its working structures, establishing a three-level hierarchy consisting of three committees, six working groups and five forums (more information in section 3 of the report).

Apart from its commitments in geographical Europe, EBU also participates in campaigns and activities which have a broader scope, in particular as the European member of the World Blind Union, a global organisation representing the interests of 253 million people with visual impairment in 190 member countries worldwide.

Logistically, the EBU Central Office supports the Board, National Members and Commissions, as well as the organisation's newly established operational structures, in their work. It is also the main contact point for information to the general public, media, members and partner organisations. Ever since it was established, the EBU Office has been located in central Paris.

Headed by the Executive Director, EBU's central office team was composed of six other staff members. By the end of 2024, the permanent EBU staff members were:

Executive Director

Lars Bosselmann

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European Project Officer

Andrea Bila (replaced Amandine Guillemois in December 2024)

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Engagement, Balance, Unity: EBU's 12th General Assembly



The 12th European Blind Union (EBU) General Assembly, hosted by the Portuguese Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted (ACAPO) in Lisbon from February 11-14, 2024, centred on the theme “Engagement, Balance, Unity: Reflecting on 40 Years, Envisioning the Future.”

The event featured a comprehensive program including network meetings, reports, discussions on strategic orientation and constitutional amendments, elections, and round tables addressing the EBU's past, present, and future, with a focus on inclusion, accessibility, and navigating challenges like crises and technological advancements. Key highlights included discussions with Ukrainian representatives, a keynote on artificial intelligence by Google, and an Accessible Technology exhibition, alongside European Central Bank accessibility testing on future Euro banknotes.

The assembly culminated in the election of a new EBU President and Board, and the adoption of resolutions, marking a pivotal moment in the EBU's ongoing mission to support blind and partially sighted individuals across Europe. Tytti Matsinen, the newly appointed President, from Finland, expressed both humility and excitement as the first female and youngest individual (36 years old) to hold the position, emphasising her commitment to fostering greater inclusivity and influence within the organisation.

Reflecting on the previous term, marked by global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war, she highlighted the resilience and adaptability gained, and looked forward to leveraging these experiences and EBU's 40-year history to enhance online engagement and strengthen unity. Acknowledging the ongoing challenges posed by climate change, political instability, and financial constraints, she underscored the importance of a

strong, unified EBU, deeply connected to the broader disability movement, to effectively defend the rights and inclusion of blind and partially sighted people across Europe.

Following the General Assembly in Lisbon, an evaluation survey was conducted. It was sent to 140 delegates and guests, highlighting several key themes and gathered 56 overall responses. Attendees were asked about their expectations, the duration of the event, changes in engagement with EBU members and leadership, the usefulness and accessibility of the information provided, venue accessibility, satisfaction with the program delivery, relevance of presentations to their work, and satisfaction with procedural aspects like voting and resolutions.

Overall, the 12th EBU General Assembly received largely positive feedback, with attendees praising the organisation, volunteer participation, and atmosphere, but suggesting improvements for future events. Suggestions included more interactive formats, earlier document distribution, streamlined agendas focusing on core issues, clearer voting procedures, enhanced accessibility in venue and information and increased opportunities for networking and collaboration. A majority of participants, however, were satisfied with the assembly's duration and accessibility.

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1. Raising awareness, advocacy, and policy influencing



A year of continuity, but with important institutional changes

2024 is marked by a large degree of continuity on the issues we engaged on, and at the same time the need to work more than usual on horizontal and institutional issues in the context of the European elections and around the organisation of a new European Parliament and a new college of European Commissioners, new political priorities and a half-way review of the EU Disability Rights Strategy.

Employment

We promoted the EBU guidelines on **reasonable accommodation** for visually impaired workers by systematically bringing them to the attention of participants in relevant meetings, e.g., the Disability Platform subgroup and plenary, and the European Network of Public Employment Services conference. We also widely advertised them on the Web and got them published in the AccessibleEU database of publications. We regret that the European Commission expressed reservations about some part(s) and did not respond to our request to know which.

We continued to denounce the so-called “**disability benefits trap**” whereby, in a number of countries, taking on paid work causes loss of benefits, to the detriment of inclusion through work and compensation for the additional costs of living for visually impaired people. This message was forcefully put across on every occasion (especially where EU Member States were represented), particularly the DG EMPL Civil Society Seminar on priorities for the European Semester and the Belgian Presidency conference “Towards full inclusion of persons with disabilities”. The issue is now identified by stakeholders as an EBU core issue. The European Disability Forum (EDF) raised it in their study on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on persons with disabilities and, within Disability Platform, Business Europe supported our call to put an end to the “trap” – interestingly, using that same expression.

Participation in public life

We continued to push for a reform of the **EU electoral law**, namely by pressing the Council of the EU to respond to the European Parliament own initiative legislative resolution. Unfortunately there were few opportunities to do so, but an [EBU article on the matter for the EESC Newsletter provided good visibility](#). Otherwise, essentially, we worked on promoting **accessible voting** through reacting to and communicating about the European Commission Guide of Good Electoral Practice, and what use to make of it in the AccessibleEU resource centre.

Inclusive design

Promoting accessibility in all areas of life is a core aspect of our work. In 2024, it consisted in the following:

- In the context of the mid-term review of the EU's Creative Europe programme, we responded to the Commission's public consultation, to press for **audio description** conditionalities to MEDIA funding to the film industry.
- We continued to monitor and promote the implementation of the **Marrakesh Treaty** within and outside the EU, and to challenge the publishers' tendency to present the **European Accessibility Act** (EAA) as undermining the Treaty and present **e-books** as overall solution for accessible reading. We cooperated with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions on monitoring. A DAISY Consortium meeting gave us the opportunity to present our EEA related concerns, including the deadline for implementation for e-books and the retrofitting of 'backlist' e-books. As programmed speaker at the Irish National Disability Authority annual conference, we gave our perspective and presented our action (particularly as regards the Marrakesh Treaty) in relation to **Article 30 UNCRPD**.

- In the absence of evolution of the review of EN 81-70 (European standard on the accessibility to lifts), we focused our lobbying efforts (including an action request to our members) toward the CEN working group on tactile lettering, for a horizontal promotion of **braille**, in liaison with ANEC, the consumer's voice in standardisation. Nevertheless, we were directly consulted by a consultant for the European Commission about the review of the EU **Lifts** Directive, and obtained concrete results signalling the insufficiencies of the text and the defaults of the standardisation process.
- Building on the output of our Pay-Able task group, we circulated our recommendations for accessible **payment** to the relevant interlocutors, namely ANEC, EDF, the leader of the EU standardisation working group for the review of EN 301 549 (digital accessibility standard), and AccessibleEU (who published them in the “news” corner of their website and in their best practices database). We solicited meetings with various industry representatives and started preparing an event within AccessibleEU in 2025 in which to put our recommendations at heart of discussions between the various stakeholders. Meanwhile, the European Commission gave us some useful feedback and encouraged us to feed our recommendations into standardisation process. We also used our recommendations in the context of a European Central Bank direct consultation for their study on challenges of digitalisation of payments for vulnerable users.
- We continued to draw attention about the gaps left by the EAA, focusing on the **labelling of food products** and in preparation of a future campaign decided at the 2024 meeting of the new EBU Advocacy Committee on **household appliances**
- We attended 3 EU-level conferences of **AccessibleEU**, and a half dozen of its webinars or workshops. We were particularly active in the conference on EAA implementation, in the Digital Europe workshop “Multimodal solutions to foster accessibility of digital products and services”, and in the workshop on challenges of AI.

Mobility

We continue to lobby the EU Institutions about the proposed Directive establishing a **European Disability Card and a Parking Card for persons with disabilities**. The Directive was approved just before the European elections and formally adopted quickly after, which was a reason for satisfaction in itself. Moreover, the text is very largely satisfactory, considering the limited scope of the initial proposal. Three noteworthy results which can be attributed directly, at least in part, to our advocacy:

- The EU Council's negative impact on the text eventually adopted turned out to be rather limited. On the contrary, thanks to some countries, it is even added that individual Member States may choose to extend the new rules beyond travellers.
- The Commission is invited, in the text itself, to address the remaining gaps, i.e., to consider persons with disabilities moving their residence to another Member State.
- A separate and complementary directive was adopted that extends the rules to third country nationals legally residing in a Member State (which Ireland and Denmark will opt out of).

European elections, new institutional scene, revised Disability Strategy

In the wake of the **European Parliament** elections in June, we organised a communications campaign building on a 10-point statement presenting our key issues for the next 5 years of legislature. The campaign targeted political groups, national parties and candidates.

The statement was also used after the elections, to connect to the **new institutional setting** at the European Parliament and at the Commission. We obtained the sponsorship of an EBU cocktail event at the European Parliament by the new Chairperson of the Employment and Social Affairs committee, and an appointment with the new Commissioner for Equality

(both in 2025). One ask of the Statement was satisfied already in 2024: the re-establishment of the Parliament's Disability Intergroup, for which we had lobbied intensively. Another action point was the pressure on MEPs, in the context of EP hearings of the Commissioner-designate, to avoid the watering down of the Equality portfolio, also with some success: Commissioner Lahbib's portfolio now mentions Equality first, before Crisis Management and Preparedness.

We liaised closely with EDF and other of its members about calls regarding the second half of the **Disability Rights Strategy** 2021-2030, considering that the Commission already delivered on most items, including all flagship initiatives. The general message is: make the most of the remaining years, with new and ambitious initiatives.

CRPD review of the EU

We continued to liaise with EDF and the International Disability Alliance (IDA) about the strategy for consultation by the experts of the UN CRPD committee, ahead of their questions to the Commission, prior to reporting, on EU compliance with the UNCRPD. We contributed comments to the EDF alternative report and made direct contributions, oral and written, to the co-rapporteurs, focusing namely on the implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty and on EU funding conditionalities.

Data on disability

We repeated the call for improved data on disability and their disaggregation by type of disability on every occasion, namely at a Disability Inclusion Europe workshop on "Closing the disability data gap", the Disability Platform plenary, and the Belgium Presidency conference. A positive development was observed in the Eurostat database: a new folder "Disability" was created, gathering all disability related datasets, separate from the Health section. We welcomed this in a statement and encouraged further progress in the form of having disaggregated data, not just to quantify types of disability, but also to relate these to various areas of life. Our statement was shared on IDA's Disability Data list.

Meetings and events

We played an active role in the new **Disability Platform**, including all plenaries and the meetings of three of its subgroups: on the Disability Card/parking Card initiative; on political participation; and on the Disability Employment Package.

As usual, we took part in all relevant **high level or strategic dialogue meetings and events**, to systematically voice our relevant key concerns and recommendations. These events include: The European Parliament's Disability Intergroup New Year reception; the DG EMPL Civil Society Seminar on priorities for the European Semester; the original trilateral-format meeting of European Parliament (EMPL + CRPD Network), European Commissioner for Equality, and Belgian Minister for persons with disabilities, to take stock of the mandate 2019–2024 achievements and to discuss the next steps halfway in the period of the Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030; the European Commission Strategic Dialogue meeting on fair transition towards climate neutrality; the Commission's Strategic Dialogue meeting on the Future of the Union of Equality; the Civil Society Week - panel "Towards a Digital Transformation that leaves no one behind"; the Economic and Social Committee's Permanent Group on disability Rights public hearing on "Potential and challenges of Assistive Technology and AI on the life of PWD"; the Strategic Dialogue meeting around new Director General for EMPL, Mario Nava; the Public Employment Services Network conference; and the annual European Day of Persons with Disabilities conference followed by the Access City Award ceremony.

Consultations

We responded to some 10 consultations of direct interest to visually impaired people including:

- Public consultations (review of the EU Textile Labelling Regulation, mid-term review of Creative Europe, mid-term review of the EU Road Safety Framework);
- Surveys (designing safe road infrastructure, assistive technologies in the EU Member States);

- Direct, i.e., bilateral consultation meetings (waste sorting labelling, review of Lifts Directive); and
- Contributions to EDF position papers (evaluation of Regulation 1025/2012 on the European Standardisation System, assistance dogs in air travel).

A noteworthy development and a result of our complaining is the improvement in the accessibility of online consultations by the Commission. Also good is the increasing proportion of consultations where EBU is directly targeted by the Commission.

Alliance building and liaison with other civil society actors

Besides what is already mentioned above, we have had many contacts with **EDF**, either to feed into their work (Enforcement Toolkit, multimodal transport passenger rights, air Passenger Rights of persons with reduced mobility) or to participate in their events (e.g., Focus Group about increasing the diversity of voices representing EDF at the EU, webinar on EU legislation of interest to organisations of persons with disabilities, workshop on how to enforce EU law, EDF quarterly meetings namely to discuss priorities for second half of EU Disability Strategy, EDF-IAAP conference on Web Accessibility Directive...).

We participated actively in a joint **AGE-BEUC** webinar to discuss the first draft of the digital euro rulebook, to promote our recommendations for making payment terminals accessible. AGE represents older people in Europe, while BEUC is the federation of European consumer associations.

We co-signed the following two **joint statements** of many civil society organisations: one on “Paving the Way for an Equality Centred Policy Cycle” and another to alert against a “Watering down of Equality portfolio” in new European Commission.

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2. Empowering blind and partially sighted persons enabling full participation in all aspects of life



Audio Description

In line with its commitment to underscore the importance of audio description in ensuring blind and partially sighted persons' right to access to audio-visual content, EBU organised an online five workshop training to create AD for short videos.

Held on 30th November and on 7th and 14th December, this free-of-charge activity enabled participants to learn about how accessibility can be included in personal and professional communications, act as AD advisors and produce accessible content.

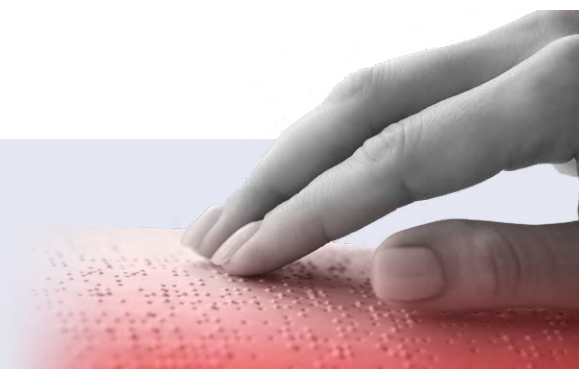
These sessions were attended by 10 people coming from Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands, featuring a mix of AD and non-AD users. Half of them were visually impaired people, while the other half were sighted persons, with all of them displaying different levels of familiarity with Audio Description.

Braille

Taking the foundations established by our former Braille Network, EBU launched its Braille Working Group after the approval of the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan. Since the structure's name change, its number of participants went up from 18 to 38.

From that moment, this Working Group organised several meetings to define its calendar of upcoming activities; while online sessions were carried out on 16 April, 29 August and 10 October, its members met physically in Frankfurt (Germany) in the context of the SightCity event.

At the same time, its members also wrote a paper about [fast-reading braille](#). Although the task of finding documentation about the techniques to improve the reading and writing of the code was successful, there's a lack of statistical information regarding the effectiveness of each method. In



spite of this shortcoming, the document is useful to underline the factors that play a key role in this process, such as age, the impact of early braille experiences or, on a more personal level, motivation and opportunities. Dissemination was postponed to early 2025 due to reviewing requirements.



Low Vision

In the context of our 12th General Assembly, our former Low Vision Network (renamed as “Low Vision Forum” since then) organised a 5-hour side event on February 11th. The activity was led by Elaine Howey and was attended by 16 participants.

Later on in 2024, during the month of June, the newly established Low Vision Forum organised a three-webinar series focused on providing tools to improve advocacy efforts in the promotion of the rights of persons with low vision. Led by the Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia, the sessions covered different domains: effective lobbying strategies (11 June), advocacy fundamentals with practical examples (18 June) and stakeholder engagement focused on inclusivity (27 June).

Building on the essence of these online sessions, the Low Vision Forum organised a meeting on 24th- 26th November in Okroglo (Slovenia). An activity led by Polona Car Djurić (Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia), it gathered six participants and four guides to work on the development of the document “Facilitator’s Toolkit: Raising Awareness about Visual Impairment”. This provides guidance to facilitators, educators and trainers so they can better understand the challenges faced by blind and partially sighted people, thus promoting best practices in schools, workplaces and communities. Although a draft version is ready, it’s expected to be finalised and disseminated in 2025.

Promoting youth participation

On behalf of the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted, Francesca Sbianchi, the Chair of EBU's Youth Forum, organised the 29th edition of the International Camp on Communication and Computers in Rome.

At the planning stage, she represented EBU in the preparatory meeting that took place in Rome between 6th – 8th February. During the event between 4th and 13th August 2024, she also served as its Chief Local Coordinator. At the same time, Oleg Shevkun, from Germany, participated as a trainer on behalf of our organisation.

Overall, the cooperation between EBU and the ICC Consortium was satisfactory, allowing us to suggest ideas to bring more quality and variety to the camp's program with the aim of empowering young visually impaired individuals.

Women leadership and Gender Equality

Prior to our 12th General Assembly, our former Womens' Network hosted a side event, led by Minna Kejonen, which was attended by 18 participants.

The attendants praised the aim of the Network's workshops in empowering women in the context of decision-making processes, as well as promoting participation and equality.

They also underlined the prejudices faced by women with visual impairment, identifying their daily barriers and obstacles in areas such as support to motherhood, access to information or digital and financial independence.

As a result of the changes in EBU's Working Structures, our Womens' Network was renamed as EBU's Women and Gender Issues Forum, which currently has 39 registered participants.

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3. Strengthening the capacity of organisations of blind and partially sighted people across Europe



Operational Structures

Following the 12th General Assembly, EBU has implemented new operational structures designed to effectively execute its 2024-2027 Strategic Plan. This restructuring centres on three key elements: Committees, Working Groups, and Forums, all operating under the guidance of the General Assembly and the EBU Board.

Three permanent Committees — Advocacy, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Leadership Exchange — report directly to the Board, focusing on strategic advocacy, inclusivity, and organisational development respectively.

A significant component is the establishment of member-led Working Groups, addressing thematic areas like Training, Mobility, Accessibility, Digitalisation, Braille, and External Communication. These groups are primarily open to EBU members and some external experts, and can create temporary Task Forces for specific activities, facilitating focused efforts on key strategic priorities.

Five Forums — Women and Gender Issues, Low Vision, Youth, Older Persons, and a Members Exchange Forum — provide platforms for discussion and collaboration, ensuring diverse voices are represented. Additionally, the EBU aims to strengthen strategic alliances with external organisations to enhance its capacity and reach.

All these structures operate primarily through e-discussion lists, ensuring continuous communication and collaboration. Following an information session held on August 22nd, 2024, member organisations were asked to nominate participants and leaders. Crucially, at the end of the nominations process, approximately 600 email addresses were successfully registered to the corresponding new e-discussion lists, ensuring robust and widespread participation within the EBU's new empowering operational framework.

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4. Strengthening EBU as an umbrella of organisations of blind and partially sighted people to improve impact and sustainability



Bilateral country visits

Under the auspices of the EU's CERV grant, fostering cross-border collaboration among European Blind Union (EBU) members, the Lithuanian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted (LASS) and the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired (FFVI) engaged in two pivotal bilateral exchanges in 2024.

Firstly, in Helsinki, June 12th-13th, at the Iris Service Centre, LASS delegates explored FFVI's robust infrastructure, focusing on rehabilitation, advocacy, and employment services. Key takeaways included the efficacy of FFVI's Daisy lending system, tactile material production, and their strategic partnership with the Finnish Disability Forum. Discussions centred on digital accessibility, inclusive education, and the vital role of regional associations. The visit underscored the significance of continuous professional development and knowledge dissemination.

Subsequently, from September 9th-11th, FFVI representatives reciprocated with a visit to Vilnius. This leg of the exchange highlighted LASS's operational framework, including its social enterprises and regional centres, contextualising their advocacy efforts within Lithuania's historical landscape. The agenda featured in-depth analyses of Vilnius' accessible infrastructure, the Audio Sensory Library's services, and LASS's innovative inclusion initiatives, such as joint hiking trips. A notable session focused on vision rehabilitation and practical accessibility solutions within Vilnius. The visit culminated with a tour of the Lithuanian Centre for the Education of the Blind and Partially Sighted and a poignant discussion with a parent of a visually impaired child, addressing the complexities of inclusive education.

Both exchanges, financed by the EU grant CERV, were deemed highly successful, reinforcing the importance of international networking and the impactful advocacy of LASS and FFVI, thereby strengthening the EBU network.

Country visits

Between September 23th-25th, EBU conducted a two-day onboarding visit to the Latvian Society of the Blind (LSB) in late September, aimed at strengthening partnerships and exploring services for visually impaired individuals in Latvia.

The delegation, led by EBU Director, Lars Bosselmann, and Membership Officer, Valérie Bertrand-Vivancos, was warmly welcomed at Riga Airport and proceeded to meet with key government officials at the Ministry of Welfare, discussing policies for supporting visually impaired citizens. The visit included a trip to Cēsis, where they explored the LSB's territorial organisation and social rehabilitation centre, and later, to Riga Strazdumuiža Village, visiting a secondary school with assistive teaching materials and engaging with students. They toured the Library of the Blind of Latvia, observing the production of braille and audiobooks, and the newly established Center for Social Rehabilitation, which offers diverse facilities, including IT resources, craft workshops, and sports areas.

The visit concluded with a presentation about EBU and a discussion with LSB board members, focusing on collaborative initiatives to enhance support for the visually impaired community. The EBU delegation expressed gratitude for the hospitality and dedication of their hosts, particularly the LSB, and emphasised their commitment to continued collaboration. Latvia, with its estimated 11,000 blind and partially sighted individuals, faces challenges in providing integrated education and addressing regional disparities in service availability.

One month and a half later, both Lars and Valérie paid a visit to our Greek Member, the Panhellenic Association of the Blind (PAB) in Athens, a dedicated organisation, founded in 1932, striving to enhance the lives of over 6,000 visually impaired Greeks through diverse services and advocacy. Apart from their national commitments, PAB actively engages in international cooperation, including the European Blind Union and World Blind Union, to learn and share best practices.

Overall, PAB offers educational resources like a digital talking library and braille lessons, along with essential orientation, mobility, and daily living skills training, though a critical shortage of instructors persists. Technical assistance, including a technology lab and social service support, further aids members.

When it comes to Greek visually impaired persons' daily barriers, employment remains a key challenge, with PAB advocating for inclusive policies and quotas, while also pushing for expanded opportunities in diverse fields. Additionally, financial support varies, and accessibility, particularly in Athens, poses significant difficulties due to infrastructure limitations.

Our small delegation had also the chance to visit the Tactual Museum at the Lighthouse for the Blind, a cultural initiative showcasing innovative tactile engagement with art and history, complementing the Lighthouse's broader mission of social care and professional training. Both PAB and the Lighthouse, despite financial and logistical hurdles, demonstrate unwavering commitment to fostering independence and inclusion for Greece's visually impaired community, operating with volunteer boards and receiving government subsidies. The delegation encouraged active participation in EBU initiatives, concluding with gratitude for the warm hospitality and insightful experience.

Meet the EBU Members webinars

In an effort to strengthen member collaboration and knowledge sharing, we launched the "Meet the EBU Members" webinar series, as proposed during the drafting of the new strategic plan, allowing member organisations to showcase their work and best practices. The aim of the series is to promote collaboration and strengthen ties within the European blind and partially sighted community.

Our British Member, the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), started the series on June 5th with a very detailed presentation on their promotion of innovative solutions in the areas of eye health, independent living or accessibility of public transport systems. Following this, SRF (Sweden) presented their organisation on September 17th, sharing their unique insights and strategies in domains such as rehabilitation, employment and digitalisation. Finally, the Croatian Blind Union concluded the reported webinars on October 29, 2024, giving us a better insight of their advocacy work in promoting personal assistance for visually impaired people in Croatia.

Each 90-minute webinar followed a structured format, including organisational introductions, examples of good practices, areas of particular interest, and discussions on the European dimension, culminating in an extensive Q&A session. Audio recordings of these webinars were made available for replay, ensuring that the valuable insights shared reached a wider audience and fostered continued learning among EBU members.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework

EBU established a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Framework in 2024 to track progress towards its 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, adopted at the 12th General Assembly and developed by a dedicated Task Force, composed of:

- Lars Bosselmann, EBU Executive Director.
- Valérie Bertrand-Vivancos, EBU Membership Officer.
- Tytti Matsinen, Quality Assurance and Accountability Specialist, Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired.
- Julie Bertholon, Responsible for Lobbying, Networking & Partnerships, Fédération des Aveugles et Amblyopes de France.
- Sabine Stroem, project management and consultancy on international level, active member of blind community in Berlin (Germany), active in the guide dog owner community and member of the German DIN/CEN forum.
- Andreas Havsberg, board member of the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted and employed at the Norwegian Central Bank with IT security.
- Bárbara Martín Muñoz, Responsible for Coordination Institutional Agreements and External Collaborations, ONCE Spain.
- Dominique Danau, External Consultant, SAGO Research.

This Task Force held its first meeting in December 2023. Throughout 2024, eight meetings were held to prepare the MEL Framework and Terms of Reference for the new Working Structures/implementation structures of EBU.

In its initial phase, the framework tested 20 indicators to measure impact across four key priorities: advocacy, empowerment, capacity building, and organisational strengthening. These indicators span impact, outcome, and output levels, assessing changes in legal frameworks, awareness, and direct activity results, respectively.

The MEL Framework's implementation has been a collaborative effort, involving the EBU Office, Board, working structures, and members, each playing a role in data collection and analysis. A baseline study was conducted in 2024 to test the framework and establish initial data, using a tracking tool and office-gathered data, with plans for future member surveys and evaluations. The baseline study focused on indicators such as event participation, output production, alliance strength, communication reach, member engagement, and governance representation.

Data collection revealed insights into event participation, with internal events primarily aligning with organisational strengthening. Communication metrics showed increasing social media engagement, despite fluctuations in reach, and website analytics highlighted member page engagement.

The study also examined member engagement in working structures, revealing varying levels of participation and the need for targeted outreach. Gender representation in EBU structures was analysed, showing a generally balanced distribution, though some structures exhibited higher female or male participation.

In summary, the MEL framework's data analysis was deemed important for assessing progress, refining strategies, and ensuring EBU's effectiveness in advocating for and supporting blind and partially sighted individuals across Europe. Its ongoing development and implementation will allow for continuous improvement and strategic adjustments.

Strengthening the visibility of EBU

EBU's website continues to be a major channel of communication for its activities and issues related to the visually impaired community. The site attracted an average of 8,500 visitors every month. On the occasion of our organisation's four decades of existence, the [video](#) produced for our 40th anniversary featured on its homepage.

Our webpage served also as the launching platform of our monthly editions of our [Member's Newsletter](#), consisting of contributions from our members, general news and information on issues relevant to our target group. It also features regular campaign updates provided by the Head of Advocacy and Campaigning. Once or twice per year, EBU also produces a Focus Newsletter, covering a particular subject; last year, it was dedicated to our [12th General Assembly](#).

The European Blind Union also strengthened its visibility by developing a more strategic approach to external communications. The main channels in this domain were our Social Media profiles on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [X](#). By the end of 2024, EBU had a total of 6,683 followers in all of its main platforms: 459 on Facebook, 980 on LinkedIn and 5,244 on X. Although overall we registered a growth in the first two, our organisation suffered a loss of followers in the third one (something that has also happened to other organisations after the internal changes the platform has gone through after the change in X's ownership). Furthermore, last year EBU started monitoring the results obtained through our Social Media activity by using the tool Metricool, a platform which allows an organisation to follow up its Social Media accounts' general performance.

Apart from the traditional EBU' publications, commemorating special days or following live events, this year we also tried to use new formats of interaction with our audience: for example, we started using videos ahead of the 2024 European Elections in order to encourage blind and partially sighted persons across the EU to vote, featuring short clips of our President and our Executive Director. The same was done in the context of special events for our communities such as the European Day of Persons with Disabilities 2024 or the 2024 Paralympic Games.

As a side note, our YouTube channel (90 subscribers) has been used for uploading our [40th Anniversary video](#), as well as the recordings of the info sessions [featuring presentations of our National Members](#). By the end of 2024, both EBU's Executive Director and the External Communications Officer discussed the possibility of creating new interesting content for persons with visual impairment as a way to animate the platform in the near future.

Apart from constantly feeding its Social Media channels, EBU also deployed the dissemination of its latest updates and materials through other tools:

Since its launching in late 2022, our organisation has been producing four episodes per year of its podcast "EBU in Action". In 2024, we produced podcasts focused on our 12th General Assembly (March 2024), the 2024 European Elections (May 2024), the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games (September 2024) and our expectations ahead of the 2024-2029 legislative cycle in the EU (December 2024).

These episodes are available on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Podbean](#) and [Spotify](#) (after some logo adjustments required by Podbean, we were allowed to disseminate the episodes of "EBU in Action" through Spotify as well). Those were also [uploaded to our website](#), alongside their respective transcripts.

Although we don't have data available about our podcast's performance on Apple Podcasts and Spotify, we have access to our download stats on Podbean; last year, all "EBU in Action" episodes produced since 2022 reached more than 1,000 downloads in the platform. Moreover, since we started using a paid subscription after using up our free plan, we've also been able to modify the episodes' descriptions, thus including transcripts and a link to our website. Overall, this has helped us in improving the interactivity of the content uploaded to the platform.

In addition to the production of "EBU in Action", our organisation gives visibility to our National Members' commitments by co-producing the #ViewsOfLife series of interviews in cooperation with ORF Journalist Julius Kratky since January 2023.

In 2024, he produced episodes with [ACAPO's President Rodrigo Santos](#), our [Executive Director Lars Bosselmann](#) (a thematic episode covering our 12th General Assembly), our [Austrian Member's President Markus Wolf](#), our Latvian Member's [Vice President Vilmantas Balčikonis](#), [Anja Uršič, from our Slovenian Member](#) and [Henrik Götesson, from our Swedish Member](#).

By the end of the year, we had a discussion with Julius over the possibility of producing special episodes on certain subjects, such as the City of Vienna being the winner of the 2025 [Access City Award](#) hosted by the European Commission or focusing on technological solutions aiming to improve the daily lives of blind and partially sighted persons in Europe.

Apart from its collaboration with Julius, EBU has kept developing its institutional and media database in order to extend its network of key contacts in media outlets and other non-profit organisations. In 2024, we have managed to get key contacts in the communications department of the [European Economic and Social Committee](#) or the [Perkins School for the Blind in the US](#). At a European level, we were also in touch with the [Accessible EU Consortium](#) Communications Department. On the occasion of the preparations ahead of World Braille Day 2025, we were also approached by a person working at the [UN Regional Information Center for Western Europe](#) in December 2024.

At the same time, [Odyssey Global Media](#), an international initiative aimed at sharing grassroots and inspirational stories across the world, became interested in EBU's work through its #ViewsOfLife videocast and our "EBU in Action" podcast. Their pioneers decided to help us in disseminating both of them to a worldwide audience.

When it comes to increasing the contacts within our journalistic agenda, EBU's focus during 2024 has been to find journalists who are specifically covering subjects concerning disability. In this sense, attending online webinars about improving media relations or events such as [EESC's 2024 Connecting EU Seminar](#) have proven to be good means to satisfy that purpose. As a result, we've been able to reach out reporters working in outlets such as EURACTIV or Euronews, who we wish to work more closely with in the future.

Directly linked to expanding our database of key contacts in external outlets, EBU submitted several contributions which were disseminated through different fora: some of our highlights included Op-Ed pieces in Social Europe covering the [European Accessibility Act](#), the [2024 European Elections](#) and the [2024 Paralympics](#). Although they changed their editor-in-chief last year, we expect to be able to keep drafting articles for the outlet while also diversifying the range of authors in charge of them.

At the same time, we also discovered a new platform: [#BlindNewWorld](#), a blog run by the Perkins School for the Blind where blind and partially sighted people across the world can share their inspirational stories in areas such as art, culture, technology or sports. Last year, our Executive Director, [Lars Bosselmann](#), and the President of the Estonian Blind Union, [Jakob Rosin](#), published an entry on the website about their personal journeys as a blind runner and blind accessibility consultant, respectively. Later on, the website manager of the initiative disseminated the two stories on their [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#) channels; in total, #BlindNewWorld has near 90,000 followers in all platforms.

As always, EBU also sent its materials to other non-profit organisations, such as the [European Disability Forum](#) or [World Blind Union](#), on a regular basis. While submitting a contribution to the latter's [December 2024 Newsletter](#) (1,047 recipients), our organisation featured seven times in the former's Weekly Newsletter (457 members). Among others, EDF shared through its Weekly Newsletter our positions regarding the developments of the EU Disability Card Directive ([example 1/example 2](#)), the launching of our [press release covering our 12th General Assembly](#) or a [summary of our 2024 Low Vision webinars](#). Furthermore, we carried out the same process alongside the communication staff of the Accessible EU Consortium, who uploaded some of our materials to their website ([example 1/example 2/example 3](#); the site has 2,487 monthly visits).

During 2024, EBU also developed a close working relationship with the communications department of the European Economic and Social Committee. Each month, EESC publishes a Newsletter (2,000 subscribers) focused on a certain topic, and in some occasions, we were able to submit a contribution. In this area, we can underscore, for instance, our Executive Director's piece about [the underrepresentation of persons with disabilities in media outlets](#).

Other notable media appearances of 2024 included an interview with Jakob Rosin by the Financial Times or another interview to our Executive Director by HQ Magazine (the digital version has been published on early 2025).

Finally, the planning of the celebration of the bicentenary of the invention of the braille code in 2025 strengthened our visibility too. Ahead of the occasion, our British Member, RNIB, created [a commemorative logo](#). Thanks to recommendations from our braille Working Group, EBU contacted RNIB and expressed its support to expand the initiative at a European level.

In this sense, the members of our braille Working Group suggested including a small version of EBU's logo to its design, thus emphasising the European dimension of the activity (which was later on validated through a signed agreement). Afterwards, we also launched a call for translations among our membership: our Austrian, Belgian, Croatian, French, Lithuanian, Polish and Slovakian Members expressed their interest in having an adapted version of RNIB's logo. Afterwards, our British Member liaised with the previous associations to finalise the requested versions.

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This publication is co-funded by
the European Union.

