



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe



The Madrid Declaration – November 2023

Introduction

The European Blind Union (EBU) considers the international mobility of young persons with disabilities an important focus for its actions in the coming years. This was the theme of the EBU 2023 Annual Conference held in Madrid, Spain, from November 6th to 8th, entitled 'People on the Move: making educational and professional experiences abroad fully inclusive!', where this declaration was adopted.

EBU strongly believes that the international mobility of blind and partially sighted people is crucial for the fulfilment of their rights as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular articles 20 (personal mobility), 24 (education) and 27 (employment) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 4 (quality education), Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) and Goal 10 (reduced inequalities).

The European Union funds opportunities for international mobility in education, training and volunteering within and outside of the EU. These are powerful instruments, in particular for people with disabilities, for improving their education, job skills and empowerment. However, persons with disabilities are still underrepresented in these schemes (around 3 percent).

The present declaration highlights the main obstacles to international mobility of blind and partially sighted people, in particular young people, and calls for a number of actions to be taken.

Main obstacles

- A. Lack of accessible information and application processes.
- B. Personal lack of autonomy and self-confidence.
- C. Failure of sending and hosting countries to meet specific needs.
- D. Lack of clarity of country's responsibility for support during mobility.
- E. Lack of statistics and feedback that hinders monitoring and evaluation of progress.

Call for action

EBU will continue to promote knowledge about the life-changing impact of international mobility programs through its communication channels and calls for the following actions to overcome the aforementioned obstacles:

A. Lack of accessible information and processes.

- Public and private institutions should make information and processes accessible and usable.
- The European Commission should create a unique point of contact to share information on all mobility programmes with links to available resources.

B. Personal lack of autonomy and self-confidence.

- Raise awareness of families and institutions, including training of university staff and teachers. Existing resource materials, such as those produced by the Uni4ALL network, should be used.
- Guidance, mentoring and the presence of role models should be increased from school age onwards.
- As young persons with disabilities, in particular those with visual disabilities, can need a longer time to reach autonomy and self-confidence the maximum age of volunteers of the European Solidarity Corps should be increased for people with disabilities.

C. Failure of hosting and sending countries to meet specific needs.

- A standard framework for support should be created for sending and hosting educational, training and volunteer institutions.
- Visual disability organisations should carry out intensive awareness raising activities towards hosting institutions for them to provide reasonable accommodation, suitable educational methods and accessible material for studying, work and volunteering.
- All institutions should establish partnerships with European stakeholders such as the Erasmus Student Network and public and private local entities for expertise and service provision.
- Young users should be involved in the design and implementation of their international mobility scheme for a fulfilling experience.

D. Lack of clarity of country's responsibility for support during mobility.

- There should be a clear agreement on responsibilities for finance and service provision, and the improvement of physical and digital infrastructures and public services.

E. Lack of statistics and feedback that hinders monitoring and evaluation of progress.

- National Agencies should implement studies, surveys, collect disaggregated data (including by type of disability) and statistics and share them broadly.

Conclusion

By drawing from the feedback and personal experiences shared by the participants during this conference, the European Blind Union believes that the time has come for more people with visual disabilities to be able to benefit from international mobility opportunities, contributing to a more inclusive, unified Europe.

Ends

About EBU

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.

6 rue Gager Gabillot 75015 PARIS (France)

Contact: ebu@euroblind.org

www.euroblind.org

[Facebook](#) – [Twitter](#) – [LinkedIn](#)