

EBU

Annual Report

2017



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

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The European Blind Union (EBU) is a non-governmental, non-profit making European organisation founded in 1984. It is one of the six regional bodies of the World Blind Union, and it promotes the interests of blind people and people with low vision in Europe. It currently operates within a network of 42 national members including organisations from 27 of the 28 European Union member states, candidate nations and other major countries in geographical Europe.

EBU offers a community where people who are blind or partially sighted are empowered to participate on an equal basis in any aspect of life they choose. Therefore EBU's major mission and role is:

- To promote and represent the interests of all blind and partially sighted people in Europe, including those with additional disabilities, with the goal of achieving the full enjoyment of their rights as citizens and their active participation in society.
- To promote improvements in the quality of life of blind and partially sighted people in Europe.
- To provide a European forum for exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of blindness and partial sight.
- To encourage, carry out and coordinate research into all aspects of blindness and partial sight.
- To work in partnership with other international organisations to promote the prevention and cure of visual impairment.
- To assist and empower organisations working in the field of blind welfare throughout Europe.

This mission and role implies the following values and principles:

- A particular focus on the human rights and needs of blind and partially sighted people while fully cooperating with those with other disabilities on issues common to all disabled people.

- Equality of participation and treatment as between persons of both genders, all ages and all degrees of visual impairment.
- Concern for the welfare and advancement of blind and partially sighted people in developing countries.
- A double-track approach to enable a society for all and to promote the provision of best in class quality of specialist services in support of an inclusive society.
- A balanced approach based on human rights, non-discrimination and positive action.
- The availability of information in format of choice at the same time as sighted people and without extra cost.
- The accessibility of ICT, manufactured goods, television, transport systems and the built environment, and the development of standards on the basis of design for all principles.
- The full inclusion of blind and partially sighted people in all educational settings, ranging from the classroom to the web and distance learning.
- Pursuit of our goals in partnership with those with similar objectives whilst retaining our specificity.

This annual report will provide an overview about the variety of EBU's activities. It will show the continuity of our many efforts to advance and promote the struggle of blind and partially sighted people throughout Europe for their participation in political, cultural and social life, for equal opportunities on the labour market, for a safe environment in order to gain the best of independent mobility, and many other issues of our work.

With pride and satisfaction we can report some essential achievements in our campaign on access to books. We also succeeded in modernizing and strengthening our internal and external information and communication systems, including our means of capacity building.

However, regarding accessibility to devices of our everyday lives, we still face many barriers that we have been experiencing already for so long, and, sadly, the strong resistance of those, who measure the worth of an independent life with the question of financial challenges..

You will also find examples of our mutual collaboration with organisations who work at similar and/or related issues.

I like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the EBU board, to thank all those friends and colleagues, who on a volunteer or professional basis have given their reliable and steady support to carry on EBU's mission and fulfil EBU's tasks.

Wolfgang Angermann,
EBU President



EBU President Wolfgang Angermann speaking at the 10th General Assembly

Introduction By The Executive Director

In spite of a difficult start of the year due to serious disruptions that affected our emailing system, EBU was able to maintain its usual level of activity in 2017. As you will read in this report, the main focus of our work was again on advocacy and campaigning. A number of long-standing campaigns, including The Marrakesh Treaty and the European Accessibility Act, were still high on EBU's agenda. So one would be tempted to believe 2017 was a year of continuity but this is a wrong assumption in that it paved the way for far reaching changes in the coming years.

It was becoming clear for example that the decentralized approach to campaigning whereby campaigns are led on behalf of EBU by its national members does not allow for an effective overall coordination of EBU's campaigning. This is particularly true regarding campaigning on social media. This had to be addressed and it is in 2017 that the proper decisions and measures were taken to introduce a more centralized set-up and to hire an EBU Head of Campaigning working as part of the EBU office staff in 2018.

Another significant change in 2017 is the result of the fresh look we took at our information system. This led to the development of a brand-new modern-looking website. The newsletter was also revisited in 2017. As a result, EBU

will be able to offer, starting in 2018, two different publications which, together with the new website, will equip EBU with an effective system of informing its members, its partners and the general public.

This ability to change, this capacity to face up to new challenges, to adapt to new situations or to improve the environment in which EBU and its members evolve is a clear sign of vitality. EBU is doing well, its finances are sound (see the note by the Treasurer) and its network of national organisations of the visually impaired remains a formidable asset to make sure our voice is heard and our needs are equally addressed at the national and the European level.

Mokrane Boussaïd,
EBU executive Director



EBU executive Director
Mokrane Boussaïd

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The European Blind Union is a non-governmental organisation protecting and promoting the rights and interests of blind and partially-sighted people in Europe. The large number of member organisations we reunite provide us with a great deal of knowledge, expertise and experience related to visual impairment and its implications in the daily life of millions of persons with sight loss. Membership of the European Blind Union is globally stable. EBU currently has 42 members.

While the General Assembly of Members held every four years is our governing body, our work in 2017 was directed by an Executive Board of 12 members. However, the Board member from Montenegro had to step down as he did no longer enjoy the support of his national organisation. In 2017, the Board held 3 meetings, as follows: Rome, Italy, 03-05 February; Malmö, Sweden, 09-11 June; and Larnaca, Cyprus, 21-22 October. In addition the officers of the Board held an average two meetings per month over Skype to address issues requiring urgent action. The officers' decisions

were reported to and confirmed by the Board at their face to face meetings.

EBU's activities are also facilitated through Networks, established to address various work areas, including ICTs, road safety and access to transport, rights, as well as the needs of specific segments of the visually impaired population, including persons with low vision, women etc

EBU also participates in campaigns and activities which have a broader scope than Europe itself, in particular as the European member of the World Blind Union, a global organisation representing the interests of 285 million blind and partially sighted people in 190 member countries worldwide.

The EBU Central Office supports the Board, national members, Commissions and Networks in their work. It is also the main contact point for information to the general public, members and partner organisations. Ever since it was established, the Central Office has been located in central Paris.

Headed by the Executive Director, EBU's central office team is composed of three other staff members. In 2017 the permanent EBU staff members were:

Executive Director

Mokrane Boussaïd

E: ebudirector@euroblind.org

Project Officer

Romain Ferretti

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The office team will be reinforced in 2018 by a Head of Campaigning.

The European Blind Union's financial results for 2017 are particularly pleasing: we end the financial year with a surplus of €75,974, which does not at all reflect a scaling back of activities, but instead rigorous management and above all commitment by the overwhelming majority of our members to pay their membership fees, for which I most sincerely thank them.

Before going into the accounts in detail, I would like to highlight three significant developments which took place in 2017 and represent the Board's willingness on the one hand to support our members' activities and on the other hand to respect the provisions of our statutes, and finally to optimise our resources:

- Firstly there is the establishment of a Solidarity Fund, the operational rules of which were adopted by the Board following its Paris meeting in 2016, clarified and detailed at Larnaca in June 2017. The purpose of this Fund is to help members to organise or participate in projects, conferences or meetings for the benefit of their country's visually impaired. It is to be supported by voluntary contributions which, in this first year of operation, have remained limited.
- In agreement with article 7, paragraphs 2-2-3 of our statutes, following the Rome meeting of February 2017, the Board was obliged to withdraw the membership status of Azerbaijan and Georgia, who had not paid their membership fees since 2008 and 2010 respectively, in spite of numerous requests. This decision takes immediate effect but has to be confirmed by the next General Assembly.
- Finally, in 2017 our bank accounts were transferred to the Crédit Coopératif in order to increase the performance of our savings and decrease our banking costs, which has had immediate results.

The amount of our operating revenue has increased to €500,744, an increase of €38,651; our expenses came to €438,325, an increase of €27,415; our financial results have an excess of €10,467, more than doubled compared to 2016; finally, after adding the special results of €3,172 and deducting taxes on income of €83, the surplus reaches the value indicated above.

Without going into the details of the accounts, which you will find in the documents drawn up by our expert accountant, I would simply like to emphasise that the provisional budget approved in October 2016 has been strictly adhered to, even taking into account the additional requirements voted for in February 2017.

This year our revenues came principally from:

- our membership fees: €232,246, being 49.48% of the total,
- a grant from the European Union as part of the REC project: €197,958, being 42.18% of the total,
- donations of €27,000 from Vanda Pharmaceuticals and €22,097 awarded to us under the Onkyo project,
- and finally, €7,000 only was received for the Solidarity Fund.

On the expenditure side:

- salaries and costs came to €255,985 compared to €244,035, a small increase of 4.87%,
- various fees of €47,968,
- travel expenses of €35,850,
- accountancy fees of €15,600,
- rent and rental charges of €13,090.

At December 31, 2017 the total of our balance sheet reached €719,300, our treasury amounts to €64,500, which represents a full year of operation and therefore complies with the basic rules of prudence.

In conclusion, I would like to express my warm thanks to the staff of the Paris office and the French Blind Federation who work together to send us very regularly, every month, the report on revenues and expenditures, thereby enabling the members of the Board to follow their development with complete transparency.

EBU is mindful of the need to establish good communication between its constituent bodies. This is essential if we want to ensure optimal participation, avoid duplication and create synergies. We are using the following communication tools to achieve this.

1 Discussion lists

In order to facilitate and boost in-depth exchange of information, experience and good practices among members between meetings, we have developed email “discussion lists” according to areas of interest.

2 Flash News

The Flash News, a tool designed for internal communication purposes, is aiming at rapidly informing all our members about important news and ongoing activities. This tool allows for regular communication on our day-to-day activities in a quick and convenient way. In 2017, 7 flash news were produced and released.

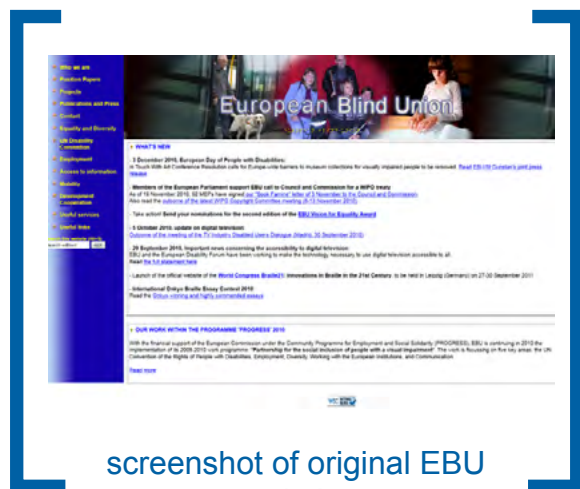
EBU's External Communication

It is equally important to maintain and increase our visibility and to make the needs and aspirations of blind and partially sighted people known to decision-makers, partner organisations, industry and the general public. Communication tools we use to that effect include:

1 Internet

The New EBU Website.

EBU has had a website since the end of the 1990s, this first version, though it did the job for many years, now looks extremely old fashioned as can be seen from this screenshot.



screenshot of original EBU website

In 2010 EBU decided to completely modernise the website in terms of both content and design, leading to the recent version, which looked much more up-to-date, even today.



screenshot of second EBU website

However, the internet (and new technology in general), evolves very quickly, and today more and more people use mobile devices (tablets and phones) to consult internet. The previous EBU site could not be displayed and consulted correctly on such devices.

Therefore it was decided to completely redesign the site, and to take the opportunity to orientate it towards the main body of work in EBU, campaigning for the rights of blind and partially sighted citizens throughout Europe, which is a quite different approach to the previous organisation by 'working areas'. This is quite a significant change, but we feel it better reflects EBU's current working methods and orientation.

Following a Europe-wide call for tender, a Spanish company specialising in accessibility issues, was chosen to create and host the new site. The process took several months and involved input from a wide range of people within the EBU network. The [new site](#) was launched in December 2017. It was partly financed with the generous support of [Vanda Pharmaceuticals](#), as mentioned in the [Finances](#) section.



2 The EBU Newsletter

In order to anticipate the work on developing the new EBU website, 4 newsletters were produced instead of the usual 6. Amongst the feature items of the EBU newsletter was an in-depth look at the potential hazards and benefits of electric and electric hybrid vehicles for visually impaired and vulnerable road users, one of our key campaign issues, while the 'focus on our members' section continued with an article on the All Russia Association of the Blind (VOS). The European Accessibility Act was also the subject of a feature piece, and we produced an FAQ on the Marrakesh Treaty, to facilitate understanding of this key topic for our members.

3 EBU responses to EU consultations

In 2017 EBU published a [Position Paper](#) detailing proposed amendments for the European Accessibility Act

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The key campaigns conducted by EBU and the LC in 2017 included:

1 The European Accessibility Act

In December 2015, the EC launched a legislative proposal for a directive for a wide reaching “European Accessibility Act” (EAA), which addresses accessibility as an overarching requirement in various sectors and establishes mandatory accessibility functional requirements. In 2016, three of the responsible committees in the European Parliament (EP), FEM, CULT and PETI, voted on the Commission’s proposal. In 2017, the proposal was negotiated in the remaining EP committees (TRAN, EMPL, IMCO) and in the Council.

The leading committee IMCO tabled a very disappointing final report, proposing amendments which favour business demands over the rights of disabled and older persons. By writing position papers and by contacting MEPs via different means, EBU worked hard throughout the year to get its amendments tabled for the different votes.

On 13 and 14 September 2017, the plenary of the EP voted on IMCO's position as its first reading. In comparison to the compiled IMCO report and reports of the shadow

rapporteurs, improvements could be made, e.g. inclusion of the built environment; applicability of the functional requirements to a range of European schemes and sectors. However, among other negative aspects, microenterprises were exempt and access services regarding audio visual media content and services were not included in the EP’s final report.

The Council of Ministers agreed on a “General Approach” in December 2017, which is far from EBU’s demands and leaves out several very important elements (e.g. it excludes built environment and microenterprises). In 2018, negotiations among the three EU institutions (European Commission, European Parliament and Council) to agree on a final text will start (“Trilogue”). EBU will continue to work hard to make the EAA a meaningful Act for the 30 million blind and partially sighted European citizens. This campaign is led by EBU’s member in Germany, DBSV.

2 “Right to read” campaign

In 2017, the EBU campaign “Access to books” focused on the EU ratification of the WIPO Marrakesh Treaty (MT) aiming to facilitate access to published works for, amongst others, blind and partially-sighted persons.

Intensive lobbying was carried out with European Institutions concerning the “EU Marrakesh legislation”. In parallel with following-up the Trilogue negotiations and EU member states’ positions, EBU participated in numerous meetings in Brussels with EP rapporteur MEP Max Andersson and other key MEPs dealing with the legislation, controversial amendments and the timetable. On 13 July, EBU organised an e-workshop on the MT aimed at its EU national members to coordinate our lobbying efforts, rewarded through the approval of a directive and a regulation (both published in the Official Journal on 19 September). In addition, EBU welcomed the agreement on the legal framework for EU ratification reached by the Council on 22 September under the Estonian Presidency. This agreement was meant to be approved by the EP in January 2018.

Also, EBU attended in September a conference organised by WIPO in Moscow (Russia) regarding the ratification and implementation of the MT in Russian-speaking countries.

Finally, EBU organised in early December a training course (TC) on the ratification and implementation of the MT in Western Balkan countries.

A strategy was set to coordinate and ease the process in this region, of which a certain number of countries are EU candidate countries. This campaign is led by EBU’s member in Spain, ONCE.

3 “Silent vehicles” campaign

In March 2016, the UNECE adopted the regulation 138 on uniform provisions for quiet road transport vehicles, like electric and electric hybrid vehicles. The regulation establishes minimum operational parameters for an acoustic vehicle alerting system, emitting an artificial sound up to 20 km/h. In January 2017, some amendments for the regulation were underway like the prohibition of the pause switch, which could have suspended the operation of the AVAS (Acoustic Vehicle Alerting System).

In March 2017, the WP.29 (responsible for the adoption of vehicle regulation at UNECE) adopted an amendment which prohibits the pause switch in electric and electric-hybrid vehicles. In July 2017, the EC adopted a delegated act which amended annex 9 of the EU regulation EU540 on the sound level of motor vehicles, according to the provisions of the UNECE regulation.

Unfortunately, the amendments are not in line with the current version of the UNECE regulation. Consequently, the pause switch is still a can-option for car manufacturers. However, the EC strives towards an adjustment of annex 9 to bring it into conformity with the UNECE regulation.

In addition, a new study was conducted by BAST (Bundesanstalt für Straßenwesen) to verify the need for a stationary sound for electric vehicles. The results were presented in September 2017 in Dresden and revealed that a stationary sound is useful for pedestrians, however only if it is composed in a certain way to enable pedestrians to audibly detect it. In the next phase EBU will put its focus on ensuring that the updated version of the UNECE regulation will be transferred into the EU regulation resulting in the ban of the pause switch. This campaign is led by EBU's member in Germany, DBSV.

4 Accessibility of payment terminals

Millions of disabled persons, blind and partially-sighted and senior citizens in particular, are not able to use payment terminals on their own. They are excluded from carrying out payments independently in shops, restaurants, stations, etc.

In an inclusive society all payment terminals should be accessible to all users. That is why EBU is lobbying for standardization and accessibility of payment terminals on a European level.

In 2016, the single-issue European platform, called Pay-Able, was launched. Contact had been established with the EC, key members of EP and Council. Organizations were asked to join the platform.

During 2017: Pay-Able continued its dialogue with the payment terminal industry and gave a presentation during the EC Workshop on Accessible Products and Services on 22 February. They also met with MEPs and Permanent Representatives to discuss the EEA.

At the end of 2017, the campaign bore fruit as both Council and Parliament have included payment terminals in the scope of the EAA (see above). This campaign is led by EBU's member in the Netherlands, Eye Association Netherlands.

5 The campaign for full accessibility of lifts

This campaign is led by EBU's member in Austria, BSVÖ in close collaboration with ANEC (European consumer voice in standardization).

In relation to the accessibility of lifts, lack of awareness regarding the importance of measures that allow people with a visual impairment to use lifts autonomously is a big problem. While it is broadly understood and accepted that certain specific requirements such as access without steps, a minimum door width or enough space inside the lift car are necessary requirements, it is not yet widely accepted that, for example, the usability of control devices is just as necessary to ensure the accessibility of the whole lift. Therefore, people with visual impairment often experience serious difficulties in using lifts.

Unfortunately, in early 2017, CEN/TC 10/WG 7, the committee responsible for the revision of EN 81-70, could not be convinced to retract their decision to reduce the requirements for contrast of signage on operating elements (e.g. buttons) in lifts. Therefore lobbying activities continued to try and convince national mirror committees to reject EN 81-70 in the Formal Vote due to insufficient contrast requirements. In May and June a Formal Vote was launched leading to intensified negotiations with national mirror committees, and in June 2017 EN 81-70 was approved in the Formal Vote (only four negative votes).

EBU supported of ANEC's appeal against the ratification of EN 81-70 by approaching national Technical Board members and writing a joint letter also signed by AGE Platform Europe and the European Disability Forum (EDF) to responsible authorities at CEN (European Committee for Standardisation) and CENELEC (European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation). Finally, in December, a conciliation panel to deal with ANEC's appeal in October resulted in the decision that EN 81-70 will be finalized without further delay, but at the same time a NWI (New Work Item) for its revision will be created to take into account the results of the study, which will be conducted as soon as an independent research organisation has been identified for this purpose. As a result of this ANEC's appeal is no longer blocking the publication of EN 81-70, but ANEC will continue to put pressure on CCMC (CEN CENELEC Management Centre) until there is certainty about the study and the revision. EBU will continue to support ANEC by means of providing expertise on the perspective of blind and partially-sighted persons.

6 Campaigning capacity-building training

On 5-6 October, 12 national campaigners from 8 countries attended a Training Course (TC) on effective campaigning skills in Paris (France). Although each campaign requires a different approach and different tactics, they were trained to use common rules summarized into a step-by-step guide and an influencing toolkit. The second day was the opportunity for participants to design a mock campaign. An internal evaluation revealed that 75% of participants reported feeling ready to use what they learnt back in their countries.

The e-workshop on the Marrakesh Treaty (MT) was eventually replaced by a physical TC held in Okroglo, Slovenia, on 30 November and 1 December. Co-funded by the Open Society Foundations and attended by 37 participants and speakers from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and Spain, the TC aimed to provide support to stakeholders involved in the MT ratification and implementation in the Balkan region. Representatives from national visual impairment organisations, libraries for the blind and ministries discovered the treaty in-depth (including the

long-standing EBU campaign) and support tools (e.g. WBU guide) were presented to them. They also exchanged on the situation in their country and how to improve it, in particular through regional coordination. Skype presentations from WIPO and the Electronic Information for Libraries network (EIFL) also enabled the perspectives to be broadened and mainstreamed the discussions to other population categories directly befitting from the Treaty. An internal evaluation revealed that 100% of participants reported feeling ready to use what they learnt back in their countries.



Delegates and speakers during the meeting

7 Conclusion

EBU campaigns were reported on and discussed during the yearly meeting of the EBU commission for Liaising with the EU. Tallinn (Estonia) on 16-17 September, the meeting was attended by delegates from 22 countries.

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

EBU delivered an analysis [report on UNCRPD article 7](#) “Children with disabilities” based on data collected within 12 countries in 2016. The main conclusions of this report are that, in most of the responding countries:

- Children and young persons are included in existing national disability strategies.
- Co-ordination amongst social, health and educational authorities with a purpose of coordinating information and proper measures is often lacking.
- There is specific legislation in their countries that guarantees that families with children or young persons with disabilities / a visual impairment receive support from the national or local authorities.
- There are formalised network or organization(s) of parents and relatives of children and young persons with a disability / visual impairment.

EBU also collected data on [article 26](#) “Habilitation and rehabilitation”.

Considering that data was also meant to be collected on low vision rehabilitation services across Europe ([see below](#)), the two questionnaires planned were merged. Experts on habilitation and rehabilitation, blindness and low vision collaborated with a subcontractor and put together a unique questionnaire circulated amongst the 42 EBU members. 17 Countries replied to the questionnaire, a report on the responses will be delivered in early 2018.

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

1.1 UNCRPD training and awareness-raising

As planned, EBU delivered a publication entitled “[The UNCRPD - A new look at our human rights](#)”. The document, the production of which was led by EBU’s member in Portugal, is intended for blind or partially-sighted citizens or others who regularly interact with them. It explains the rights set out in the UNCRPD and what they mean in practice for people with disabilities and blind and partially sighted people in particular.

It will assist people in better understanding their rights and how to defend them. The publication is available in Croatian, German, Italian and Polish and will progressively be translated in new languages in the years to come.



Illuminated braille panels and participants in the session in Croatia

Further to this translation, EBU members in Austria, Croatia, Italy and Poland organized sessions in the second half of 2017 to inform blind and partially sighted citizens on their fundamental rights as enshrined in their national legislation and deriving from the UNCRPD. A briefing document was made available to them. Attended by a total of 158 persons, the 4 sessions were a success and paved the road towards new sessions in the future. It is worthwhile mentioning that expectations were exceeded as the number of translations and sessions planned was 3.



Participants in the session in Poland

2 Blind and Partially Sighted Women

A new e-workshop entitled “Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women with visual impairment” was held on 14 December. Moderated by EBU’s member in Sweden, the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired, the event was attended by 16 participants from 9 countries. The EBU toolkit “The future we want” developed in 2015 was extensively presented. An audio recording is available from the EBU office.

EBU also produced [a video](#) entitled “The roads that lead to the top: a video on blind and partially sighted women’s leadership”, it portrays the stories of ten women who are blind or partially sighted and traces the paths they followed towards pursuing their dreams. The transcript of the video is also available in English, French, German and Spanish.

3 Low Vision

Since 2014, EBU has been extensively working to improve low vision services in Europe. Standards were developed in 2014, a promotion and implementation toolkit was put together in 2015 and an awareness-raising video on low vision was produced in 2016. To continue this ongoing work, an EBU expert attended the international [VISION 2017 conference](#) held in the Hague (Netherlands) from 25 to 29 June. Organized by the International Society for Low Vision Research and Rehabilitation (ISLRR), it was the perfect place for EBU to mingle, network, present and promote all the work carried out.

In addition, a follow-up survey to map the situation on low vision services in EBU member countries was planned. It was decided to merge it with the survey on UNCRPD article 26 (see above). Many survey replies did not indicate differences between services for the blind and services for partially-sighted individuals, suggesting that this data is not easily available.

The materials developed over the recent years, the experience accumulated and the contacts made during the conference will

be instrumental in implementing meaningful low-vision related activities in the future.

4 Working for Elderly Blind and Partially Sighted People

The last VISAL facilitators TC planned over the period 2015-2017 was held in Warsaw (Poland) on 11-12 May. 6 new facilitators from Greece, Iceland and Poland joined the VISAL community. A total of 31 participants from the three countries benefitted from a VISAL facilitators course.



The group of facilitators with their certificates accompanied by EBU staff and the VISAL trainer

Although not planned, VISAL facilitators trained 11 new facilitators in Hungary (May, Budapest) and 2 new full courses of 7 sessions each were held in Croatia (24 participants).

5 Working for younger people

5.1 Employability Training Course

As planned, EBU held a third TC on blind and partially sighted youth employability from 13-15 April in Tirrenia (Italy). The same non-formal methods fine-tuned in 2016 were used: ice-breakers, role playing, exercises and work in small groups. The 8 participants from Austria, Italy, Netherlands, Serbia and Spain also participated in mock interviews debriefed by a psychologist, in particular regarding non-verbal communication and body language. Back in their country, the participants organised discussion sessions to inform a total of 122 people about the methods developed.

5.2 Accessibility of exchange programs for blind and partially sighted students (Mapping out accessibility of exchange programs) with ICEVI Europe

In collaboration with ICEVI Europe, the working group delivered a publication entitled [“Recommendations for students with visual impairment participating in international exchange programmes”](#) studying abroad, in particular through the Erasmus+ mobility programme. The aim of this brochure is to motivate blind and partially sighted students to participate in international mobility with the Erasmus+ program and to help them prepare for a successful academic experience and stay abroad. Information, recommendations, questions and messages are mainly drawn from the surveys and project materials developed previously, namely the:

- [State-of-the-art report](#) on the accessibility of exchange programmes for students with visual impairment (2015) and the

- [Pilot Survey among Erasmus+ and Disability Coordinators and “Accessible Universities for Erasmus+ Students with Visual Impairment” reports \(2016\).](#)

6 Beyond Europe - Solidarity with our friends worldwide

As mentioned above in the finance section, in October 2016, EBU set up the "Solidarity Fund" mainly to support the EBU member countries who are experiencing difficulties in paying their Membership Fees, organizing or participating in projects or meetings. Further details are available from the EBU central office.

7 Report on Access to Braille

EBU aimed to map out existing good practices related to Braille usage and teaching, and promote the availability of Braille in all relevant situations and environments in society. 4 main actions were implemented:

- Desk-based research, in 2016.
- Data collection in 9 countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden in 2016; Austria, Estonia, France and Italy in 2017.
- Country visits: To supplement the information gained through the questionnaires, members of the project steering group met country representatives in Estonia, France in Italy in the autumn of 2017.
- Events: Working group members exchanged internally and with other key experts on the occasion of the 9th ICEVI international conference (July 2017, Bruges – Belgium) and a specific seminar (November, Frederica – Denmark).

A final [report on “Braille teaching and literacy”](#) was delivered. The Main conclusions and recommendations are:

- Lack of monitoring of progress of blind children’s Braille literacy.

- Braille usage should be extended to a wide range of situations including better identification of objects, easier navigation, better access to services, increased social interactions (e.g. card games), or personal development and lifelong learning.
- Need to promote cheaper and already-existing technical display-based Braille devices.
- Need for visual impairment organisations to collaborate with parents' organisations to raise awareness on the importance of Braille.
- Need to establish a Braille authority in all European countries.

8 Other activities: the Onkyo Braille competition

EBU runs the European strand of the [Onkyo World Braille Essay Contest](#), an international initiative to promote Braille literacy and to encourage the sharing of social and cultural information among blind and visually impaired people.

The contest is sponsored by Onkyo Corporation, a Japanese consumer electronics manufacturer and the Braille Mainichi, part of Mainichi Newspaper Company in Japan. It was created in 2003 and has been a great success ever since.

All Braille users residing in an EBU member country and in Israel can take part by submitting an essay in digital format. The essays are required to relate either to how the individual gains independence or knowledge through the use of Braille or to an individual concept about the world from the viewpoint of a person with visual disabilities.

In 2017 the First Prize was awarded to Marina Valenti from Italy, who wrote an essay entitled 'Braille ... an essential tool for the visually impaired or blind'. Her essay is a compelling demonstration that braille literacy is key to education and to accessing information. But braille is on the decline and blind children in mainstream schools are often denied braille literacy, not because braille is obsolete but because of negative attitudes.



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe



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