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# EBU Members' Newsletter 2022

## Number four, April.

## Quick update on Ukraine – first actions taken by EBU

As you all know, the situation in Ukraine continues to be deeply worrying. In line with previous communications, EBU has started to take first actions this month. Concretely, we provided support to three Ukrainian DPOs, Practice of innovative experience, Fight for Rights and Pravo Vybora (Right for Choice). All of these organisations cater for the basic needs of blind and partially sighted people in this extreme situation, as well as helping them to evacuate from heavily attacked cities to find refuge in “safer” places within Ukraine. We are grateful for the support that the Finish Abilis Foundation provided in establishing the contacts with the three Ukrainian DPOs. In the coming days, we are expecting to hear directly from them about what the financial support EBU provided helped them to achieve. We will share those stories with you, and especially those who donated money to our Solidarity Fund. Also, EBU provided support to the Romanian Association of the Blind to help them host, at their premisses, a few refugees from Ukraine, amongst them blind and partially sighted people. This is just a quick update about the latest action undertaken by EBU, thanks to your generosity! We know that many of you also work hard to provide relief to Ukrainians who are blind or partially sighted by welcoming them in your respective countries or by providing material support sent to Ukraine or neighbouring countries. Given the magnitude of the crises, all initiatives are critical! For any further questions or updates, please contact me;

**[Lars Bosselmann](mailto:ebudirector@euroblind.org),** EBU Executive Director

## Assistance from our Polish member for Ukrainian refugees

In connection with the war in Ukraine, the Polish Association of the Blind has undertaken the following activities for the benefit of the blind and visually impaired:

The Polish Association of the Blind has launched a helpline for people with visual disabilities from Ukraine who need support. It will be open from Monday to Friday from 8 am to 2 pm under phone number: **536 434 692**. Our employees will try to provide all the necessary information on:

– contact numbers to establishments offering accommodation,

– possibility to enroll a child to special educational centers for the blind and visually impaired persons,

– possibility to sign for an ophthalmological consultation at the Central Rehabilitation and Treatment Clinic,

– contact numbers to other aid institutions,

– other matters related to helping the blind and visually impaired.

Ukrainian flag Польська Асоціація Сліпих (PZN) запустила гарячу лінію для людей з України з вадами зору, які потребують підтримки. Інфолінія працюватиме з понеділка по п’ятницю з 8.00 до 14.00 за номером телефону: **536 434 692.** Співробітники Асоціації PZN будуть надавати необхідну інформацію щодо:

– номерів телефонів закладів, що пропонують житло,

– можливості зарахування дитини до спеціальної школи та освітніх центрів для сліпих та слабозорих дітей,

– можливості отримання офтальмологічної консультації в Центральній Реабілітаційно-лікувальній Клініці,

– контактів та даних інших служб надання допомоги,

– інших питань допомоги для сліпих та слабозорих людей.

Russian flag Польское Общество Cлипых запустило горячую линию для жителей Украины, нуждающихся в поддержке. Горячая линия будет работать с понедельника по пятницу с 8-14 по телефону: **536 434 692**. Работники ПЗН будут пытаться предоставить необходимую информацию по:

– контактные телефоны объектов, предлагающие жилье,

– возможность зачисления ребенка в специальные учебно-воспитательные центры для слепых и слабовидящих,

– возможность воспользоваться консультацией офтальмолога в Центр Клинике Реабилитации и Лечения,

– контактные телефоны других центров помощи,

– другие вопросы, связанные с оказанием помощи слепым и слабовидящим.

Two clinics of the Polish Association of the Blind in Warsaw and Olsztyn provide medical services for Ukrainian citizens who crossed the border after 24 February this year. They also provide assistance to all Ukrainian citizens in urgent and life-threatening cases. A Russian-speaking doctor is employed in Olsztyn. In 4 centers of the Polish Association of the Blind we will accept blind and visually impaired people until we run out of places.

On March 21-24 we conducted a collection for visually impaired children and young people aged 2-17. These were food, personal hygiene items, clothing and shoes. The gifts have already arrived in Ukraine to a school for the blind in Lviv.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) has pledged to send white canes, cane tips and Braille watches to Poland for visually impaired citizens from Ukraine. We cooperate with the Caritas Poland association in providing various support. Our specialist School and Education Centers in various places all over the country have joined in helping children with their education. In Warsaw educational support for children and youth is provided by the Towarzystwo Opieki nad Ociemniałymi in Laski near Warsaw. The children are offered a place at a boarding house and schooling. All of our Regional Structures also join in the assistance. Particularly in areas near the border with Ukraine.

We also work with other EBU member organizations that are interested in helping refugees from Ukraine.

**Andrzej Brzeziński**, President of the Main Board

Polish Association of the Blind

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## Support center for Ukrainian migrants in the Netherlands

On April 1, 2022, the «Oogvereniging» - Eye Association Netherlands started a project to help Ukrainian migrants with eye problems (visually impaired and blind, who have glaucoma, macular degeneration or other diseases that require systemic treatment).

We expect that hundreds of Ukrainian people with eye problems (in different age categories) will need help from the Eye Association.

Fundamental in this project is a Support Center for Ukrainian migrants. Nina Spodina, who worked as an ophthalmologist in Ukraine and had a license for private practice, was appointed as the coordinator of the support center. She will speak with Ukrainians in their native language and help them to solve their eye problems as much as possible. We will print and distribute flyers for Ukrainian migrants through the VNG (an association of Dutch municipalities), the Red Cross, volunteers, WhatsApp groups and Telegram chats of Ukrainians in the Netherlands, contact with the Ukrainian diaspora in the Netherlands, information exchange through the pages of associations on Facebook and Instagram.

This project will be able to make the lives of hundreds of people complete without a sense of inferiority and disability. The Bartiméus Foundation and the Visio Foundation financially support the work of a support center for visually impaired Ukrainian refugees. But more is needed. If you support this project, you can donate quickly and easily:

NL29 RABO 0177 8855 05 (Donation for Ukraine)

For more information check <www.oogvereniging.nl/oekraine>

## Ukraine - BlindSquare Blog provides assistance

On April 1st, in an effort to support blind Ukrainian refugees, BlindSquare released free access to [BlindSquare Event](https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/blindsq-event/id635707709) to a 1,000km region including all of Ukraine, as well as 21 other surrounding countries. People of Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Northern Albania, North Macedonia, Turkey, Thessaloniki, Slovenia, Eastern Austria, Czechia, Poland and Eastern Germany can download our full-featured version of BlindSquare throughout the duration of the war, plus 90 days, supporting those on journeys to and from Ukraine. If these BlindSquare users acquire this app within one of these regions, they will have global access should they travel outside of the regions mentioned above.

For full information, [read the blog post](https://www.blindsquare.com/2022/04/12/blindsquare-responds-to-request-for-help-for-ukraine/).

## Our campaigns

### Accessibility

#### Books - Marrakesh Treaty

Our enquiry (April 1st) to our member in Armenia about the status of their country toward joining the Treaty has remained unanswered to-date.

#### Accessible e-books – Implementation of Accessibility Act

We attended Daisy Consortium's Open Forum on EU Inclusive Publishing meeting of 26 April, where the issue of the backlist/legacy e-books was discussed again in the light of our reaction to the report of their previous meeting. Good news: apparently there is now consensus, among Member States as well as within the Forum on the position that, as clarified by the Commission, the backlist is included in the EAA. Discussion on this matter will now focus on how to prioritise which legacy e-books to provide with accessible format as a matter of priority. The Forum intends to help publishers in the matter, with a working group to prepare recommendations, and EBU will want to participate in this.

#### Lifts

The EU standard EN 81-70:2021/FprA1 ‘Safety rules for the construction and installation of lifts - Particular applications for passenger and goods passenger lift - Part 70: Accessibility to lifts for persons including persons with disability’, was approved. This is a welcome development, and so is the fact that the European Commission has decided not to quote in the Official Journal the present version of EN 81-70 (the Accessibility to Lifts standard) but to wait for the amendment resulting from the ANEC’s appeal to be ready.

#### Films

We carried out a further analysis of Creative Europe/MEDIA calls for proposals, with a view to issuing a press release, more critical this time, one year after our previous press release on the matter.

#### Web

On 8 April we relayed to our member organisations in the EU a European Disability Forum request to lobby their national governments on the Digital Services Act (DSA) to support the European Parliament’s position against the EU Council in interinstitutional negotiations, on the following two points: a reference to the European Accessibility Act in the DSA, and no reduction of its scope to very large online platforms only. Sadly, the provisional agreement reached on 23 April by the Council and the Parliament does not give us satisfaction.

We attended the WAI-Coop online open meeting of 19 April. We took this opportunity to ask this to the European Commission representative: EU websites and apps are particularly important to connect citizens to the EU. Although the Web Accessibility Directive (WAD) does not apply to the websites and apps of the EU institutions, is the Commission nevertheless somehow using the monitoring process by Member States and resulting feedback to improve its own performance? Reply: yes, also because in the WAD, there is an EU commitment to lead by example. The effort currently focuses on rolling out accessibility statements—a very long process—and the Commission is not yet in position to launch formal monitoring. We are encouraged to press Commissioners Dalli and/or Hahn to press for that. EDF intervened to ask about the action plan announced in Disability Rights Strategy, to regret that although it was due for 2021, it has not been published yet.

#### Accessible payment – implementation of Accessible Act

On 4 April, the Chair of EBU Commission for Liaising with the EU 4/04: LC Chair appointed the "working group for accessible payment terminals and other self-service terminals", with 12 countries represented and 3 leaders: Estonia, the Netherlands, and Sweden (instead of Germany as written earlier, after all)

#### Horizontal

MEP Langensiepen's report—for which she had consulted us—on the AccessibleEU resource centre calls for a strong mandate, stable resources for AccessibleEU, which should bring together national authorities and experts to help Member States meet accessibility requirements.

### Political participation

After careful analysis, we can be content with the Constitutional Affairs committee of the European Parliament (AFCO) vote of late March on the reform of the EU electoral code. Big wins so far are: a new accessibility article including appropriate measures to vote independently and in secret; the free choice of assistance; and the accessibility of postal voting & political campaigns. Newt step: both texts (draft regulation and accompanying legislative resolution) will be voted on by the European Parliament plenary, possibly during the 2-5 May session.

### Mobility

After chasing the International Transport Forum Secretariat to get confirmation of a slot for EBU to present the PAsCAL project, we were disappointed to learn that ITF would like us to address the broader issue of the digital gap in the development of mobility technologies and that they ask us to liaise with WBU with whom they are already in contact for the 2022 edition. We therefore decided to drop our participation in the ITF 2022 and leave WBU to represent BPS people.

We are consulting the members of our Road Safety and Accessibility of Transport group for a possible EBU reply to a European Commission consultation on the safety of automated vehicles (revision of the implementing regulation).

### Review of the EU by the UN CRPD committee

On 19 April, the CRPD committee published its list of issues prior to reporting. Very many of the issues flagged in the EDF alternative report—supported by EBU—are raised. Notably, the committee requests the European Commission to provide information, on behalf of the EU, namely on the following issues of importance to us:

* Implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty
* Unblocking the proposed horizontal directive on equal treatment
* Areas not covered by the European Accessibility Act
* Participation of disabled persons’ organisations in the standardisation processes under the European Accessibility Act
* How disability assessments, qualifications for and transfer of social security benefits, and others, impact the possibility of persons with disabilities to exercise their right to move and reside freely within the EU
* Facilitating the availability to accessible languages, formats and technologies, including Braille
* Ensuring the right of persons with disabilities to vote and stand as candidates in the elections to the European Parliament
* The use by Eurostat of reliable and comparable data, disaggregated data by type of disability, with a human rights-based indicators system
* Measures taken to protect the safety of persons with disabilities affected by the hostilities in Ukraine

On the negative side, considering the issues EBU had particularly put forward in its statement to the committee, we regret that the following is not mentioned:

* The specific problem that the EU Marrakesh Treaty Directive leaves the option to Member States to provide for compensation for rightsholders and publishers
* The extent to which Creative Europe funding effectively promotes accessibility of films (the issue is too loosely formulated as "accessibility of EU culture and sports programmes")
* The accessibility of the European Commission’s public consultations in general

Next steps: once the Committee will receive the Commission replies to the list of issues, it will schedule an interactive dialogue with the EU. Based on the results of that dialogue, it will then—probably not before the end of this year—adopt recommendations in the form of ‘concluding observations’. We will possibly intervene again before that, should we feel the need to object to some of the Commission replies.

### Ukraine

Invited by MEP Adam Kósa, member of the European Parliament’s Disability Intergroup, to suggest parliamentary questions to the European Commission, we proposed these two questions:

* Blind and deaf-blind people and people with sensorial impairment in general are at higher risk of being left behind in evacuations from Ukraine, and of experiencing violence and abuse. Does ECHO have figures of how many such persons have reached the EU? And information about which services they have been referred to?
* Until now, a significant amount of the work to welcome refugees with disabilities in the bordering countries, including their relocation to housing and support in other EU countries, is done by the disability movement and NGOs. How is the Commission ensuring that EU-funded humanitarian aid operations follow the Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2019 Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action?

## Montenegro - Independent and secret voting of persons with disabilities

The Union of the Blind of Montenegro has initiated changes in the State Electoral Commission-SEC in order to ensure independent and secret voting for the visually impaired.

The most important novelties in the election process concern the following issues:

* The voting template for the visually impaired will be with metal rings to ensure the secrecy of the vote. Until now, the template, which normally follows the appearance of the ballot, did not have rings but only openings, so there were complaints that during the voting on the template, traces of a ballpoint pen remained, which violates the secrecy of the ballot. The introduction of a new template with metal rings eliminates the threat to the secrecy of the ballot.
* In order for each visually impaired person to be able to get acquainted with the contents of the ballot paper, in the future there will be two Braille ballots at each polling station. It will be part of the election material and will be informative.
* Regarding the arrangement of the polling station, the SEC will issue instructions to the Municipality Electoral Commissions to install dark red etison guidance strips inside the polling stations in the future, which will make it easier for the visually impaired voting.
* For other persons with disabilities, the ballot box will be placed on a flat surface of 40 cm so PWDs can independently put the ballot in the ballot box.

Mrs **Katarina Bigovic Kulic** - Union Of The Blind Of Montenegro

## PARVIS awareness-raising event on political participation in 9 countries – May 9, 2022

An awareness-raising event on the topic of political participation will be held on May 9th on the occasion of Europe Day in 9 countries: France, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden.

Visual impairment associations involved in the PARVIS project will each organise a panel including politicians, decision-makers and visually impaired people active in politics, to discuss barriers and opportunities in accessible voting as well as representation of blind and partially sighted people in politics.

A joint social media action will be conducted on Twitter and Facebook during the day of the event, to bring awareness to UN CRPD article 29 on participation in public and political life, as well as the importance of equal access to politics.

More information about the event outcomes will be provided later on the [PARVIS webpage](https://www.euroblind.org/awareness-raising-blind-and-partially-sighted-persons-rights).

Watch our newest awareness-raising [video on political participation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymXMmqA42qM) in English. Videos in 9 other languages will be available on May 4th.

## See Art With Your Hands - The Italian National Tactile Museum “Omero”.

by **Aldo Grassini**, Museum President.

The [Omero Museum](https://www.museoomero.it/en/) was established in 1993 in the city of Ancona. It was named after the famous Greek blind poet Homer.

The Omero Museum was created on the initiative of two blind persons. My wife Daniela and I -both blind and annoyed of being denied everywhere the right to enjoy the beauty of art- decided to create a tactile museum where to place real copies of the greatest masterpieces of sculpture as well as models of the most famous monuments. For this difficult journey, we started with the support of the Italian Union of the Blind, the Municipality of Ancona and the Region Marche, where we live. In 1999 the Italian Parliament, appreciating the role and uniqueness of this project, approved a law that recognized the Omero Museum as the "State Tactile Museum".

The Omero Museum includes a section dedicated to Greek, Roman and Italian sculpture with particular attention to the Renaissance (there are 10 works by Michelangelo), up to the nineteenth century.

These are scientifically created copies of the same size as the originals. Moreover, there is a gallery dedicated to contemporary art with about a hundred sculptures, all original, which include among the authors some of the most important masters of Italian art of the twentieth century.

The architectural models, made according to the most suitable scale to represent the structure and decorations of each monument, are another reason of interest.

A new section has recently been opened. It is dedicated to the Italian design with the best of industrial art that has made Italy famous in the world.

Since 2012, the Omero Museum has been located in the splendid “Mole Vanvitelliana”, a 3000-square-meters edifice emerging from the sea, built by Luigi Vanvitelli, a great Italian architect of the eighteenth century.

It must be emphasized that at the Omero Museum everything can be touched. Here there are no barriers for blind people, but we do not think only of them. All activities are designed to be accessible to any visitor. Inclusion is the primary objective: people with different needs can live a common experience together, each according to their possibilities: blind people touch, sighted people watch, children learn through play.

But the possibility of touching is granted to everyone, even to those who see. And so, a new way of approaching art is experienced. The traditional prejudice that art is linked only to the function of seeing falls away, and the concreteness of the relationship with nature, which is based on all the senses and not only on sight, is rediscovered.

Blind people have taught those who see something: touching, indeed, caressing beautiful things is exciting and introduces qualities otherwise unattainable by the other senses. And for those who see, adding the emotion of touching to the emotion of seeing also means discovering a new dimension of art.

The next step is a multi-sensorial level, that is the commitment of all the senses in the aesthetic experience that today represents the goal of ever more numerous artists.

As regards the problems of accessibility of cultural sites so that they are accessible without barriers for all types of public and particularly for the visually impaired, the Omero Museum is now a point of reference for Italy and arouses interest also in foreign countries. This different way of thinking about art requires a different way of presenting it through a transformation of museology and educational methods. Museums are not just for looking. "Forbidden to touch" makes no sense when it is not essential for the protection of works of art.

Before the pandemic, the number of visitors had reached 35,000 in 2018 and 2019, but it is interesting to underline that the vast majority were not blind but able-bodied people. A fine example of inclusion, but also a reality that revolutionizes the ancient concept of art as the exclusive realm of seeing. And this new frontier of aesthetics and museology is taking an interest in many academies and many university faculties. We are continually invited to scientific meetings with these cultural institutions and even to hold some academic courses. Obviously, there is all the consultancy work to which we are called by many museums and places of culture that want to respond to the demand for accessibility of which society is now becoming increasingly aware.

I usually say that when the Omero Museum was established in 1993 it was like "a voice crying out in the desert". Today society is changing profoundly. Of course, we don’t pretend to be architects of this transformation, but we see ourselves as an active part in a more and more democratic culture, respectful of everyone's rights.

## RNIB Scotland- the need for accessible streets

A national sight loss charity has told a Scottish Parliament committee that accessible streets and thoroughfares are key to persuading blind and partially sighted people back to shops.

RNIB Scotland has responded on 14/04/2022 to a call from the Parliament's Employment and Fair Work Committee for views on 'the new realities of retail and e-commerce'.

Recent figures from the Scottish Retail Consortium have showed footfall in shops had dropped by 21.1 per cent in March compared with pre-pandemic figures for 2019, worse than an average UK decline of 15.4 per cent and the steepest for all four UK nations.

RNIB Scotland's campaigns manager Dr Catriona Burness said: "Prior to the pandemic, the streetscape was already challenging for people with sight loss. Simply leaving home presents challenges when pavements or walkways are cluttered or obstructed."

A UK-wide survey by RNIB in 2015 found that 95 per cent of blind and partially sighted people had collided with an obstacle in their local neighbourhood over a three-month period, and that nearly a third of those were injured.

Now, the charity warns, new obstacles on pavements and walkways – such as dockless hire vehicles and the spread of electrical vehicle charging-points – are adding to obstructions like advertising boards and pavement-parking.

In its response, and in its manifesto for the May 5th Scottish local authority elections, RNIB Scotland has called for a ban on 'shared spaces' where vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians all use the same levelled surface; for controlled road crossings with audible and tactile signals to indicate when it is safe to cross; and for kerbs to be at least 60mm high where road use changes.

The charity has also been critical of the hasty introduction of new street designs and cycleways during the lockdown period, highlighting concerns such as pavement café sprawl, increased numbers of proposed floating bus-stops, alongside temporary cycleways and traffic-management bollards.

"We have expressed concern that the new street layout arrangements might effectively extend lockdown for blind and partially sighted people," said Dr Burness. "Feedback from our members has confirmed that many have found the new arrangements worrisome and challenging. Sixty-six per cent of people we asked in 2020 said they now feel less independent than they did before the covid pandemic. Being able to walk safely and confidently is of fundamental importance in ensuring blind and partially sighted people can live their lives as independently as possible. However, recent changes to the layouts of our towns and cities have impacted on their safety and confidence in going outdoors."

The charity points to other studies that it says corroborate this. A recently published Public Health Scotland report, 'Road Space Reallocation in Scotland: A Health Impact Assessment', acknowledges that ‘many disabled people have been disadvantaged by recent road space reallocation schemes, with most reporting that the measures made it more difficult for them to get around'.

For further information, please contact [Ian Brown](mailto:ian.brown@rnib.org.uk) at RNIB Scotland.

**ENDS**.

**European Blind Union**

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