

# EBU Members' Newsletter 2023

## Number two, February.

## Our campaigns

Very early draft EBU “Guidance on **reasonable accommodation** for VI employees and applicants” is ready to be submitted to our working group “Rehabilitation, Vocational Training and Employment” for elaboration, in parallel to the European Commission’s draft guide on reasonable accommodation that will be presented to the EU Disability Platform’s subgroup on the Disability Employment Package on 11 May.

On 14 February, the European Parliament adopted the reports defining its stance on two directives proposed by the European Commission on the rights of mobile EU citizens to participate in the European and municipal **elections**. The Parliament introduced new provisions to ensure that EU citizens with disabilities living in another EU country have reinforced rights to participate in the political process. But here again, like for the reform of the EU electoral law, the competence to adopt these Directive falls solely on the Member States represented in the Council.

A call for evidence and a public consultation are announced on Have Your Say, respectively for Q2 and 3 2023, in the perspective of the mid-term review of Creative Europe 2021-2027. We will want to participate in that, to express concern that EU MEDIA **funding to the film industry** does not use its leverage to promote audio description and audio subtitling.

We heard from the Ukrainian Disability Platform that their parliament has opened the way for ratification of the **Marrakesh Treaty**. We have offered support, and also to our member organisations in Turkey and North Macedonia, to help push these countries down to the finish line toward ratifying the Treaty. Meanwhile, the European Commission has announced a call for evidence for evaluation of EU’s Marrakesh Treaty Directive in the fourth quarter of 2023.

We learned that the ETSI/CEN/CENELEC relevant Joint Working Group has started its work to review the EU standard (EN 301 549) for accessibility of ICT. This EN covers **payment terminals**, and does not take the right approach as far as touch-pads are concerned. We are considering releasing a statement to the joint working group via ANEC and possibly also BEUC, in which to flag the inadequacy of the current approach and inform about EBU recommendations in the making on accessibility of payment terminals.

We responded to an Ernst & Young survey about the **EU Disability Card** on behalf of the European Commission. Shortly after, the Commission opened its proper public consultation on the ‘Have Your Say’ portal, and we are preparing the EBU response, building here again on the input of our ad hoc task-group. We have also asked our member organisations to diffuse these consultations, as they are meant, not only for organisations, but also for individual persons with disabilities. A noteworthy result is that thanks to EBU, an accessible Word version of the consultation’s questionnaire was provided by the organisers, spontaneously this time, after our reaction on the prior call for evidence.

We attended the following **meetings**:

• **EU Disability Platform** plenary meeting (14/02), where the following was discussed: the platform’s work programme for 2023; the Swedish EU Presidency’s work on disability; the impact of the cost of living on persons with disabilities; the national social protection schemes and disability assessment methodologies, against the background of the ESPN study; the EU Disability Card; the AccessibleEU resource centre; the Disability Employment Package; and the CRPD review of the EU.

• **EDF-ENGO meeting** (16/02), with as main topic on the agenda the preparation of the 5th European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities event on 23 May. EBU is aiming to be represented through some national delegations.

• Young Europeans-France roundtable (23/02), to present our work in the area of **political participation** for persons with disabilities in the wake of European elections in 2024. We used this opportunity to give visibility to the EBU Youth Manifesto adopted in December 2022.

We received and accepted an invitation by the European Commission’s directorate general competent for transport (DG MOVE) to speak on 28 March to High-Level Group of Experts on Road Safety, together with EDF and AGE, on what specific **road safety** challenges old people and people with reduced mobility face, and what action we want EU Member States to take.

## Our support to Ukraine continues!

These days marked the tragic anniversary of one year after the Russian invasion in Ukraine. As you could read in this newsletter throughout the year, EBU has undertaken a number of actions since the beginning of the war, thanks to the generous support provided by some of you!

While we all recognise that all our best efforts can only be a drop in the ocean, our help brought some relief to blind and partially sighted people from Ukraine. The following are key actions we could achieve with your help;

Through the Finish Abilis Foundation, three grassroot DPOs in Ukraine received support allowing them to provide shelter and emergency aid for internally displaced Ukrainians from the blindness community. Also, an organisation led by blind and partially sighted lawyers, could maintain their services despite the war.

Our Romanian member could host, at their premisses, a family of which two members were blind without waiting for the slow governmental support.

UTOS, our own Ukrainian member, was enabled to continue to run their educational and rehabilitation centres, including in the various regions of the country.

With the help of the National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities from Ukraine, people who acquired sight loss due to the war could receive advice and support how to cope with this. Also, an educational centre could be partially repaired.

Please read their powerful testimonial. They provide a much better overview of what they achieved with our support than I could summarise in this article, but you can also hear even more about our collective efforts to support our Ukrainian friends in a recent [interview I made with Peter White on the BBC Radio In Touch](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001jc5w) programme.

As you can see, our collective efforts can make a real difference. In that sense, I am renewing our call to make contributions to our Solidarity Fund, dedicated section to helping Ukraine. Please get back in touch with me should you need further information.

**Lars Bosselmann**, EBU Executive Director.

### Assistance for People with Visual Impairments in and from Ukraine

More than 80 persons with visual impairments from the most war-affected communities of Chernihiv, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Sumy, Donetsk, and Kyiv regions have received financial support from the **European Blind Union. The assistance was provided in accordance with Ukraine’s legislation, on the basis of official letters from public organizations of people with disabilities (with visual impairments) to the NAPD Secretariat and in response to individual appeals from the people.**

**Also, the repair works in the Center for internally displaced persons (Ukrainian Society of the Blind) in Dnipro city were supported. This Center was damaged by a rocket hit on November 26, 2022. Currently, about one hundred people are living there on a permanent basis.**

*“Owing to the received financial aid, we have been able to partially repair the premises so that the people could continue living there,” says Serhii Kit, director of the enterprise belonging to the Ukrainian Society of the Blind.*

**The support was provided to enable further operation of the Informative and Consultative “Hub for Blind», supported by the All-Ukrainian League of the Organizations of Persons with Visual Disabilities ‘THE MODERN LOOK.’ During the month of the Hub’s operation, more than one hundred people who lost their eyesight in the wartime and their family members have applied for help.**

*“We are thankful for the support to the European Blind Union. The number of the Hub’s hotline phone calls is increasing every day. Our group of consultants fully consists of people with visual impairments, and it is gradually transforming into a multidisciplinary online-team providing assistance and consulting on a big variety of issues. The scope of the issues varies from the questions on where to obtain rehabilitation and a walking cane to how one’s home can be adjusted, how to learn to differentiate the clothes by colors, how to cook food, how to learn living independently, and other issues.”*

Lesia Perepechenko, Public Union “All-Ukrainian League of Organizations of Persons with Visual Disabilities ‘MODERN LOOK’

**The National Assembly of People with Disabilities expresses its gratitude to the European Blind Union for the provided targeted financial support to people with visual impairments.**

## News from Austria

The regional branch of the Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted – Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland – established an academy course for future mobility and orientation trainers. The second round of the academy course was completed by participants last year and the new trainers can now start assisting visually impaired people in their independent mobility. We have talked to Elliott Edwards, one of the 2022 graduates now working as a trainer.

Mr. Edwards, you trained a lot using a blindfold. Can you give us an example of the techniques you learned that blind and partially sighted people need for independent mobility?

Elliott Edwards: When we learned how to use a white cane properly, we were blindfolded, so we had no image of our surroundings. We practiced the technique and it took a while to find the right rhythm and the right width in which to swing the cane. We got a lot of feedback and had to correct ourselves and it wasn’t easy to get the hang of it. Also, using stairs or orienting yourself in a building was a big part of it. For example, I memorized the northwestern corner because there I could feel a cupboard with a defibrillator in it. This is how I started building my orientation in a room. I have to say, in general, it is a lot to, but the academy course was very well structured and I feel secure enough to start training visually impaired people, even though I know I still have a lot to learn myself.

Link: <https://www.blindenverband-wnb.at/fuer-sehbehinderte-und-blinde-menschen/akademie-bsv/akademielehrgang/>

## Meet Sergio Marin Zapata

Hello everybody! It is my honour to have joined the European Blind Union as Project Officer. I became a part of the team earlier this month and have since been growing into the role.

Spanish by birth, European by heart and French by choice, I have a background in political science with specialisations in European affairs and international relations from universities in the United Kingdom, France, and Belgium. In the past I have worked as project officer in a French university, as communications officer in a Spanish business school, and as a lecturer in a Hungarian university, on top of traineeships in a supranational body and an international organisation.

I had long wanted to shift from higher education to advocacy and I am delighted that my now colleagues decided to give me the chance to support the advancement of blind and partially sighted people in Europe through my work. I look forward to working with all of you to entrench and enhance our activities at the supranational level, and in that regard please do not hesitate to drop me a line via [e-mail](mailto:sergio.marinzapata@euroblind.org) or connect on LinkedIn!

## Views of Life – interviews with EBU members

In December, EBU started a collaboration with Julius Kratky, a journalist from Austrian Broadcaster ORF Connect, called #ViewsOfLife. In this initiative, Julius interviews different people from our national members so he can give the audience a good overview of the situation of blind and partially sighted people across Europe.

After one introductory interview with our Executive Director, Lars Bosselmann, and our External Communications Officer, Nacho López, the first interviews of EBU members have already been produced: Elisa Montonen (Finland), Luboš Zajíc (Czech Republic), Reiner Delgado (Germany) and Cristina Barreto (Spain) have been the first people to tell us more about the situation of the visually impaired community in their respective countries.

Currently, we are in the process of contacting further national members so Julius can produce the following interviews. In case you want to know more about #ViewsOfLife, please [visit our members section where you will find the segments that have already been produced](https://www.euroblind.org/about-us/members#views).

## EBU gets a bite at the Apple

Alongside other DPOs, EBU was invited to an exchange on accessibility at Apple on February 3.

First there was a presentation by Sarah Herrlinger on Apple's approach to accessibility, then there was time for questions and networking.

EBU was represented by Bart Simons, one of our accessibility experts, from Belgium.

He provided the following feedback on the topics which EBU brought to the discussion, after consultation with the accessibility network.

### About Text-To-Speech voices:

- they thought that almost all European languages were available. As we heard this is not the case for Estonian. Jakob Rosin, from EBU’s Estonian member, said that a voice exists and wondered why Apple does not include it. They replied that there may be two reasons: they don't know of the existence of this voice or it may not be compatible with their software. In both cases they are interested to hear about it and try to work together with the developers of the local voice

- they said that for each language they have local experts. I could not make her give concrete details. She could not answer the concrete question why the Hungarian voices have been replaced. But she says that this is done after consulting local people.

- several people reported bugs in the pronunciation of specific items in specific voices. She strongly encourages to send them to [accessibility@apple.com](mailto:accessibility@apple.com) and they will look into it.

### About Braille tables:

- no concrete answer about the general source for Braille tables and how often the library is updated.

- again the recommendation to send issues to [accessibility@apple.com](mailto:accessibility@apple.com)

### About the [**accessibility@apple.com**](mailto:accessibility@apple.com) e-mail address:

- they understood that people may have the feeling that it is like a black box since you often don't hear back from it

- they reassured that messages are read by people and categorized

- it is not necessary to write in English. They say that they support all languages.

- they strongly encourage to use this channel, also for translation errors (as reported by Hungary) or issues with specific voices or in local braille tables

### About new camera features such as door detection:

Bart said that it is not always practical to point the phone's camera (rain, full hands ...) and asked if we could not have a camera independent of the phone. In glasses or otherwise head or chest mounted.

They simply thanked us for the suggestion and moved on. Clearly she was not going to say anything about possible plans for glasses.

Bart and other EBU experts will continue to monitor the situation and put forward further questions.

## The International Competition for Blind Composers 2023

The Jan Deyl Conservatory of music  
in cooperation with  
Czech Blind United (SONS)  
announces the International Competition for Blind Composers 2023.

Further information, including the history of the competition, the jury, regulations and the application form are available on the [competition website.](https://jandeylconservatory.cz/competition-2023/index.php?lng=en)

The best works will be financially rewarded and publicly performed. Don't hesitate to apply; the deadline is June 30, 2023. The organisers look forward to hearing your compositions.

You are invited by:

* Ondřej Štochl – Chairman of the Jury
* Stanislava Lustyková – Director of the Jan Deyl Conservatory of Music and
* Luboš Zajíc – President of the Czech Blind United (SONS)

**ENDS**.

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