

# EBU Members' Newsletter 2024

## Number eight, September.

## Our campaigns

This month, besides preparing for **upcoming** **key internal meetings** – the EBU annual Advocacy Committee meeting of Warsaw (26-27 October) and the Board meeting of Madrid (5-6 October) where advocacy will feature as an important item for discussion – we continued to be busy monitoring post-European elections **institutional developments** at EU level.

The composition of the **proposed new European Commission** was also followed closely. The Belgian former Minister of Justice Ms Hadja Habib is designated to have responsibility for “Preparedness, Crisis Management, and Equality”. Her mission letter ambitiously includes “Full implementation of the Disability Strategy and CRPD”. However, we are disappointed at the downgrade of the Equality portfolio. We echoed the EDF [press release](https://www.edf-feph.org/equality-left-out-in-commission-portfolios/) in which they called on the European Parliament to press for maintaining a stand-alone Equality portfolio. Concretely, they can do this through the public hearings of commissioners-designate (week of 4 November), written questions ahead of that (end of October) and eventually the plenary vote to approve the Commission as a whole.

We identified new **key actors at the European Parliament**, including group coordinators in the most relevant committees, and informed our members about these. EDF signals 38 elected MEPs that have signed their pledge for disability rights (our of 200 candidates), and 29 re-elected MEPs that were members of the Disability Intergroup in the previous assembly. Only 2 MEPs have (visible) disabilities: Katrin Langensiepen (Greens, Germany) and Pál Szekeres (Patriots for Europe, Hungary).

We obtained from the new Chairwoman of the Parliament’s Employment and Social Affairs committee, the Finnish MEP Li Andersson, an agreement of principle to sponsor an **EBU event at the European Parliament** in Brussels. We still need to find a suitable date for this, as our contemplated target of 12 November would be problematic for MEP Andersson’s office.

Thanks to the participation of our members – namely in Austria, the Czech Republic and France – we obtained some good results on our lobbying to obtain vocal support among MEPs for the re-establishment of the **Disability Intergroup** and expressions of interest to participate in it eventually. This action request is on-going and we invite our members to participate in it, if they have not done so already, and to keep us informed of results.

Other advocacy actions this month include:

In the framework of the **EU Disability Platform**, we contributed comments:

* to the European Commission's draft Guidance on **independent living and inclusion** in the community of persons with disabilities, and
* to the final text for the study on **alternative employment models**.

In relation to **European standardisation**:

* Bart Simmons represents EBU in the accessibility working group of ANEC and, as such, represents ANEC in CEN TC 293 (the plenary and also the Working Groups 12 on accessibility and 13 on **tactile lettering**). This is strategical given that the focus is on visually impaired people. We have asked tour members in the EU to contact their national standards body on this file, and have received positive feedback from the Czech republic, Denmark and Lithuania.
* Looking at the larger picture, ANEC submitted its [comments](https://anec.us11.list-manage.com/track/click?u=1ec6bfd908eb461aefcb8c558&id=35adcc20ca&e=97a68deee2) in answer to the EC public consultation on the **evaluation of the Standardisation Regulation**(EU) 1025/2012, a message we contributed to with EDF and fully support.

We invited comments/input from our members to an EDF draft Position paper on **Assistance Dogs in Air Travel**. Hungary reacted quite extensively and France also responded.

On behalf of EBU, based on their experience gained through your Wayfinding Centre, Vision Ireland responded to a PWC Survey on Designing **Safe Road Infrastructure**, for the European Commission (DG MOVE, Road Safety Unit), including a focus on vulnerable road users.

The Commission’s Joint Research Centre requested to meet with EDF and us in October to discuss **Waste Sorting Labels**. We solicited input from our members in that perspective.

We attended the joint EDF-IAAP conference of 24 September, “Celebrating the **Web Accessibility Directive** Fourth Anniversary”.

On 26 September, together with other European level disability organisations, we met around IDA and EDF to discuss the next steps in the **CRPD review of EU**. It is now confirmed that the EU will be reviewed by the CRPD Committee at its next session in March 2025.

Interesting news from the Daisy Consortium’s EU Inclusive Publishing Forum of 17 September, to support our position regarding **‘backlist’ e-books** after 28 June 2025 (deadline for compliance with the **European Accessibility Act**): in the American Disability Act (which is aligned with the EAA on e-books) the question about backlist is addressed and says that any title would be covered as long as it is still being sold.

Also worth noting, is the [study](https://www.edf-feph.org/the-impact-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis-on-persons-with-disabilities/) published by EDF on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on persons with disabilities. It supports our demand, in the European countries concerned, that disability benefits be not conditioned by not being engaged in full time employment (the so-called “benefits trap”) and that, generally speaking, the benefits take into consideration that persons with disabilities face extra-costs of living regardless of other revenue they may have.

## EBU and ICC together to empower young visually impaired persons

In August 2024, the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted hosted the 29th edition of the International Camp on Communication and Computers for young visually impaired persons - ICC24. This initiative was started by the disability support centres of the universities of Karlsruhe (Germany) and Linz (Austria), but it was so successful that in a few years it became a truly international annual event that was hosted in 17 European countries. Since 2022, the EBU joined efforts with the ICC association as it strongly believes that the ICC camps format, that combines non formal training on information and communication technologies with the enhancement of social skills and independent living, is a fundamental component of a strategy to empower young visually impaired persons, that is a common goal of both associations. The objective of EBU at ICC camps is then to develop this strategy bringing in the awareness of the importance of self-advocacy and the activities of self-representative associations at local, national and international level.

This year, 50 young visually impaired persons from 12 different EU and non-EU countries spent 10 days together in Rome, Italy. They attended two workshops of their choice every day, experimenting and acquiring new skills, hearing about European opportunities, while making friends with their peers from other countries and enjoying hosting country’s attractions.

The climax of this extraordinary empowerment camp was reached on 10 August, when all participants were actively involved in the ICC24 Media Day. ICC and EBU worked together to organise this day, that opened with key messages from the EBU, represented by Francesca Sbianchi, Coordinator of the EBU Youth Activities. A participant, a young journalist from Greece, also interviewed other guests, showing strategies to discuss blindness-related activities on media. After this introductory session, participants were asked to speak about the things that struck them most in ICC24 and they could choose to use any media they wanted: audio, video, creative writing or interviews. The ICC and EBU trainers were available to support participants in their efforts. The multimedia output of the ICC24 Media Day will soon be available on the ICC website <https://www.icc-camp.info/>.

Another interesting feature of the ICC camp was the circulation of knowledge, as all participating countries contributed to the workshop programme, bringing in the most innovative or creative ideas in non-formal education for the visually impaired they experimented nationally.

At the end of the camp, participants and trainers left with increased knowledge and skills, as well as the feeling of being a community that grows and that, united, can achieve more and better results for the welfare of visually impaired persons. We are convinced that the suitcases of ICC participants were not only full of good memories but also of a sense of belonging to a larger circle of persons, beyond borders and languages, who want to fight for their own rights and now, also thanks to ICC and EBU, have the key to do it.

## Persistence as a tool for change: our Swedish Member SRF present their current commitments to the EBU community

In times of political and social unrest, non-profit organisations can encounter obstacles to implement their mission and objectives. However, when faced with challenges, associations must persevere to reach their goals. This is the message our friends from the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired ([Synskadades Riksforbund](https://www.srf.nu/), SRF) conveyed in the second online EBU member’s webinar, a series that started last summer.

Founded in 1889, SRF’s central office coordinates 23 regional and 110 local branches. SRF’s Advocacy Officer Cecilia Ekstrand provided a comprehensive description of the association budget, funding sources and expenditures, a fine example of how a DPO (Disabled Peoples Organisation) can operate financially.

“Our organisation is deeply committed to the promotion of our communities’ rights in areas such as rehabilitation, employment or digitalisation”, underlined Ms. Ekstrand. “Apart from the work we do in Sweden, we have also engaged ourselves with projects focused in the domain of international cooperation and development”, she added.

However, our Swedish friends’ efforts often face barriers while implementing their action plan, most notably in the area of guiding services. One of Cecilia’s fellow Advocacy Officers, Lennart Karlsson, highlighted the restrictive character of the focus laws on this subject. “We have already flagged this up to the government through our research, as municipalities cannot guarantee these services in a proper way. Even if the current social climate is harsh, we need to make this issue a priority within our country’s political agenda”, he stated. Legal problems are also present in important domains such as education, as the Swedish Education Act doesn’t cover the special needs of visually impaired children and remains too focused on mainstream schools.

**A reliable legal advisor and international partner**

Nonetheless, the challenges mentioned above don’t stop SRF’s officers in pursuing their goal to help improving the lives of blind and partially people in Sweden. “We’re one of the very few organisations who provide legal advice to persons with visual impairment in our country within the context of discrimination cases”, pinpointed Amanda Schulin, the association’s Communications Officer. Additionally, she also talked about how essential it is to bring forward to the media examples of situations where visually impaired people’s rights are not respected in order to raise awareness of what needs to be corrected to ensure the full implementation of the UNCRPD.

Apart from being fully engaged with the values of accessibility, equality and inclusion at a national level, the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired is also active at a European level through the EBU Network. A former partner of the PARVIS Accessible Communications project from 2021 to 2022, they also provide their valuable inputs in forums such as our braille and accessible payment terminals Working Groups.

During the session, they also shared their concerns on widely common challenges across Europe, such as the lack of digital culture among elder blind and partially sighted people. Nevertheless, as stated above, no matter which obstacles stand in front of them, our colleagues from SRF will always be ready to advocate for a better world for our communities in their country and beyond.

You can [listen to the full webinar](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JllGUxFrtow).

## Slovakia - ÚNSS Accessible 2024 conference

‘Accessibility is not only an obligation, but also an opportunity to welcome everyone to the digital world ‘

From June 2025, the websites of e-shops or financial institutions must be modified so that they are accessible, i.e. readable even for people with disabilities. How to handle it easily and well? Why are public administration websites still not free of digital barriers? How to incorporate accessibility into company processes? And what does accessible cinema look like? The 1st year of the Accessible 2024 conference, organized by the Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired of Slovakia, sought answers to these questions.

You can find out more information about the conference at the following link (in Slovakian): [Konferencia ÚNSS Prístupne 2024 - prístupnosť nie je len povinnosť ale aj príležitosť privítať v digitálnom svete všetkých](https://unss.sk/ts-konferencia-unss-pristupne-2024-pristupnost-nie-je-len-povinnost-ale-aj-prilezitost-privitat-v-digitalnom-svete-vsetkych/)

## RNIB - accessible travel

RNIB and Motability Foundation are currently working in partnership to explore the design of an end-to-end travel concept aimed at enhancing accessibility for blind and partially sighted individuals. As part of our initiative, we are keen to understand the efforts being made by international sight loss organizations in this area. Specifically, we are interested in learning about any ongoing projects or research focused on improving the accessibility of travel from start to finish for people living with sight loss.

Our goal is to influence the market and collaborate with like-minded organizations to create a more inclusive travel experience. We believe that by sharing knowledge and working together, we can make significant strides in this important area.

Could you please share any information on your current projects or initiatives related to accessible travel? Additionally, we would be interested in discussing potential collaboration opportunities to further this cause.

Please contact Tara Alexander, Head of Innovation Delivery, at RNIB via email at [tara.alexander@rnib.org.uk](mailto:tara.alexander@rnib.org.uk).

## Switzerland – Inclusion Initiative

On September 5th over 1,300 people gathered on the federal square in the Swiss capital Bern to celebrate the successful collection of signatures for the Inclusion Initiative. Together, they submitted over 108,000 valid signatures to the Federal Chancellery. The Swiss federation of the blind and visually impaired was also represented by members from various parts of the country at the atmospheric rally.

The Inclusion Initiative calls on the Confederation and cantons to take binding measures for the legal and active equality of people with disabilities This is because people with disabilities want to decide for themselves how and with whom they live, use public transport without barriers, work, and exercise their political rights. But in Switzerland, equality for people with disabilities is not progressing.

Our constitution has prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability for 23 years. Switzerland has also ratified a Disability Equality Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Nevertheless, people with disabilities do not have the same access to human rights as non-disabled people.

Living inclusion is the aim of the initiative. The initiative was launched by those affected and supported by a broad, non-partisan network of citizens' committees, disability associations and organisations.

## Braille guide to the Paris Metro in English

Association Valentin Haüy (AVH) for the blind and visually impaired in Paris has recently published a Paris underground metro and surface tram braille guide in English. It is embossed in 2 volumes in a convenient format (21 cm / 15 cm).

The AVH shop is located in AVH Head Quarters at : 3, rue Duroc, 75007 Paris, 3 minutes walk from metro station Duroc line 10 and 13.

Opening hours are 10 AM to 5 PM from Monday to Friday.

Before coming it is preferable to contact the staff to check the availability of the copy behind the counter.

The shop staff can be contacted by telephone on 01 44 49 27 37, or by E-mail at [magasin@avh.asso.fr](mailto:magasin@avh.asso.fr)

They can be [purchased online in English or French](https://magasin.avh.asso.fr/85-guides-du-metro-et-du-tramway-parisien)

## ICEVI conference call for abstracts extended

The Board of Directors of ICEVI-Europe and the Robert Hollman Foundation would like to inform you that the abstract submission deadline for the 10th ICEVI European Conference: "Supporting children and young adults with visual impairment: What can we do? What can be done?" (Padua, 15-17 May 2025) has been extended.

It is therefore possible to submit your abstract until 31 October 2024, through the online form at the following link: <https://icevieurope2025-hollman.it/abstracts>.

The secretariat of the Scientific Committee of the ICEVI Conference will contact you by 20 December 2024 to officially communicate the acceptance of your proposal.

The Conference program and other useful information will be made available within a few days. You can find all latest updates on the ICEVI-Europe website: [www.icevi-europe.org](http://www.icevi-europe.org/) and the official conference website [www.icevieurope2025-hollman.it](http://www.icevieurope2025-hollman.it).

We look forward to welcoming you and building together the 2025 European ICEVI Conference in Padua!

Don't miss this opportunity and spread the word in your network.

John Ravenscroft

ICEVI-Europe President

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RHF General Director

**ENDS**.

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