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# EBU Members' Newsletter

## Number six, June 2020.

## The EBU Annual Report 2019

With the financial support of the European Commission EBU has produced its Annual Report 2019

The report details a busy and innovative period for EBU, and provides information on our activities, campaigns and achievements for 2019, a busy year for us, including a General Assembly.

We hope you will enjoy reading this document which provides a full picture of the wide range of work carried out by EBU, with much help of course, from its members.

The report can be downloaded as an [accessible PDF file](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/annualreport2019.pdf).

## OUR CAMPAIGNS

### Marrakesh Treaty

It seems that Belarus joined the Marrakesh Treaty in May, but we are still waiting for confirmation from WIPO or from our member organisation in Belarus.

In June, San Marino joined the Treaty and it entered into force in Serbia.

### Accessible lifts

In view of the CEN/TC 10/WG 7 meeting of July, we provided our partners ANEC and EDF with a draft paper with our recommendations for the revision of EN 81-70, to be completed by them to incorporate the issues of other disabled persons’ organisations. As instructed by the WG 7 chairpersons, the paper eventually will be sent to WG 7 ahead of its 8-9 July meeting.

### Creative Europe/MEDIA

Exploratory contacts at the European Commission have continued, about the proposed Regulation on the Creative Europe programme for 2021-2027, to fine-tune our draft position paper regarding the sub-programme MEDIA, before it is submitted for comments and approval to our membership.

### Miscellaneous

On 4 June we participated in a chat with the European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit, on “A Sustainable and Fair Recovery” (from the economic crisis resulting from COVID-19). We received a specific and detailed reply to our question: how concretely can the EU ensure that it delivers on its commitment and obligation to include disabled persons in the jobs market, if it lacks the necessary statistical tools? And what does the Commission plan to do about it?
Details of this question and answer session can be found in our [online Covid Resources page](http://www.euroblind.org/publications-and-resources/guidelines#_covid).

On 4 June we attended the EU’s Disability High Level Group, with on the agenda the next Disability Strategy and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 12 June we responded to the European Commission’s [public consultation on the White Paper on Artificial Intelligence](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12270-White-Paper-on-Artificial-Intelligence-a-European-Approach/public-consultation).

On 25 June we participated in the first of a series of brainstorming meetings with MEP Katrin Langensiepen, to inform her report to the European Parliament’s EMPL committee on "Implementation report on the Employment Equality Directive in light of the UNCRPD", in which she will mainly focus on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities in relation to employment. The [ONCE-EBU report of 2019](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/once_ebu_employment_report_en.pdf) was used in that context

## EBU Anti-Harassment Policy

After EBU received an anonymous letter from a participant to the 11th General Assembly, stating that during the event, this person was verbally harassed by an accompanying person of one of the delegates, the EBU Board decided to immediately take action and formed a working group to analyse the situation and address this problem. As it was stressed, EBU has a duty to protect both the staff at the EBU office as well as the people participating in events that EBU organizes and or is actively present.

The working group, consisting of the 2nd Vice President, Barbara Martín Muñoz, the Secretary General, Maria Kyriacou and Board member Maria Thorstensson, carefully studied similar policies of other international bodies, including the World Blind Union’s Code of Contact approved by the Executive Committee in 2007.

Based on the investigation, the group identified the most important components which make an anti-harassment policy comprehensive and drafted The EBU Anti-harassment Policy which was presented and unanimously approved by the EBU Board during its online meeting on June 20, 2020.

The EBU anti-harassment policy will be soon uploaded on EBU’s website.

## EBU and Female Empowerment

2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing declaration, which is an agenda for female empowerment signed in 1995 by 189 states and is considered until today the key global policy document on gender equality. On EBU level, this June also marked the first anniversary of the [Malmö declaration](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu_malmo_declaration_2019.docx) – a document drafted at last year’s GEAR (Gender Equality Awareness Raising) conference, which reminded the European Blind Union and its members of the importance of gender equality in all aspects of their work and which, together with the Cyprus declaration, led to important changes within EBU itself. After its successful conference on gender equality within organisations of the visually impaired, the GEAR consortium presented a resolution at the EBU general assembly in October 2019, asking, amongst other things, for a quota system in EBU’s board, a limitation of terms in office and for regular conferences on gender equality. The resolution was adopted and so it is now amongst all of us to take the necessary steps to bring to life what we have been advocating for.

The first step to gender equality is female empowerment, and this is why the GEAR project will continue this year with empowerment and training sessions for visually impaired women in three countries – Austria, Denmark and Slovenia – thus enabling the women in these countries to gain confidence and skills and to demand that their national and regional boards take gender equality just as seriously as the EBU board will from now on. For more information and background documents please visit <http://www.euroblind.org/publications-and-resources/guidelines#_Women>

## EBU on RNIB Connect Radio.

EBU Executive Director Lars Bosselmann was interviewed on RNIB connect radio by Allan Russell on 19th June.

<https://audioboom.com/posts/7613529-european-umbrella-group-supporting-sight-loss-charities>

The discussion was about the covid crisis and lockdown measures, but also about how EBU is managing its ongoing work, around and in spite of, the current situation and its difficulties. This was the second of what we hope will be an ongoing series of interviews with the radio station of our UK member.

The first interview from April 17th is also still available:
https://audioboom.com/posts/7557471-european-blind-union-supporting-sight-loss-charities

## The 23rd EBU Access Cast!

Welcome to the June number of the [EBU Access Cast](https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebu-access-cast-23).

We are happy to say that from now on you are able to listen our podcast with the [transcript](https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebu-access-cast-23-transcript) which will bring better inclusion to all the listeners with different disabilities, so if you want to read what we said, head over to it!

Lockdown measures are being eased further after 3 months of restrictions and most of us have been teleworking in that period. Owning a decent headset with a good microphone is important for virtual meetings. Tanja purchased new headset from [MPOW](https://www.amazon.de/gp/product/B07RYQYTCG/ref%3Dppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_o00_s00?ie=UTF8&psc=1) for this purpose and shared with us her impressions.

We talk about the [new features in iOS 13.5](https://9to5mac.com/2020/05/20/ios-13-5-released-features-exposure/) and the [Apple Exposure Notification System](https://www.macrumors.com/guide/exposure-notification/) which lets apps from public health authorities and governments worldwide help people figure out if they've been exposed to COVID-19, and if so, what steps to take next to minimize the spread of the virus.

Staying on the same topic we spoke about [SODAR](https://www.theverge.com/21274383/google-social-distancing-ar-tool-two-meters-six-feet-sodar-measure)- the Google's experimental web app that helps the user measure 2 metres by using augmented reality and keep the distance from other people. None of us managed to make it work on our devices. Mario recommended to use the Sunu band for this purpose as the user can adjust in the phone app the distance of an obstacle to be announced.

Microsoft released the [Spring feature update for Windows 10](https://blogs.windows.com/windowsexperience/2020/05/21/whats-coming-in-windows-10-accessibility/), a.k.a. version 2004 with many accessibility improvements for blind and partially sighted people.

What if we could read braille without touching the surface? German researchers have developed an ultrasonic haptic speaker [HaptiRead](https://www.digitaltrends.com/news/haptic-speaker-midair-braille/)that allows to display Braille dots without contact.

New Art Scanning Method Offers [3-D Image Of Painting’s Brush Strokes](https://www.forbes.com/sites/evaamsen/2020/05/30/new-art-scanning-method-offers-3-d-image-of-paintings-brush-strokes/#2f7010297604) This technology could help improve online art lessons and virtual museum tours as well as make paintings more accessible to visually impaired people.

For all this and much more, tune in to the latest [EBU Access Cast](https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebu-access-cast-23)!

Watch this space for the next episode where we'll be sure to deliver even more exciting news. Meanwhile, feel free to reach out with your thoughts and suggestions through our Email and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/EBUAccessCast/).

For more on this and much more useful information, go to [the podcast page](https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebu-access-cast-20)!

## ADVISE – employment news from Montenegro

In the period between 2019- 2020, three training sessions for the inexperienced job seekers with a visual impairment were held in Montenegro. Trainings are a part of the project activities carried out by the European Blind Union, through the activity of ADVISE.( Aiding Young Visually Impaired Seeking Employment) In the period between Dec 2018- May 2020, 4 countries, Spain, Austria, Poland and Montenegro participated.

In Montenegro, two trainings were held in 2019, first on May 15, second on July 18, and one training on June 19, 2020. Third training was planned for March 2020, but the situation with the COVID-19 postponed the training.

The training coach was Katarina Bigović. All three trainings were attended by twenty four visually impaired persons, fourteen of them were partially sighted, and ten were blind.

A lot of people have found a job. We created a Viber group after every training and had continuous communication on a daily basis, with a few face to face meetings.

At the trainings we had guests, visually impaired persons with an experience in the field of employment, who talked about good and bad practice and how to communicate with employers and employees.

We distributed a manual to all participants in three formats, audio, Braille, large print, and we also sent them via e-mail.

Seven people have found a job, and a lot of them are on the way to being employed.

A lot of young visually impaired persons were interested by the activity, and the results certainly reward the work at the trainings.

**Katarina Bigović**, Savez slijepih Crne Gore

## Belgium - Back to work & telephone tales

On March 16, 2020, Brailleliga /Ligue Braille had to close its offices due to the Covid-19 crisis. During lockdown we continued to help our blind and visually impaired members from a distance. For example, we launched a new initiative “Telephone tales”. Our members could make an appointment to receive a relaxing phone call, during which one of our volunteer storytellers reads a tale to the visually impaired person. We launched this initiative to give our members an opportunity to break through their isolation and to offer them a short escape to a fantasy world during these challenging times. Since 25 May, our offices are gradually reopening. We are making every effort to resume our normal service, subject to safety regulations.

BRAILLELIGA vzw - LIGUE BRAILLE asbl

## Hungary - TÁVSZEM (Remote Eye) – Remote Assistance for Visually Impaired Persons

The development of information and communication technologies is opening up the world to visually impaired people. Already having screen reader software, smartphones brought another revolution in equal access, opening up new ways of getting to information and communication. Based upon these, the Hungarian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted (MVGYOSZ) set up TÁVSZEM services in 2019 from EU funds.

TÁVSZEM facilitates equal access to visual information for blind and partially sighted people, and thus supports their autonomous life. By using a designated app a video link is established between the VI user and a sighted operator, where the operator is “acting as the eyes of the Blind or Partially Sighted user” via the camera of a smartphone. This way he or she can provide a blind client with any kind of information in words that would be accessible around the VI user only by sight, like the name and expiry date of a product, the colour and the patterns of a cloth, a handwritten or printed text, etc. TÁVSZEM services are available at any time and every day, even on weekends and holidays. TÁVSZEM services are accessible Free of Charge for anyone, after having registered online and verified his or her eligibility (Visual impairment). The App can be downloaded both for iOS and Android devices.

TÁVSZEM services were launched in July 2019. During the first year of operation, operators have provided assistance nearly 20,000 times. The number of registered users has already exceeded one thousand. TÁVSZEM became particularly important in the spring of 2020, at the time of Covid-19 pandemic, when visually impaired people living an autonomous life could hardly get any sighted help.

TÁVSZEM is available at present in Hungarian only. It is our ambition to expand the availability of our services, firstly for Hungarian Visually Impaired citizens living as minorities outside of Hungary. We plan for TÁVSZEM to offer its services later in several languages, available at European level.

## 2020 Accessible Airport Award: applications are now open

The [Accessible Airport Award](http://www.aci-europe-events.com/annual-general-assembly/awards/#rules) is now open for applications until **17 July 2020.**

 The award, given by the European Disability Forum (EDF) and Airport Council International Europe ([ACI-Europe](https://www.aci-europe.org/)) celebrates airports in Europe that have achieved high level of accessibility as well as range and the quality of the assistance services to persons with disabilities. By sharing best practices, we aim to motivate more airports to advance accessibility of air travel.

Past winners include Gatwick airport, Pafos Airport, Larnaka Airport and the Dublin Airport.

The winner will be announced during the 16th ACI Europe Awards on 20 - 22 October 2020 in Geneva, Switzerland.

If you know an airport that has made big achievements in accessibility and assistance services, [encourage them to apply](http://www.aci-europe-events.com/annual-general-assembly/awards/#rules)**.**

**Contact:** Mher Hakobyan, Accessibility Officer

We take this opportunity to remind you that our [EBU Focus newsletter](http://www.euroblind.org/newsletter/ebu-focus-english) of March 2020 dealt with air travel for blind and partially sighted citizens and included mention of the above award.

## Access City Award 2021

Applications for the 11th Access City Award competition are now open. EU cities have until 9 September to apply.

EU cities are invited to take part in the Access City Award 2021, the EU Prize for cities accessible to persons with disabilities and elderly people.

European cities over 50 000 inhabitants have the opportunity to present their designed actions and strategies to become barrier-free and better places for everyone to live and work.

The selection process will have two stages:

* national juries will evaluate the applications at a national level;
* an EU jury will then assess the shortlisted applications

Celebrating the 11th Access City Award

This new edition of the Access City Award will take into account the current global situation and a special mention “Accessibility of public services in times of pandemic” will be created to reward cities’ efforts.

For the second year in a row, a financial prize will reward the first, second and third place winners of the competition (please note that special mentions are not entitled to a financial prize).

Go to the [Access City Award website](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?&catId=88&eventsId=1604) for more information and application details.

## Braille in times of lockdown

Europe has - as so many other regions of the world -been struck by massive lockdowns. Citizens everywhere have been confined and have been compelled to fine meaningful ways to spend their time. This goes for visually impaired persons too. I am sure that many have been Netflix series bingers, including those with partial sight or who enjoy listening to Audio Descriptive films.

But there are those who for one or more reasons prefer other ways of spending time in the company of a good book or more. Here, the talking book or podcasts are good ways to keep ourselves entertained, on with the headphones, close out the surroundings, and delve into one's own universe.

But then, there are those who take in culture from writers through their fingers, the braille readers!

Braille may occur on paper or on a braille display either hooked up to a computer, where the source file in electronic format is to be found, or downloaded to a stand-alone notetaker.

Braille, invented more than 200 years ago, is still without doubt or exception the writing and reading font (format) specifically adapted and used by blind persons who have no residual sight to read magnified text.

Whether in a professional setting - job or education, or in a leisure setting, the Brailled text is the direct link between the writer/author and the blind reader. It enables us to have the full control and the direct connection with the text through the fingers on the braille, and we have the control over the throttle, i.e. the speed control.

I, personally, use braille every day, all the time, often in combination with a computer with the qwerty keyboard and speech or with my notetaker. But I also use braille on paper all the time professionally and in my leisure time, and I have truly been binging braille books by authors both national and international, American, Indonesian, German and Spanish - all translated to Danish, i must confess.

So why am I writing about braille? Well, apart from not missing any occasion to promote braille, which I have by the way done at several international events, including the recent EBU Assembly in wonderful Italy, I have the privilege of being chair of a working group now taking out speed to focus on braille for the next four years in line with the first objective and first action of the strategic orientation of the EBU adopted at the aforementioned assembly.

 It highlights braille, teaching and literacy.

The board has identified 11 areas where braille might be a hinge to self-assurance and self-reliance on the part of blind persons as well as a number of actions where politicians, educators and developers of devices and solutions may be activated or addressed to promote braille in a multitude of settings.

The EBU, too, has as one of its possible actions to assist in focusing on braille on its website, by supporting useful networks and disseminating questionnaires and petitions. It is in my view a cross over between international pressure and national awareness that braille may be put more in the bracket and level where it deserves to be.

And just as I write, the Onkyo braille contest is running, and the inspiration through stories, essays and express of joy and enthusiasm may be one way to awake and ignite the same amongst readers.

**John Heilbrunnn**

ENDS.

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