****

# EBU Members' Newsletter

## Number eleven, December 2020.

## Editorial

Dear EBU Members, Dear Readers,

As we start a New Year, I would like to convey my very best wishes to all of you for a healthy, enjoyable and successful 2021!

For many of us, both individually and for our organisations, 2020 was a challenging year during which we faced many unforeseen obstacles along the way. And while the switch from one year to another obviously does not take away some of the challenges, we can certainly be optimistic about the future!

This newsletter is not the time or place to take stock of EBU’s achievements in 2020; the annual report will take care of this. Nor is it the place to give a detailed overview of what lies ahead. But some key features of our joint work this year are:

* The kick-off of our PARVIS project, which will help us to create innovative audio-visual tools to advocate for the rights of blind and partially sighted people in many areas of life.
* The preparation of a new multi-year project with the European Commission, which will allow EBU to consolidate and further develop its work.
* The adoption of the new 10-year EU Disability Rights Strategy, which will provide a framework for our EU advocacy work for the years to come, and which will include, as much as we know today, a number of key demands put forward by EBU over the last years.
* And so many more activities, events and actions to strengthen the rights of blind and partially sighted people across the continent! All of these will only be made possible and successful with a vibrant network of support. In other words, I count on all of you to play an active role in moving our joint agenda forward also this year, and look forward to many achievements, encounters and sharing!

Have a good start in 2021 and enjoy reading our monthly newsletter,

Lars

## OUR CAMPAIGNS

### Creative Europe/MEDIA

On 15 December, a political agreement was reached between the European Parliament and EU Member States on the new Creative Europe programme for 2021-2027, after over a year of interinstitutional discussions on the Commission’s proposal – delayed partly due to the COVID19 pandemic. In a [press release](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu_press_release_on_creative_europe_regulation_2021-27.pdf) welcomed the agreement in that it largely responds to our demands in our [position paper](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu_position_paper_on_media_funding_sept2020_final.pdf) of September and our advocacy. In substance:

* A new general clause in Article 3 of the Regulation, on the objectives of Creative Europe, says that the objectives of Creative Europe shall be pursued in a way that encourages inclusion, equality, diversity and participation; and that where appropriate, this shall be achieved through specific incentives that ensure that inter alia people with disabilities can access the culture and creative sectors, and encourage their active participation in those sectors, including both the creative process and audience development**.**
* More directly related to our campaign targeted at the MEDIA part of Creative Europe and our demand for more accessible films, Annex I says that activities through which the MEDIA priorities should be pursued include support for subtitling, dubbing and audio description.

The new Creative Europe Regulation provides a good basis for our continued campaign from 2021 onward, where we will be looking at how EACEA, the EU executive agency that manages the MEDIA funding, puts the Regulation into practice as far as our demands are concerned.

### Marrakesh Treaty

We learned that Armenia ratified the Treaty, but are still waiting for official confirmation from WIPO, or confirmation from our member in Armenia.

All eyes on Turkey and Ukraine now, while Western Balkans country are already in a positive dynamic and the non-EU European Economic Area countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) are expected to bring the implementing EU law into their national legislation without further delay.

### Accessible voting

On 15 December, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted by unanimity, and without any abstention, an [opinion](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/need-guarantee-real-rights-persons-disabilities-vote-european-parliament-elections-additional-opinion) about the need to guarantee real rights for persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections. This follows up the EESC 2019 [report](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/information-reports/real-right-persons-disabilities-vote-european-parliament-elections-information-report) on the real right of persons with disabilities to vote in the European Parliament elections, which described the legal and technical barriers preventing persons with disabilities from voting in the European Elections. The opinion calls for a revision of the European electoral law of 1976.

### Equality in employment

On 3 December, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the European Parliament’s Research Service published a [study](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/654206/EPRS_STU%282020%29654206_EN.pdf) on the implementation of the Employment Equality Directive in light of the UN CRPD, in support of the ongoing Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) committee implementation report. The study places a particular focus on reasonable accommodation, positive action, sanctions and equality bodies, and also to employment-related data regarding persons with disabilities.

In EMPL, ongoing negotiations are going well, with minor resistance (namely on intersectional approach or positive actions).

Two out of the expected three committees have already delivered their opinions: the Womens' Rights and Gender Equality Committee and the Petitions' Committee.

Voting in EMPL expected to take place at the end of January 2021.

### Accessible Lifts

The Chair of CEN/TC 10/WG 7, the EU standardisation body’s working group that is revising the accessible lifts standard, confirmed that one meeting day in 2021 will be dedicated to issues of concern to BPS, with ANEC to liaise with EBU for this, and that input will be collected ahead of that meeting. The next meeting (2-3 February) will focus on finalising the contrast of operating buttons issue.

### Consultations by the European Commission

* On December 1st and 16th respectively, we participated in the EU workshops on the evaluation of EU Regulation 181/2011 (passenger rights in bus and coach transport) Regulation 1177/2010 (passenger rights in waterway transport), which focused on the needs of persons with reduced mobility.
* We responded to the online consultation [on the new EU strategy on rights of the child (2021-2024)](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/response_to_consultation_on_eu_strategy_on_rights_of_the_child_dec_2020.pdf).

### Events

We participated in the [European Day of Persons with Disabilities 2020](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventsId=1748&furtherEvents=yes) conference (1-2 December), online this year. The conference was two-fold:

1. To report on the evaluation of the currently ending EU Disability Strategy (see our previous Newsletter) and to provide a last moment of dialogue on the future Disability Rights Strategy – as it will now be called – expected to be adopted in the first quarter of 2021. We expressed our impression that we and other DPOs were well and widely heard on the orientations of the future EU disability policy, but less so on the necessary institutional arrangements to mainstream disability in EU policy;
2. To discuss the impact of COVID-19 impact on persons with disabilities. We advertised our own position paper: "Making the 'new normal' inclusive for all. Some key lessons to be learned from the crisis, the perspective of blind and partially sighted people".

The conference was followed, as usual, by the Access City Award (2021), which we followed and echoed on Twitter with great interest.

### Miscellaneous

* We were invited by the International Transport Forum organisers to online consultation meeting on 10 February, for stakeholders to contribute in shaping the ITF summit 2021 programme, in Dublin in May. Our Road Safety and Accessibility of Transports experts are being consulted to prepare for this.
* We helped circulate as widely as possible the [EDF survey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BMRJHN6) on the implementation of the Web Accessibility Directive, via Twitter and within our organisation.

## Job opportunity - EBU is looking for a Communications Officer!

**In the framework of its new awareness-raising European project PARVIS, due to start in early 2021, the European Blind Union (EBU) is looking for two collaborators: a PARVIS Project Coordinator and a Communications Officer.**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**: 10 January 2021.

**ANTICIPATED START DATE**: ASAP.

**JOB TITLE**:

* **Communications Officer**

**TYPE OF CONTRACT**: Part-time (17,5h per week) and fixed term (2 years), French-law.

**LOCATION: Paris, France; other arrangements like home-based work are open for discussion.**

**MOBILITY: up to 2 trips per year to the Netherlands and Sweden.**

**REPORTING: The PARVIS Communications Officer reports directly to the EBU Project Officer.**

**SALARY: see** [job description for Communications Officer](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020_communications_officer_job_description_2020.17.12.docx)**.**

Willing to join our organization and help change the lives of millions of blind and partially sighted persons? Send your CV and cover letter in English to ebusecretariat@euroblind.org by 10 January 2021. Applications by persons with disabilities are encouraged. Applicants must have a valid work permit for working in France.

## The 27th EBU Access Cast.

The last [EBU Access cast of 2020](https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebuaccesscast-27) is now available, this edition includes a new participant, Hlynur Þór Agnarsson from Iceland. The team looks at lots of new goodies, very useful for those thinking of Christmas presents!

They then move on to some technical innovations and updates, including Android Talkback, an important new device developed by our UK member, RNIB, which allows blind women to take pregnancy tests in privacy, they also look at envision glasses, and much more, so tune in and check it out. EBU and the whole team wish you a happy Christmas and a much better 2021!

## EBU Conference 2020: “Acoustic Systems for Information and Orientation”

This year’s EBU conference focused on acoustic systems for information an orientation and was hosted by the Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted (BSVÖ). Due to the current Covid-19 situation, the conference could not take place in Vienna but was instead – for the first time – held in the form of 3 webinars. This allowed participants from outside EBU to join as well and a high number of participants was reached. Also, an interpretation system was used which allowed for interpretation in 4 languages (German, French, Spanish, English). Due to joint efforts from the organization committee BSVÖ and SONS, (Czech Republic) and especially from EBU, all 3 webinars went very smoothly.

Webinar 1 tried to give an overview of national practices and European standards and good examples were shared, such as a Swiss navigation app or new technologies to activate acoustic traffic lights with both Bluetooth remote control and smartphone apps. The second webinar gave an update on AVAS and informed about apps for door-to-door mobility. The need for interoperability of the various technologies was stressed during an active panel discussion. Webinar 3 focused on acoustic traffic lights and national adaptations, examples were given from Denmark and Czeck Republic. Austria presented a national database for acoustic traffic lights.

122 participants were present over the three events and we hope that the webinars will lead to a more active discussion within the respective RSAT list of EBU, in order to develop a European knowledge base on accessible transport.

The conference was made possible thanks to financial support from the European Commission.

## World Braille Day in Brussels with Manneken Pis & Ligue Braille / Brailleliga!

Manneken Pis celebrates this special day with us! As usual, he will put on his blind schoolboy uniform and his guide dog will keep him company for a whole day. Are you looking for an original way to share your New Year's wishes with friends and family? Go to message.braille.be and send your wishes in Braille!

**The Manneken Pis statue decorated for World Braille Day**

## WBU Statement on World Braille Day

January 4th 2021 is world braille day. In 2018, the [UN General Assembly](https://www.un.org/en/observances/braille-day) officially designated the world braille day as a day to raise awareness of the importance of braille as a means of communication in the full realization of the human rights for persons who are blind or partially sighted.

World braille day commemorates the birthday of Louis Braille, born at Coupvray, France in 1809, who has been credited for inventing braille, a widely used touch system of reading and writing for persons who are blind. This is a special code made from 6 raised dots on a grid. There are 63 combinations of these dots, meaning that they can be translated into many languages, including music.

Braille is essential for literacy and lifelong learning of the blind, their freedom of expression and opinion, as well as social inclusion. This is in line with Articles 21 and 24 of the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)](http://www.euroblind.org/convention) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 which focuses on inclusive and equitable quality of education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In celebrating the world braille day, the [World Blind Union](https://worldblindunion.org) is urging all countries to ratify and implement the [Marrakesh Treaty](http://www.euroblind.org/campaigns-and-activities/current-campaigns/marrakesh-treaty) which enables distribution of braille, and other accessible reading materials, without the threat of copyright infringements. This is a great way of ensuring that braille remains relevant alongside new technology. Also, it is critical given that in less developed countries, braille production is costly, hence limiting the availability of reading materials for the blind.

Furthermore, as the world strives to cope with COVID-19 pandemic, access to information and reading material in accessible formats is essential for persons who are blind or partially sighted. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity to call on governments, policy makers and all other stakeholders to ensure that reading materials are available in accessible formats, including braille, so that no one is left behind.

Meanwhile, the WBU continues to promote braille literacy by providing scholarships to persons who are blind and partially sighted in less developed countries. For further information and downloadable application forms for WBU scholarships, please visit their website at: <https://worldblindunion.org/programs/education/scholarships/>

## Free new app for downloading and listening to audio books in French

Good news for all our francophone friends!

The ‘Bibliothèque braille romande et livre parlé’ (BBR), based in Geneva (Switzerland), is distributing its new free application for downloading and listening to audio books: BBR Player.

This application considerably broadens the range of books available for listening for the visually impaired community, but also for different audiences who are unable to read or who have reading difficulties, now available directly on their smartphone and tablet, Apple or Android.

It gives access to all the audio books in the BBR catalogue and complements the Callio Player application developed by the BSR (Bibliothèque sonore romande, Lausanne, Switzerland) which has been in existence for some time now, pending the release of an application common to the three libraries of the French-speaking Swiss network. It is also an addition to the offer proposed by the Valentin Haüy Foundation and the GIAA, with which the BBR works in close collaboration.

All useful information (including manuals and tutorials) on BBR Player can be [found under this link](https://abage.ch/association/bibliotheque-braille-romande-et-livre-parle-bbr/prestations/application-de-telechargement/)

The BBR is:

* Free of charge (registration upon presentation of proof of inability to read/difficulty reading)
* More than 10'000 audio books in French, for all ages and of all literary genres.

## Manifesto on Digital Accessibility from France

A French organisation, the [GIAA apiDV](https://www.apidv.org/), supported by our French member, the [CFPSAA](http://www.cfpsaa.fr/), published a statement, in English, ‘[Making sure that the digital environment and innovative practices benefit the visually impaired](https://www.apidv.org/Making-sure-that-the-digital-environment-and-innovative.html)’, (a [French translation](https://www.apidv.org/Manifeste-du-GIAA-apiDV-Agissons-pour-un-meilleur-acces-a-l.html) is also available) with 12 key measures aimed at ensuring that the visually impaired can gain better access to employment and culture.

This is of course even more relevant in the context of the current ongoing health crisis, where digital solutions and substitutions for physical events have become extremely prevalent. We encourage you to share this information and adapt it to each national context.

## ‘Access City Award' 2021 winners announced

### The city of Jönköping in Sweden has won the 2021 Access City Award.

Jönköping, in the south of Sweden, made continuous improvements in both the new and old areas of the city, in collaboration with disability organisations. The city also created a local ‘Access City Award', for businesses or organisations that worked with their customers to improve accessibility. Out of 50 applications, Jönköping was designated the winner of the 11th edition of the Access City Award at the online ceremony on 1 December.

Announcing the winner, Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli said: “Creating a barrier-free Europe is about more than buildings and pavements. It is about commitment to change that improves people's quality of life and that enables persons with disabilities to participate in society on an equal basis with others. Accessibility is important for everyone, and it is indispensable for persons with disabilities. I will ensure that this crucial subject remains in the forefront of our actions. The upcoming Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 will be our main instrument to further improve all areas of the lives of persons with disabilities.”

The city of Bremerhaven in Germany and the city of Gdynia in Poland are the second and third place winners of the 2021 Access City Award.

Poznań in Poland received a special mention for accessibility of public services in times of the pandemic. Two further special mentions were awarded to Komotini in Greece for “accessibility as an opportunity for the whole city” and Florence in Italy for the “built environment”.

EBU congratulates all the winners!

### Background

The Access City Award is organised by the European Commission together with the European Disability Forum, and is one of the actions of the [EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1484&langId=en).

The Access City Award was launched in 2010 to raise awareness of disability and promote accessibility initiatives in European cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. The prize is about ensuring equal access to city life for people with disabilities.

The Award goes to the city that has demonstrably improved accessibility in fundamental aspects of city living, and has concrete plans for further improvements.

The Access City Award is presented at the yearly [European Day of Persons with Disabilities conference](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventsId=1748&furtherEvents=yes#:~:text=You%20are%20invited%20to%20attend,1%20and%202%20December%202020.).

Winners of the previous awards: 2011, Avila (Spain); 2012, Salzburg (Austria); 2013, Berlin (Germany); 2014, Gothenburg (Sweden); 2015, Boras (Sweden); 2016, Milan (Italy); 2017, Chester (United Kingdom); 2018, Lyon (France); and 2019, Breda (The Netherlands); 2020, Warsaw (Poland).

## Just4All Project

Our Spanish member [ONCE](https://www.once.es/) is launching a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) focused on the rights of persons with disabilities, in the framework of the Just4All Project. We encourage all EBU members to disseminate this information at national level and through their own networks.

Just4All is a project co-funded by the European Union Justice Programme (2014-2020) which aims to improve access to justice for persons with disabilities and thus contribute to the effective application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Union policies on disability.

In order to achieve these objectives, the participating institutions in this project, which is led by **Fundación ONCE** in partnership with the European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities (**EASPD**), the European Disability Forum (**EDF**), **Thomson Reuters** and the Institute of Human Rights "Gregorio Peces Barba" of the Carlos III University of Madrid),  have designed this MOOC on the subject, which will be complemented with the training of legal professionals through the organization of different workshops.

Although the MOOC is primarily designed for use by legal practitioners, especially lawyers and notaries. It is also open to a broader public in fact, the course may also be of interest to persons with disabilities and experts in the field of disability.

The course is a fully accessible course for all persons with disabilities and is available in [English](https://www.aranzadi.es/curso-justforall-en), [Spanish](https://www.aranzadi.es/curso-justforall-es) and [French](https://www.aranzadi.es/curso-justforall-fr).

ENDS.

**European Blind Union**

6 rue Gager Gabillot, 75015 Paris, France

+33 1 88 61 06 60 | ebu@euroblind.org | [www.euroblind.org](http://www.euroblind.org)