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# EBU Members' Newsletter 2021

## Number two, February 2021.

## OUR CAMPAIGNS

### Creative Europe/MEDIA

We are still expecting an announced letter of reply from the competent unit at the European Commission’s DG CNECT, to our letter of 16 January on the MEDIA Work Programme for 2021 and beyond. We await this reply to engage with the unit, whose interlocutors on our issues we have already identified. The EBU Access to Culture group was brought up to speed on advocacy developments and the grounds set for their collaboration in the campaign.

### Marrakesh Treaty

On 20 January Bosnia and Herzegovina ratified the Treaty.

The EFTA Secretariat informed us that the EEA EFTA States hope to join the Treaty by the end of 2021. Contact was established with the relevant CNECT unit, and we had a meeting with them on 24 February to discuss the timeline for bringing the Marrakesh Treaty Directive into the national legislation of EFTA countries – a separate and parallel process. We learned that the deadline for Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway to table draft implementing legislation is April 2021, and that they aim to have the legislation adopted by the end of the year.

Important related development: on 12 February, DG CNECT launched a public consultation to gather information whether it is necessary to extend the Marrakesh Treaty Directive provisions to more (i.e. non-print) works and more types of disabilities in Europe. We are preparing a response to this consultation. This investigation is an obligation under Article 9 of the directive.

### Accessible voting

On 29 January, the Bureau of the European Parliament's Disability Intergroup met to decide political priorities for 2021. Among these, noteworthy is the right to vote. This connects well with our goal to have an EP resolution on accessible European elections calling for the amendment of the 1976 Electoral Law in line with the UNCRPD and the EESC opinion.

EU Disability Rights Strategy.

The European Commission is expected to present the new Strategy for 2021-2030 on 3 March. We are preparing our reaction, in liaison with the European Disability Forum.

We will be looking with particular interest, inter alia, at what the Strategy says about accessible voting, the Equal Treatment Directive, the EU Disability Card and the collection of statistical data on disability.

### Equality in employment

On 27 January the Employment and Social Affairs committee (EMPL) of the European Parliament approved the own initiative resolution on the implementation of the Equality in Employment Directive in light of the UNCRPD. There appears to be a strong consensus at the EP on this initiative.

As slightly amended, the text is even closer to our positions on two matters which we thought were being approached too negatively by the rapporteur and other stakeholders: sheltered workshops and fines when employers fail to respect diversity quotas.

The Plenary vote is forecast on 27 May.

### European Accessibility Act implementation

On 11 February we participated in the first of a series of "Peer support online meetings" on the implementation of the EAA, organised by EDF. Our efforts to accompany this focus on two specific areas:

* E-books: on 9 February we had another meeting, together with EDF, with the Federation of European Publishers and Fondazione LIA, to discuss technical specifications (i.e. whether ePub3 format can be unequivocally recommended to publishers) and future collaboration (at national level and involving national administrations) toward achieving the broadest accessibility of e-books.
* Payment terminals: on initiative of our Dutch member, who formerly led our Pay-Able campaign, the setting up of a taskforce to make technical recommendations for accessible payment terminals, is being considered.

### UN Sustainable Development Goals

In the fall of 2020 we had been consulted by the Eurostat unit of the Commission about the review of the SDG indicator set.

We received a reply from them in January, essentially to recognise the need to track groups at high risk of social exclusion and that Eurostat currently does not collect data disaggregated by disability, and to say that including additional breakdowns, like disability data for the indicators we suggested, requires further consideration and research, considering the availability of data itself and the availability of long time series for each Members State. Our suggestions are kept on hold and will be revisited for the next review round, the reply indicates.

We reacted on 4 February, to insist that Eurostat should start to collect data disaggregated by disability, to allow a well-informed EU policy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and that to begin with, this could be only in some priority areas – e.g. employment – and not every year, but that progress is now urgently needed in this area.

Looking at the next review at this point, we asked to integrate for example the Washington Group Short Set of Questions into the surveys Eurostat and the national statistics offices use for data collection for this purpose.

## The EBU 2021 Action Plan

The [EBU 2021 Action Plan](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu_action_plan_2021.docx) sets out actions to be conducted in 2021 to implement the Strategic Orientation Plan agreed by the 11th EBU General Assembly

The document also tries to identify the bodies responsible for implementing the action, as well as the source of their funding. You can thus see the ten key points which will guide the work of EBU for 2021 and how they will be carried out.

We hope you find this document useful and we look forward to working with many of you in the implementation of these actions over the course of 2021 to further advance the inclusion of blind and partially sighted people throughout Europe.

## EBU Gender Equality Committee action plan

On the occasion of the 2021 International Women’s Day, EBU wishes to announce the launching of [the 2021 – 2023 Gender Equality Committee Action Plan](mailto:http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/gender_equality_committee_action_plan.docx) The main purpose of informing you and sharing this Action Plan with all our national members is to show how EBU continues to comply with its commitment to promote gender equality in all aspects of its work. The Action Plan, adopted by the EBU Board during its online meeting on February 6, 2021, lists a number of actions in three main objectives, as these have been outlined in the text of the Malmo Declaration, adopted during the [EBU GEAR Conference](mailto:http://www.euroblind.org/events/ebu-gear-conference-gender-equality), held in Malmo, Sweden, on June 13-15, 2019.

These objectives are:

* mainstream gender in all EBU work, policies and documents, including the constitution and by-laws,
* advance the work on balanced representation at all levels of EBU,
* raise awareness on the situation of visually impaired women and girls and work towards the inclusion of blind and partially sighted women in society and ensure that EBU’s work with the EU, EDF, EWL, ICEVI and other organisations takes into account the perspective and specific needs of visually impaired women of all ages.

## EBU-PARVIS - Promoting Awareness on the Rights of Visually Disabled People in an Inclusive Society

We are happy to let you know that the PARVIS project started in January. Partners are EBU, OVN (Eye Association Netherlands) and SRF (Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired).

This major project aims to massively raise awareness on blind and partially sighted citizens’ rights.

Thanks to the EC co-funding, PARVIS partners will be investing more than 560 000 EUR over the next two years to develop many tools addressing a wide number of targets: blind and partially sighted citizens, general public, decision-makers, policy-makers, media, as well as visual impairment organisation’s staff and volunteers.

These tools are meant to be used by EBU member organisations for many years to come. **The consortium is now looking for at least 8 EBU members** to engage with the PARVIS team in this global awareness-raising campaign. If you are interested, please contact me by 12 March. Note that Terms of Engagement would be signed with EBU.

To get a clear picture of what PARVIS would concretely mean to your organisation, you can [download an outline](https://euroblind.us17.list-manage.com/track/click?u=62d697c14fca54ea17e942ba4&id=c135e71147&e=165381f4fd). It presents the activities, deliverables and milestones you would be associated to. As you will read, the investment from your side would be very limited (mostly for translation) as compared with the communication benefits to be gained. You can also [download the PARVIS detailed work programme](https://euroblind.us17.list-manage.com/track/click?u=62d697c14fca54ea17e942ba4&id=06cc548e8a&e=165381f4fd), as a complement.

In parallel, we are still in the process of recruiting a Project Coordinator and a Communications Officer. [Vacancies are available on the EBU website](https://euroblind.us17.list-manage.com/track/click?u=62d697c14fca54ea17e942ba4&id=ecf1829269&e=165381f4fd).

The PARVIS European communication initiative is something new and exciting. EBU and the consortium do count on your involvement, dynamism and ideas to make this project successful.

The more united we are, the more visible visually impaired citizens will be. So, join us!

Please contact Romain Ferretti the [EBU Project Officer](mailto:ebuprojects@euroblind.org?subject=PARVIS%20project) if you are interested.

## Welcome to the first EBU Access Cast of 2021!

[The number](mailto:https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebu-access-cast-28) includes comments and advice on the latest gadgets, including Pawel speaking about an unusual invention; a music pillow!  
Also mentioned are fixes, updates and new developments for various apps, and there is a discussion about facebook's new alternative text description feature, which moves on to discuss the accessibility of facebook more generally.  
And news from Iceland, where accessibility posters have been printed out as mousepads to be distributed to programmers, designers and staff working in the IT industry to remind them on basic accessibility recommendations.  
A great idea!  
Check out all this in detail in this [new edition of the EBU Access Cast](mailto:https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebu-access-cast-28).

## Anne Renoud becomes the new President of the French Federation of the Blind

The French Federation of the Blind recently elected Anne Renoud, its first female president, an activist who has worked in the public employment service. Former President of FAF-APRIDEV Rhône-Alpes, Anne Renoud is originally from Ardèche and now lives near Bourg-en-Bresse. Blind since the age of 30, she has never stopped fighting to advance the cause of visually impaired people.

*"I am proud to take over from Vincent Michel, who has shown unfailing commitment during his 12 years as President. I will continue the projects that have been launched, whether on the issue of accessibility of the built environment, roads, transport or medical research; and I will undertake new projects, just as crucial as the above mentioned, on access to digital technology, training, employment, sports and culture.*

*I was lucky enough to go to an ordinary school, to have parents who never held me back. I trained as a masseur-physiotherapist, then I needed to invest myself in the professional integration of blind people, which I still feel today as a real injustice. Thanks to the work carried out at the FAF-APRIDEV Rhône-Alpes, we manage to individually accompany more than 60 people a year and put a third of them back into employment each year. This is a great victory for the territory and I would like to generalise these good practices and good results at a national level. I am a person of challenge, with a fighting spirit and I don't lack motivation! "Anne Renoud*

The Federation gathers 52 member associations and acts as a privileged interlocutor for the public authorities. Beyond the fundamental struggles around the promotion and learning of Braille, education, access to knowledge and books (only 7% are accessible), opening up to the world of culture, sport and leisure, Anne Renoud will give priority to:

1. **Digital accessibility**, by encouraging university training centres to integrate dedicated modules; by taking action to make business software accessible and by training visually impaired people to use these software,
2. **Employment and vocational training:** in France, only 1 in 2 visually impaired people are in employment. Yet they have the ability to make their place in the professional world and develop their full potential if jobs and training are finally accessible.The Federation will soon launch a study on the occupations under strain that can be performed by a blind or visually impaired person and will identify how to make the corresponding training accessible,
3. **Autonomy**: in France, **one blind person is born every 15 hours**. It is therefore essential to train more instructors for the autonomy of visually impaired people, **a degree course provided by the Federation**,
4. **Paris 2024**, in particular on the issue of audiodescription and the place given to visually impaired athletes and amateurs. **The Federation wishes to initiate a reflection in collaboration with the OCOG.**

Find [Anne Renoud's presentation video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SOpci9uaYU) (in French) as well as all the Federation's news and activities at [aveuglesdefrance.org](http://www.aveuglesdefrance.org/).

***About the French Federation of the Blind***

*Created in 1917, the French Federation of the Blind and Partially sighted People gathers activists, users, professionals and volunteers committed to the greater social and economic inclusion of people with visual impairment. It acts on a daily basis to enable full citizenship for all blind and partially sighted people, in France and abroad.*

## Audio description tool for online video available

Finally! An easy way to create and publish online videos with audio description. Dutch initiative scribit.pro has created an affordable online tool with which you can create audio descriptions, captions and a video’s transcript for any online video. With these three supportive ingredients added to a video, you fully comply with the European WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility guidelines. The platform also provides the video player to publish the video in a fully accessible way on your website. Do you rather use YouTube embeds on your website? No problem. Scribit pro also created a YouTube embed ‘add-on’ with which you can activate the audio description you created in the platform, as a simultaneous play-out alongside, the original soundtrack of the video. You can view a video of the EBU organization as example. You will find the video’s with optional audio description in two different players the link below. There is an audio description button beneath the videoplayers that activates the audio description.

<https://scribit.pro/en/european-blind-union/>

Scribit’s online tool is very easy to use for people who can use there sight to create descriptions of what is seen on screen. You only need the share link of a YouTube video and you can get started. You type in your descriptions which transform into speech in real time. When you are satisfied with the results, you can download the accessibility files or publish them on your website directly. Currently there are two English audio description voices available in the software, a male and a female voice.

The software is available as a per-video purchase or with an (annual) subscription fee. You can try out scribit pro software without any obligations. Create your free trial account here. If you can’t find the time to create the descriptions yourself? Not to worry. Scribit pro has professionals available to do it for you. Video assignments can be ordered online.

Driving force behind the scribit.pro initiative is the Bartimeus Fund, a Dutch NGO that closely works together with the Eye Association in the Netherlands, our EBU member in the Netherlands. Aware of the challenges regarding accessibility of video in other countries, Bartimeus Fund and the Eye Association support scribit.pro as an international start-up. Adding other languages is possible. If you are interested in a local partnership with Scribit.pro please get in touch through email: [info@scribit.pro](mailto:info@scribit.pro).

## “Promoting effective communication for Individuals with a Vision Impairment and Multiple Disabilities – PrECIVIM”

The Erasmus+ project entitled “Promoting effective communication for Individuals with a Vision Impairment and Multiple Disabilities – PrECIVIM”, has integrated its actions. It is a project which aimed to support professionals in respect of their intervention programs towards [communication and children’s communicative competencies](http://precivim.eu/index.php). The current project acknowledged the need to train teachers regarding how to assess and teach communication skills to children with MDVI. On the other hand, assessing communicative skills in children with MDVI is a big challenge because communication is a complex domain with many sensory and cognitive sectors which need to be assessed.

PrECIVIM was approved by the Erasmus+ Programme in relation to Key Action 2. The project consortium was consisted of the following organizations: University of Thessaly, Greece (Coordinator), Babes Bolyai Univestity, Romania/Roehampton University, UK/Amimoni - Panhellenic Association of parents and friends of visually impaired people with additional handicaps, Greece/ Special School for the Deafblind, Greece/ Liceul Special pentru Deficienti de Vedere Cluj-Napoca, Romania/Whitefield Academy Trust, UK/ St Barnabas School for the Blind, Cyprus, TRAPEZA PLIROFORION & PERIEHOMENOU A.E., Greece, and EBU/France (associated partner). EBU was involved in this project as associate partner and supported the project dissemination process.

In total, the PrECIVIM project organized the following activities and delivered corresponding deliverables:

* The development of a detailed project/work plan,
* The development of a quality plan,
* The development of a Situation Analysis/scoping (ΙΟ1),
* The design and development of the PrECIVIM portal (ΙΟ2),
* The development of the training material (ΙΟ3),
* The conduction of training events,
* The development of reflective logs (ΙΟ4),
* The development of a Guide of Best practices (IO5),
* A Policy Recommendations Report (IO7),
* Miscellaneous Videos (IO8), and
* The Dissemination Action Plan and Exploitation (IO6).

The PrECIVIM project put great effort to bridge assessment and intervention and underlined the need of assessment of communication skills for the development of individualized educational approaches and the use of appropriate educational material in order to promote the communication skills of students with MDVI. It is argued that PrECIVIM achieved impact on local, regional, national and European level, through the production of Intellectual Outputs which can be downloaded free from [the project website](http://precivim.eu/index.php).

## Image description technology in Facebook

Several years ago, Facebook introduced innovative new technology for screen reader users called AAT that can generate text-based descriptions for photographs that are missing them. They have continued to improve this technology and it is now taking a big leap forward.

Before looking at the details of this below, please note that our podcast team looked at this in detail in the [latest edition of the EBU Access Cast](https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebu-access-cast-28), so take the time to check it out for their independent analysis!

AAT is now able to recognize over 1,200 concepts – more than 10 times as many as before. AAT is available for photos on Facebook for iOS and Android in News Feed, profiles and groups and when a photo is open in the "detail" view (where an image appears full screen against a black background). It is also available on Instagram for iOS and Android for photos in Feed, Explore and Profile.

They’re also unveiling a new, additional AAT feature on Facebook for iOS and Android that provides a more detailed image description, including a count of recognized objects, the position of objects in a photo, and their relative size. The detailed description can be accessed using a long press (Android) or a ‘custom action’ (iOS) on a photo. This design is based on early user feedback, enabling people to hear more about the photos they are most interested in, without slowing them down by providing too much information about every photo they encounter.

They have also published a Newsroom blog post – [Using AI to Improve Photo Descriptions for People who are Blind and Visually Impaired](https://about.fb.com/news/2021/01/using-ai-to-improve-photo-descriptions-for-blind-and-visually-impaired-people/) – to introduce these improvements and describe how They accomplished this work. Here are some of the highlights from the blog post:

• Expanded Object Recognition. AAT uses our latest AI models and now recognizes over 1,200 concepts – more than 10 times as many as the original version they launched in 2016. AAT can now identify activities, landmarks, types of animals, etc. They accomplished this by training the AAT model on billions of public Instagram images and their hashtags.

• Keeping It Simple. AAT uses simple phrasing for its default description rather than a long, flowy sentence. For example, an AAT description might say “May be a selfie of 2 people, outdoors, The Leaning Tower of Pisa.” They’ve found users can read and understand the description quickly.

• Global Availability. The alt text descriptions are available in 45 different languages, helping ensure that AAT is useful to people around the world.

• Detailed Image Descriptions. Screen reader users of the Facebook app can now access detailed image descriptions of a photo that provide additional context, such as a count of the recognized objects, positional information, and a comparison of the relative prominence of objects in an image.

• Accuracy and Reliability. As they consulted with screen reader users about AAT and how best to improve it, they made it clear that accuracy is paramount. To that end, they’ve only included concepts where they could ensure well-trained models with a high threshold of accuracy.

• Reducing Bias. They continue to improve machine learning models, sampling data from images across all geographies, and using translations of hashtags in many languages to reduce bias. They also evaluated our concepts along gender, skin tone, and age axes. The resulting models are both more accurate and culturally and demographically inclusive.

ENDS.

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