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# EBU Members' Newsletter 2021

## Number seven, August.

## OUR CAMPAIGNS

### Creative Europe/MEDIA

In a meeting of 25 June organised by the Unit of the Audiovisual Industry and Media Support Programmes at DG CNNECT of the European Commission to update civil society organisations on the diversity and inclusiveness policy development and support activities for 2021 and beyond, the Commission informed us that diversity strategies will be evaluated and rewarded, but for the first year they want to learn what is already in practice, as a stock-taking exercise in view of a 2022 monitoring report.

The feedback collected from our members in the EU, on the audio description practice of national film funding agencies, will be useful in that perspective. It still needs to be analysed.

We have started to prepare the ‘right of access to culture’ component of the PARVIS project, in particular our related awareness-raising Twitter campaign in September 2021, which connects to our campaign to promote responsible funding to the film industry.

### Marrakesh Treaty

Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway have now notified the European Economic Area Joint Committee that they have fulfilled the constitutional requirements, which makes that committee’s decision binding under Art. 103 of the EEA Treaty. The next step is for these countries is to deposit their instrument of ratification. However, this will only be a formal step because, as members of the EEA, the three countries are part of the European Union internal market with respect to copyright issues and must therefore implement EU directives and regulations relating to copyright, including the Marrakesh Treaty, in their laws.

We have asked our members in Armenia, Turkey and Ukraine to let us know about the state of play toward their countries joining the Treaty.

On 7 July we attended an online WIPO conference on SDGs and the Marrakesh Treaty.

### Accessible lifts and other standards

In July, we urged our member organisations to contact their national standardisation bodies and express support for the position of ANEC (the consumers’ voice in EU standardisation) on the technical revision of the Accessibility to lifts standard EN 81-70:2018. This position is to vote in favour of the technical revision of that standard (EN 81-70:2021/prA1) – following a successful ANEC appeal and subsequent work, within the relevant working group of CEN, in which EDF and EBU were closely involved by ANEC – which now provides for satisfactory colour contrast requirements.

The finalisation of the revision is due to take place in early September. On 22 July, the EBU President wrote to the president of the European Lift Association (ELA) about this revision, to ask for their support in that perspective. ELA replied that “(it) supports the approval of the document. However, each national mirror committee must make its own decision based on the principle of neutrality.” This feedback was shared with ANEC, who finds it a promising reply given ELA’s influence on many national mirror committees.

### Reform of EU electoral law

An own-initiative proposal is currently being debated in the European Parliament that would further harmonise the electoral system and procedure applicable to European elections. The Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament (AFCO) is responsible for this file. The draft report includes “an obligation for Member States to ensure physical and sensorial access to polling stations, especially for persons with disabilities”, but it could be more ambitious as far as accessibility is concerned. The deadline for tabling amendments is in September. We are liaising with EDF about this and have contributed comments to their still very draft proposed amendments, based on our AVA project output report “Accessibility of Elections for Blind and Partially Sighted Voters in Europe”.

### Miscellaneous

On 17 July we were informed by the European Commission that the Study assessing the implementation of the pilot action on the **EU Disability Card**, written by Ernst and Young, was finally published. It can be found [here](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8407&furtherPubs=yes). An accessible version will be published in due time.

We contributed comments (in July) to EDF’s draft position paper on **disability assessment procedures**, and (in August) to its draft position paper on **artificial intelligence**.

In July the European Economic and Social Committee adopted its [opinion](http://cdlink2.eesc.europa.eu/c/6/?T=NzYyODI4NzE%3AcDEtYjIxMTkwLWY5MGEwMzdiYjVkYjRmMzlhNDNhYzk5ZTNjYWVkYjBh%3AZWJ1QGV1cm9ibGluZC5vcmc%3AY29udGFjdC1hZTI4NmU2YzI5NWFlOTExODExMzAwNTA1NmEwNDNlYS05YTkyOWJkMDJhZGU0MjcwODNmYjFjZWY5MWZkZDE1Mw%3AZmFsc2U%3AMA%3A%3AaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZWVzYy5ldXJvcGEuZXUvZW4vb3VyLXdvcmsvb3BpbmlvbnMtaW5mb3JtYXRpb24tcmVwb3J0cy9vcGluaW9ucy9zdHJhdGVneS1yaWdodHMtcGVyc29ucy1kaXNhYmlsaXRpZXM_X2NsZGVlPVpXSjFRR1YxY205aWJHbHVaQzV2Y21jJTNkJnJlY2lwaWVudGlkPWNvbnRhY3QtYWUyODZlNmMyOTVhZTkxMTgxMTMwMDUwNTZhMDQzZWEtOWE5MjliZDAyYWRlNDI3MDgzZmIxY2VmOTFmZGQxNTMmZXNpZD1lODI3ZGI5Ny04ZGQ5LWViMTEtODExOC0wMDUwNTZhMDQzZWE&K=aStQPQZTZ-8NVV5n_1PtiA) on the new **EU Disability Rights Strategy**. It welcomes it as a clear step forward compared with the previous one, yet expressing concern about the lack of binding measures and hard legislation implementing the Strategy.

In August we responded to a European Commission public consultation about a potential **social taxonomy** (as there is already an EU environmental taxonomy). The idea is to have a set of criteria to ensure that social objectives and principles are met by public authorities as well as private investors. Our response was essentially to duplicate the EDF response and thereby increase the visibility of disability-related concerns.

## EBU engages with a group of youngsters

On August 13th, EBU held an online workshop at the International Camp On Communication And Computers (ICC). This was the first time EBU organised such a workshop. The ICC is an annual event bringing together blind and partially sighted youngsters, aged between 16 and 23, from all across the world. The aim of the ICC summer camp is to make young blind and partially sighted students aware on the benefits of efficiently using Information and Communication Technology as well as Assistive Technologies, which skills are a "must", where to put efforts to enhance technical as well as social skills and the level of mobility, to supports students in finding a decision for their educational and vocational paths, and build social networks across different countries. Please find more about ICC at: <https://www.icc-camp.info/>

Entitled “Get heard - The movement of blind and partially sighted people”, the workshop gave an overview of what it means to be a representative organisation at the European level: The structure, some key successes and current advocacy topics as well as ways of getting involved for young blind and partially sighted individuals were presented and discussed. EBU was represented by its second Vice-President, Bárbara Martín Muñoz, the Leader of its Youth Network, Francesca Sbianchi and Lars Bosselmann, the Executive Director.

20 youngsters attended the workshop, which was more than had actually registered! Each of the three EBU inputs triggered a number of questions and lively interaction. Common themes that were raised by participants revolved around education, access to books and information, EBU’s work with youth organisations and, as to be expected, how to get involved. Francesca recorded a video for the event which was shown during our workshop.

“We are excited about our discussions today and your enthusiasm, which we very much hope you will be contributing in one way or another to the common fight for full inclusion of all blind and partially sighted people in Europe”, said Barbara to conclude the workshop. The ICC organisers, on their part, expressed their hope that this was just the first step towards a long cooperation between ICC and EBU.

## PARVIS updates, August 2021

PARVIS activities are back in full swing at the start of the autumn season. A new awareness-raising video on the Right to personal mobility, supporting UNCRPD Article 20, has just been launched in [English](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrYwYb4TKQ0), and the video will be available in French, Swedish, Lithuanian, German, Slovak, Montenegrin, Portuguese and Spanish on September 3rd on the [PARVIS YouTube Channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBLKX-DklJI98RHUjODP3KA/playlists).

An e-workshop providing tips and sharing experiences on how to raise visually impaired citizens awareness and how to advocate with decision makers about this right, will be held on September 6. If you wish to attend, kindly email to Cecilia.ekstrand@srf.nu by September 2.

On September 6, EBU and 9 other partner organisations will launch a 5-day awareness-raising Twitter campaign on #AccessToCulture, which is connected to [UNCRPD Article 30](http://www.euroblind.org/convention/article-30) on the Right to participation in cultural life and EBU's ongoing [Creative Europe/MEDIA campaign](http://www.euroblind.org/creative-europe/media-funding-film-industry), looking at EU funding to the film industry. The Twitter campaign advocates for visually impaired citizen’s right to culture, by demanding more funding (public or private) for audio description and audio subtitling, and that all films, TV programmes and streaming services should be made accessible to blind and partially sighted people. In order to support our cause, those of you present on Twitter, please like and retweet in support of our asks through following the account @euroblind and the hashtags #AccessToCulture and #AudioDescription.

In September, we will also start planning for the PARVIS ‘Rights-reporting’ podcast, which will be aired every two months from November 2021 onward. The podcast centers on visually impaired citizens’ rights linked to the UNCRPD, while discussing about events where such right has been denied through interviews. If you have any examples of such cases or wished to contribute to the podcast, kindly email to Cecilia.ekstrand@srf.nu.

## PAsCAL project Focus Group Discussions – action summary

The [PAsCAL project](https://www.pascal-project.eu/) (Enhance driver behaviour and Public Acceptance of Connected and Autonomous vehicLes) is co-funded by the European Union under the EU H2020 programme. The European Blind Union joined this project as it plans, amongst other things, to collect information on “visually impaired travellers and the connected transport environment”. In response to a call from the EBU at the end of 2020, the Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted (UICI) committed to organising 4 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) meetings in Italy, in cooperation with Etelätär, PAsCAL pilot task leader.

The main objectives of FGDs were to

* gather VIP’s suggestions on the features that would enhance the accessibility of CAVs (Connected and Autonomous Vehicles) and the relevant technology, that is, systems that exploit digital functions to manage means of transport like cars, trains, metro, towards a more and more automated, driverless, safer transport, as well as
* identify VIP’s concerns about those technologies, sharing and discussing them.

FGD meetings also offered the precious opportunity to raise the awareness of blind and partially sighted people about CAV technology.

From June to July 2021 the UICI held PAsCAL FGD meetings in four cities, chosen for their developed urban and mobility structure, each of them showing distinct features: Bologna, Milan, Naples and Rome. In each city, the cooperation of local organisers was extremely helpful and experts supported the FGD facilitator in presenting the PAsCAL project and introducing CAV technology to participants. After the introductory part, participants were asked to fill in an online questionnaire that was made accessible thanks to the efforts of the EBU and the UICI. The replies to the questionnaire, analysed in real time by Etelätär’s staff, who attended the meeting from remote with the support of an interpreter, were used to formulate questions to participants and fed into the discussions. The meetings were very successful and a total of 51 blind and partially sighted persons, a number exceeding the original plan, attended them. The subject was felt of high interest by participants and the focus group structure made it easy for them to express their views, whether they had a technical background or not.

In general, CAV technology was felt very promising in terms of the enhancement of VIP’s independent mobility, but warnings were made about the fact that this technology should be part of a seamless system integrating other high-tech and low-tech indoor and outdoor navigation tools and O&M training to ensure that the objective is fully reached. Safety and the possibility to communicate and interact with the system were felt as the critical issues for the acceptance of this technology.

## The 32nd EBU Access Cast

Welcome to the [32nd number of the EBU Access Cast](https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebu-access-cast-32) – our podcast about assistive technology for blind and partially sighted people. This is [transcribed episode 32](https://ebuaccesscast.libsyn.com/ebu-access-cast-32-transcript).

Some of us got the EU Covid certificate and we shared our experiences of showing the digital version on the mobile phone as blind persons. We found out that not all PDF viewers on mobile phones open the QR code maximised and therefore this creates difficulties to blind persons to show properly the certificate on the Covid-19 travel checkpoints. Feel free to share your experience with us!

Pawel discovered a very handy app for taking notes [Simplenote](https://simplenote.com/). The notes are synced on all your devices and can be accessed via the web interface as well. We were thrilled to discover that the interface is accessible on all platforms and that every action has an assigned shortcut.

We discussed the new accessibility features in [iOS15](https://9to5mac.com/2021/07/05/ios-15-everything-new-accessibility/) and compared them with Google announcement of the changes which will come in Android 12.

We also commented the [Windows 11 accessibility announcement](https://blogs.windows.com/windowsexperience/2021/07/01/whats-coming-in-windows-11-).

The [NVDA 2021.1](https://www.nvaccess.org/post/nvda-2021-1/) was released in July with many new features and bug fixes.

We discovered the [NVDA Unmute addon](https://addons.nvda-project.org/addons/unmute.en.html) that checks the status of the Windows audio system when NVDA starts. If the sound is muted - the add-on forcibly turns it on. As blind users we find it very useful.

Mario discovered the [RHVoice](https://github.com/RHVoice/RHVoice), open source TTS engine, that supports 8 languages.

Get in contact with us, share your comments or suggestions via email ebuaccesscast@euroblind.org or via Twitter @ebuaccesscast.

## A step forward in accessible packaging coming to Europe from the UK

At the start of last year, EBU’s UK member, RNIB, began working with Kellogg’s on a project to find a solution for making packaging more accessible – but what started out as a small trial and an awareness raising exercise, has since grown into a world-leading project.

The relationship began when Kellogg’s wanted to create a special edition Coco Pops box to mark World Sight Day in 2020. Knowing that nine in 10 blind and partially sighted people find it difficult or impossible to read packaging information, their aim was to increase the understanding of sight loss and use the accessible edition as a trial to show what could be achieved in this space.

The original trial, which took place in over 50 UK stores, featured new Coco Pops boxes which not only had braille, larger print and simplified artwork, but also featured a world-first technology that allows smartphones to detect and playback labelling and allergen information to the user.

The new technology, NaviLens, is similar to a QR code, but can be detected in a fraction of the time from up to three metres away. Also, as the technology was originally created to provide navigational assistance, it means that it can help the shopper to find a product, as well as giving them packaging information.

The trial was an overwhelming success, with 97 per cent of participants agreeing they would like to see more of these accessibility features available on grocery packaging. After analysing feedback, Kellogg’s and RNIB quickly recognised that the ability to access pack information digitally, using NaviLens, catered for the needs of everyone with sight loss, rather than just those with specific requirements (such as braille users). This led to Kellogg’s announcing in July 2021 that from early next year, it will be adding NaviLens codes to their entire range of cereal products across the whole of Europe.

Pete Matthews, Director of Brand Design & Operations at Kellogg's, said: “At Kellogg’s, we share RNIB’s passion for inclusive design and we are committed to making our packaging more accessible. That’s why we are now proud to announce that from early 2022, our entire European portfolio of cereal products will feature NaviLens codes. We’ve been incredibly proud to go on this journey with our friends at RNIB to find a solution to make packaging accessible for everyone and hope that it inspires other brand owners to join this movement.”

Marc Powell, Strategic Accessibility Lead at RNIB, said: “This announcement from Kellogg’s is a real game changer within the packaging world. It marks a significant step-change in how big brands can put accessibility at the forefront of design and packaging decisions and be a catalyst for change. Important information on packaging can often be in very small print, making it difficult or impossible for people with sight loss to read. Changes like this can provide blind and partially sighted people with vital information for the very first time, giving us the same freedom, independence and choice as sighted customers. Designing packaging so that it works for everyone makes complete sense and we hope that other brands will follow Kellogg’s lead in making packaging information more accessible.”

A [video is available](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-MnzF9lJq4) for further explanations.

The links to download the app are:

Apple: [NaviLens](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/navilens/id1273704914) - [NaviLens GO](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/navilens-go/id1313878412)

Google: [NaviLens](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.neosistec.NaviLens) - [NaviLens GO](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.neosistec.navilensgo)

## People with sight loss in the UK can now access thousands of audio books through Alexa

Customers of the Royal National Institute of Blind People’s (RNIB) Talking Books library are now able to access their audio books by asking Alexa, as well as through RNIB’s usual library services.

The Talking Books service has been described by many users as a ‘lifeline’ during the pandemic, with 1.33 million Talking Books sent out in the last year.

David Clarke, Director of Services at RNIB, said: “We are extremely pleased to announce that Talking Books customers can now access the 34,000 books in the RNIB Library by asking Alexa. RNIB’s Talking Books library is 86 years old yet continues to adapt to the changing landscape of how our library users want to read their books.

“There are some great advantages to accessing your Talking Books this way. If you start a book but don’t like it, you can immediately choose another one rather than waiting for your next book to arrive in the post.

“Voice activated technology is bringing us closer to a world where blind and partially sighted people can consume books on a level playing field with sighted people.”

RNIB worked with both Amazon and New Zealand based company, Sonnar Interactive to develop the Alexa Skill.

Users will be able to search by book title, author and key word. RNIB will continue to provide Talking Books in the traditional USB and CD format, and customers can still access RNIB advice and support services including Tech for Life.

The Talking Books service has revolutionised reading for people with sight loss since it launched in 1935 to help soldiers who had been blinded in the First World War and were struggling to learn braille.

For more information, visit [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk) or call our helpline on +44 303 123 9999.

## A new visual impairment information site launched in Scotland

Leading sight loss charity RNIB Scotland has welcomed the launch of a new Scottish Government website that brings together information on all aspects of visual impairment.

The [Eyes.Scot site](https://www.eyes.scot/) was launched on the 09th of August.

James Adams, director of RNIB Scotland, said: "Around 170,000 people are currently living in Scotland who are blind or partially sighted. This will inevitably increase as we have an ageing population and a rising rate of sight-threatening conditions such as diabetes.

"So it's vital that we all understand how to maintain good eye-health, and that government and health services take the steps necessary to contain any increase as far as possible.

"The Eyes.Scot website will provide an invaluable one-stop hub from which people can access information on eye conditions, eye-health, and the wide range of support services provided by bodies like RNIB Scotland throughout the country. We have worked with the Scottish Government to ensure the new site is accessible to people with limited vision and for screen-reading software.”

Public Health Minister Maree Todd said: “Eye care is an important part of everyone’s health. I welcome the launch of Eyes.Scot, Scotland’s new national website for information about eye care services and eye health. Supporting both the public and eye care professionals, Eyes.Scot is an invaluable resource which provides easy access to information about how best to look after our eyes and sight. With the launch of Eyes.Scot all of this information is now available in one place making it easier to find and access the right information.”

## The EBU Annual Report 2020

With the financial support of the European Commission EBU has produced its [Annual Report 2020](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/annualreport2020-final.pdf).

The report details a complicated period for EBU which remained active despite the limitations and difficulties created by the pandemic, and provides information on our activities, campaigns and achievements for 2020, a busy year for us, discovering new resources in the face of adversity.

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/annualreport2020-final.pdf).

## 2nd Edition of the International Low-Vision Song Contest

After receiving very positive feedback, the German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted (DBSV) together with VIEWS International is happy to announce the second edition of the International Low-Vision Song Contest in May 2023. The contest will probably once more take place online. The ILSC Team is already looking forward to the next edition.

You will find current information on [www.dbsv.org/ilsc](http://www.dbsv.org/ilsc) If your organisation wants to hold the national pre-selection in your country please inform DBSV: Alice Rollet - Further details regarding the 2nd edition of the contest will be communicated beginning of next year.

## Reminder - Call for ideas: “DANOVA: Innovative transportation services for blind and partially sighted passengers in the Danube Region”

Since 2020 the the Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted (BSVÖ) is part of the DANOVA project. It is a transnational cooperation project co-funded by ERDF, IPA, and ENI (European Union funds) that aims to improve the accessibility of airports, seaports, train/bus stations to blind and partially sighted people by developing a set of new services and competencies to ensure full access to all transportation information, facilities, and services.

The DANOVA project team, 18 organizations from the Danube region, including BSVÖ, is now looking for innovative ideas /solutions in the field of transport and mobility for blind and visually impaired people. The Call for Ideas is open for submissions from the 1st of S**eptember to the 15th of October** via following link: <https://cutt.ly/RQpcWjK>

Submissions can be made in two categories, firstly modifications of the built environment and secondly assistive technologies. Within this categories following criteria will be assessed: direct link to transportation, existing infrastructure for the idea to be based upon, entry-level of skills needed for the usage, added value in comparison to existing solutions, time for implementation and budget and operational expenses.

Chosen ideas will have the opportunity to be presented at the final project conference in Vienna to various international stake- and shareholders in the field of transportation. Additionally the ideas are going to be part of the official project publication. Further information can be found [here](https://www.dropbox.com/s/5dvjnn7p4uoy3ks/DANOVA%20Call%20for%20Ideas%202021.pdf?dl=0).

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