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# EBU Focus Number Fourteen, January 2022.

# Employment - Keys To Inclusion

### Polish, Serbian and Turkish versions available!

EBU Focus newsletters are now available, as word documents only, in [Polish](https://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu-focus-employment-inclusion_polish_pl.docx), [Serbian](https://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu-focus-employment-inclusion_serbian_sr.docx) and [Turkish](https://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu-focus-employment-inclusion_turkish_tr.docx). We hope that these translations will enable this information to reach a wider audience.

## Employment of blind and partially sighted people – a key to inclusion

This was the title of our annual conference which we organised together with our Serbian friends from the Union of the Blind in Serbia. The conference took place in Belgrade and brought together 150 participants from all over Europe to discuss challenges and opportunities in the field of employment. As also underlined in [the Belgrade Declaration](https://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/declaration_belgrade.docx) which resulted from that gathering, employment means so much more than just an income generating activity, it is really about inclusion in society! But what does the employment situation of blind and partially sighted people really look like today in different countries?

Well, there is good evidence clearly demonstrating that blind and partially sighted people are still more likely to be amongst the unemployed or have precarious jobs than their sighted peers. This situation can worsen when considering other factors such as gender, ethnic origin or multiple forms of disability. These being some general trends and facts, do we know precisely what the situation is? This raises the long-standing topic of lacking comparable, reliable, and official data; data telling the full story about the employment of blind and partially sighted people in different countries, sectors, age groups etc. This remains a real challenge but would be a precondition for adopting targeted policies and supportive measures to improve the employment of blind and partially sighted people.

I am afraid that this Focus edition will not put in place data systems providing us with that much needed body of evidence. But it contains news and thought-provoking articles helping us to continue our efforts to get more blind and partially sighted people in employment: a very interesting piece of research where our Serbian member gathered relevant employment data by themselves. Still in the area of data, this Focus also features an encouraging article from EuroStat with the latest progress and plans to close the disability-data gap. At the same time, the question on how to disaggregate data to also capture blindness and partial sight remains open. You will also read with interest a personal contribution from Estonia highlighting the fast-changing nature of employment through technology, and both the challenges and opportunities coming with it. In short, this edition features just a few key aspects of employment, a theme that will remain top on our agenda for many years to come!

**Lars Bosselmann**

EBU Executive Director

## Employment Of Visually Impaired Persons In The Republic Of Serbia

### Introduction

Employment plays one of the most important roles in human life. It offers financial safety, a stable existence, work activity and productivity, as well as making and maintaining new acquaintances. There are many challenges in the employment process. The unemployment rate in Serbia is very high, even higher among persons with visual impairment. During the 20th. Century, the range of professions for visually impaired persons was not wide. There were professions such as physiotherapists and telephone operators, but there were also highly educated persons in areas such as law, languages, sociology, psychology, special pedagogy, journalism and other social sciences.

In recent decades, with the development of new information technologies, the range of professions became wider. The usage of computers opens up new opportunities for the jobs visually impaired persons can do, but also for more independence in already existing jobs.

On the occasion of the annual employment conference organized by the European Blind Union (EBU), which was this year held in Belgrade, the Union of the Blind of Serbia conducted research on the employment status of visually impaired persons in the Republic of Serbia. This document analyses the results of the research. (The [full report is also available](https://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/the_research_on_the_employment_of_visually_impaired_persons_in_the_republic_of_serbia.docx))

### **Research sample**:

The sample consisted of 124 subjects, whereby 51.6% were female and 48.4% male subjects.

The age of subjects varied between 18 and 62 years, but the majority of the responses were given by the subjects 30-35 years old.

The responses were received from 39 towns in Serbia, but the majority of the responses were from Belgrade area (29).

There were 55.6% totally blind and 44.4% partially sighted subjects.

The age of sight loss: by birth: 67.7%, at school age: 20.2%, later: 12.1%.

As for the level of education, the majority of the subjects had secondary education (54%), 14.5% of the subjects graduated from university, 11.3% finished master studies, 9.7% had high/higher education, 8.9% of the subjects had primary education and 1.6% doctor titles.

There were 54.8% subjects moving independently, 8.9% those who do not move independently, and 36.3% those who use personal assistance.

Out of the total number of subjects (124), 77 (62.1%) were unemployed and 47 (37.9%) were employed.

Time and location of the research:

The research was conducted in Belgrade, from June to September 2021. The subjects had the possibility to fill in the questionnaire online, using the link they had received.

### **Results and discussion**:

In this discussion, we will first show the results according to the tasks and hypotheses, and then subsequently address some key question for this subject.

There are 55.6% blind or visually impaired persons who experienced some form of discrimination seeking employment, and 44.4% persons who did not experience any discrimination.

These percentages confirm the first hypothesis, i.e. that there are more blind and visually impaired persons who experienced some form of discrimination as job seekers than those who did not.

The impact of additional health problems during the search for employment: In 49.2 of the subjects these problems have no influence, in 11.3% these problems do have influence, and in 2.4% of the subjects these problems have a partial impact.

This confirms the second hypothesis: additional health problems in visually impaired persons do not necessarily influence the search for a job.

As for the adaptation of the websites of companies to the needs of visually impaired persons seeking employment, 4.8% of the websites are adapted, 37.1% are partially adapted, whereas 22.6% are not adapted at all.

From these percentages we can conclude that the third hypothesis that the majority of websites of the companies are adapted to the visually impaired job-seekers is only partially confirmed.

After acquiring an education level, people mostly try to find a job in their profession. Is it exactly so in this case?

22.6% of the subjects sought employment in their profession, 5.6% of the subjects did not seek employment in their profession, 1.6% are likely to do so, whereas biggest percentage of 35.5% of the subjects would accept any job that would be offered to them, on condition that it is in accordance with their possibilities.

From the above mentioned data we can conclude that the fourth hypothesis that visually impaired persons are more inclined to seek the employment in their chosen professions is not confirmed.

In the question: What were the difficulties that you encountered while seeking employment? The subjects were given the possibility to tick more than one box.

58.9% of the subjects indicated that visual impairment was a problem, whereas 52.4% ticked the prejudice of the employers. A very few subjects (3.2%) ticked the box "insufficient family support".

To answer the question: What are your reasons for seeking the employment?, the subjects also had the possibility of multiple choice. Financial security was ticked by 59.7% of the subjects, The reason of 50.8% of the subjects was to acquire years of service, also 50.8% seek an employment because they want to be independent from others, and 49.2% want to be useful and equal society members.

One of the presumptions concerning the employment of visually impaired persons is that the employer should adapt the workplace. To what extent is it really necessary?

The question: Is your workplace adapted? 15.3% of the subjects answered "Yes", 10.5% "no", and 11.3% answered "partially". Of course, this question applied only for the employed subjects.

As far as the ways of adaptation of the workplace are concerned, the subjects had the possibility of multiple choice, but they also could add a response they considered appropriate. The main concern for the most of the subjects (12.9%) was safe access to the building, 10.5% ticked safe workspace adaptation, 9.7% chose the adaptation of working tasks, 4% think that the offices should be marked with the large print numbers for visually impaired persons, whereas the smallest percentage (1.6%) of the responses relate to the marking of offices in Braille.

Which assistive technologies are mostly used by visually impaired persons on the workplace?

The biggest percentage of the subjects use the computer with speech synthesis (18.5%). Some respondents do not use any assistive technologies, because they do not need them to do their jobs properly (telephone operators, physiotherapists...).

### Conclusion

As we can see from this research, there is a bigger percentage of unemployed persons amongst the visually impaired in Serbia. There is so much to be done in Serbia to decrease the unemployment rate among visually impaired persons. In order to address this problem as adequately as possible, the state and its institutions, the media, and the Union of the Blind of Serbia with its local organizations must be more involved and there is still much to do on raising awareness in society. In order to decrease and eliminate prejudice, especially in the employment area, it is necessary to organize various round tables, seminars, webinars, workshops and trainings of employers in different companies. Employers mostly place the main accent to the visual impairment, i.e. to the limitations of a visually impaired person. On the contrary, these persons, in accordance with their qualifications, possibilities and opportunities, can perform their tasks adequately, with certain reasonable adaptations if needed.

More research on this subject would be appreciated in the future, in order to verify if something is changing in the employment status of this population in our country.

**Suzana Jojić** and **Mara Ožegović**, specialized teachers.

## Digitalization in the employment sector: a break or breakthrough?

As an owner of a small business, creating and sending invoices is usually a task filled with joyful thoughts. My job is done, it’s time for the client to pay. That all goes as a breeze, until one morning, when logging in to my cloudbased bookkeeping software, I’m met by a happy popup. “We’ve totally renewed the user interface to bring you the best possible experience!,” it announces. Fear growing inside, I attempt to dismiss the popup. Unsuccessfully. Once, twice, three times. Until I suddenly am offered a demo video. Which to me, is just 4 minutes of boring corporate music. After asking a sighted colleague to click the dismiss button, I find that the fancy new interface is now completely inaccessible with a screen reader. I try a couple of different browsers, load up a virtual machine to test a different operating system, every-thing fails. A software update has broken my workflow again. Third time this month. Now effectively leaving me without my income.

I am sure that this experience doesn’t come as unfamiliar to people working in professional environments. Digitalization has brought us huge benefits in terms of making everyday work life more effective, but at the same time, leaving people with disabilities in the hands of developers, to whom accessibility is still a thing they might have heard of, but with which they are not familiar. And that has brought new challenges to virtually all professions. Want to be a blind chef? Good luck finding kitchen appliances without touch controls. Are you a physio-therapist? Client management software tends not to be very accessible. Have you set up your own business? Increasing demands on marketing and it’s visual attractiveness, without accessible designing tools, demand you outsource those tasks, costing you money on things other can save on. The list goes on. And thus, it is incredibly important to raise more awareness among developers and manufacturers about accessibility. Will a web based software comply with [WCAG](https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/) and other relevant accessibility guidelines? Can a machine be operated without being able to see it? Those are just a few questions a product owner should ask, before releasing an update.

However, not all digitalization has brought issues. As bad as the Covid19 pandemic has been to the whole world, we can’t ignore the fact that meetings via videoconferencing software have increased the potential for more accessible meetings. No more worrying if the meeting area is physically accessible or wondering who the rest of the participants are. When a meeting is held through something like Zoom, it can be attended from wherever, it’s participants browsed with a screen reader. It is even possible to access live captions and a chat room within some meetings, even broadening the accessibility of the meeting further.

Another example. Several governments are considering digitalisation in the public sector, making digital signatures equal with written signatures. As a citizen of Estonia, where digital signing has been in place way more than a decade, ability to verify the contents of a document, sign it, and verify my signature in an accessible way has been a ground-breaking advantage.

Thus, as a conclusion, we should not see digitalization as some-thing bad. Inaccessible professional products still exclude a lot of people from their career, which is a sign for us, national and EU organisations, to raise more awareness, help to provide more information on the need and details of accessibility. Because once something is accessible for everybody, digitalization indeed benefits all.

**Jakob Rosin**

Estonian Blind Union

## The Importance of statistical data for disability-related policies and initiatives

One of the principal sources of information in society is found in statistical data. Providing regular and reliable statistics is a key element for developing effective evidence-based policies in any domain as well as for monitoring implementation and any progress made. The European Union and its Member States are strongly committed to promote policies and actions with the objective of improving the social and economic situation of persons with disabilities.

In this respect, key initiatives that would contribute to a full participation of persons with disabilities in society, on an equal basis with others, were set out in the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 adopted in March 2021 by the European Commission.

Improving availability and comparability of disability data is one of these initiatives. The aim is to have a disability breakdown in all existing statistical data collections that refer to persons and households. This will enable one to analyse the situation of people with disabilities in various aspects of life, to identify the barriers in the economic and social environment that prevent people with disabilities from exercising their capabilities, as well as from enjoying equal opportunities and full participation in all aspects of life.

For instance, many economic and social policies rely on the statistical data provided by the EU Labour Force Survey (EU LFS). The inclusion of a disability breakdown in the EU LFS from 2022 onwards will not only enable the management of progress in relation to the labour market participation of persons with disabilities, but also as regards their education and training levels or their socio-economic background.

Existing data in the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) show that the situation of persons with disabilities in domains like employment, poverty and social exclusion is consistently and substantially worse than for persons without disabilities.

When considering the headline indicator of the labour market, the employment rate, the disability employment gap (that is the difference between the employment rates of persons aged 20-64 with and without disabilities) shows a slight increase over the period 2014 to 2020 at the EU level: from 22.7 percentage points to 24.5 percentage points. The highest employment rate for both categories of persons was found in 2020, in Estonia: 65.7% for persons with disabilities and 86.3% for persons without disabilities.

When presenting disability data it is important to acknowledge the challenges that this concept poses in terms of data collections. Disability is an umbrella term for different concepts such as, impairment, activity limitation and participation restrictions. Its complexity and multidimensionality lead to many aspects having to be considered when measuring it. Therefore, identifying people with disabilities in surveys is a difficult task that requires making compromises as regards the disability definition to be used, mainly because the operationalisation of the disability concept cannot be the same in non-dedicated social surveys and in dedicated surveys where an extended set of questions can be used. The consequence is that disability is measured in different ways across the various surveys and the estimates might not always be comparable.

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