



The voice of blind and
partially sighted people in Europe

**SAGO Research,
Evaluation and
Consultancy**

**European Blind Union
External evaluation Action Plan 2023**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANEC: European Association for the Co-ordination of Consumer Representation in Standardization
AVA: Accessible Voting Awareness Raising
BPS: Blind and partially sighted (people)
CAV: Connected and Autonomous Vehicles
CEN: European Committee for Standardisation
CERV: Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme
DG CNECT: (European Commission) Directorate General Communications Networks, Content and Technology
DPO: Disabled Person's Organisation (s)
EC: European Commission
EDF: European Disability Forum
EP: European Parliament
EU: European Union
GA: General Assembly
GEAR: Gender Equality Awareness Raising (project)
ICEVI: International Council for Education and Re/habilitation of People with Visual Impairment
LC: EBU Commission for Liaising with the EU
LEF: Leadership Exchange Forum
M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation
MS: Member State(s)
REC: Rights, Equality and Citizenship (programme)
SDG: Sustainable Development Goal(s)
UN: United Nations
UNCRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
VET: Vocational Education and Training
VI: Visually impaired

I want to express my gratitude to all EBU members and EBU staff who have contributed to this evaluation round.

1. INTRODUCTION

EBU created in 1984, is a non-governmental, non-profit making European umbrella organisation and 1 of the 6 regional bodies of the World Blind Union. EBU has currently 42 members, of which 26 in EU Member States¹. The [EBU Constitution](#) together with the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) and the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) are the guiding principles of the work of EBU.

The mission of EBU is threefold:

- To promote the interests of all blind and partially sighted (BPS) people to European bodies.
- To produce European-wide research and best practice relating to policies, services and social inclusion.
- To support and strengthen national organisations of BPS people.

SAGO Research was contracted to evaluate the implementation of the [EBU 2023 Action Plan](#) funded under the EU CERV programme. This EBU 2023 Action Plan is framed within the remit of the [EBU Strategic Orientation Plan 2020-2023](#). The objectives of the EBU 2023 Action Plan are related to different areas of work:

- Improving Braille teaching and literacy.
- Employment.
- (improved) Access to ICTs.
- (improved) Participation in public life.
- Non-discrimination.
- Inclusive design

¹ The membership of Russia is suspended for the duration of the war in Ukraine, which means that there are currently 41 active EBU members.

- (improved) Mobility (i.e. connected and automated vehicles, shared spaces).
- (improved) Governance and working processes (gender equality, cohesion amongst the membership, Leadership Forum, preparation of the 12th General Assembly, EBU Solidarity Fund, increased use of virtual communication, building a monitoring, evaluation and learning system)
- (improved) Communication and campaigning.
- (improved) Fundraising capacity.

These objectives are linked with the priorities and objectives of the EBU Strategic Orientation Plan 2020-2023:

- **Priority 1: Empowering blind and partially sighted persons:**
 - In cooperation with ICEVI-Europe, governments, professionals and other stakeholders are made aware of the importance of braille (UNCRPD art. 9, 21 and 24 - SDG 4).
 - Every blind and partially sighted adult in Europe has the opportunity to have a fulfilling job (UNCRPD art. 27 - SDG 8).
 - Every blind and partially sighted person has access to technologies that meet their information needs (UNCRPD art. 9 – SDG 9).
 - Every blind and partially sighted person has the right to participate in public life (UNCRPD art. 29 - SDG 16).
 - Blind and partially sighted persons, including children, are protected against discrimination in all areas of life (UNCRPD art. 5 – SDG10).
 - Every blind and partially sighted person has access to inclusively designed goods and services (UNCRPD art. 9).
 - Every blind and partially sighted person has improved mobility (UNCRPD art. 20).
- **Priority 2: Strengthening EBU and its members**
 - EBU has improved governance and working processes.
 - EBU and its organisations have improved communication and campaigning capacity.

As there are visible linkages between this 2023 CERV Action Plan and other EU-level projects implemented by EBU, it is almost inevitable that evaluation results reflect these connections.

EBU is funded through membership fees and contributions, a Grant from the European Commission (CERV programme), EC projects and sponsoring.

Reading Guide

After the introduction to this report, the second chapter explains the objective and approach of the evaluation of the EBU Action Plan 2023.

In chapter 3 the conclusions and recommendations are presented.

Chapter 4 presents the evaluation findings, structured around overall findings, the priorities in the Strategic Orientation Plan and other themes EBU was working on in 2023.

2. OBJECTIVE AND APPROACH OF THE EVALUATION

2.1. OBJECTIVE AND OBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

Objective

The **main aim of the external evaluation** of the EBU Action Plan 2023 is to assess the **performance and achievements** of EBU in 2023 vis-à-vis the overall objectives of this Action Plan.

This evaluation aims to contribute to:

- a learning process aimed at the improvement of the functioning of EBU activities.
- a broader evidence base to inform the management and governance of EBU.

Object

The object of evaluation is for 2023 defined by the clusters of activities specified in the 2023 Action Plan:

- Contribution of the work of EBU to the development of the EU law/policies and to their implementation.
- Building the capacity of the members of the network and/or training relevant practitioners and stakeholders and/or informing the general public.
- Raising awareness and dissemination of results.

2.2. EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND CRITERIA

The main evaluation **questions** guiding this research are:

- Are the activities of the EBU 2023 Action Plan implemented in an effective and relevant way in achieving the objectives?
- To what extent is there coherence between the various activities of the EBU 2023 Action Plan?
- To what extent have the resources been used in the most optimal way?
- Did the implementation of the EBU 2023 Action Plan lead to the expected results/changes?

The **criteria** used are:

- Effectiveness: the extent to which the objectives have been achieved of the EBU 2023 Action Plan.
- Relevance: the extent to which EBU appropriately responds to the needs and priorities of its members (and the wider BPS community they represent) through the implementation of these various activities.
- Coherence: the extent to which the various activities are coherent, addressing the synergies and interlinkages and consistency between the various activities.

2.3. TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

For the **data collection**, two main tools were used:

- Documentary analysis.
- 24 online/telephone interviews with a selection of members and the EBU Office staff.

Data collection for the evaluation process took place between March and December 2023.

Documentary analysis

A range of documents produced in the framework of the EBU 2023 Action Plan was used as input into the evaluation:

- EBU Action Plan 2023.
- EBU Strategic Plan 2020-2023.
- Press release: 07 March 2022, Press release of the European Blind Union on the situation in Ukraine, Adopted by the European Blind Union Board in Genova, Italy, on 5th March 2022
- EBU position paper '[Analysis of the Proposed Directive for a European Disability Card and a European Parking Card for persons with disabilities](#)' (pdf document, October 2023) a [word version of this document](#) is also available.
- EBU Statement on [European Parliament elections 2024 'Stand for a Union more inclusive of visually impaired people'](#) (pdf document, September 2023) a [word version of this document](#) is also available.
- EBU statement on the European Commission proposal for a European Disability Card - '[Free movement for disabled citizens: the European Commission puts its cards on the table](#)' (pdf document, September 2023) a [word version of this document](#) is also available.
- EBU position paper on [Access to Reading and Using Braille – a matter of the future](#) (pdf document, September 2023) a [word version of this document](#) is also available.
- EBU [Response About using Braille for operating buttons of lifts](#) (pdf document, May 2023) a [word version of this document](#) is also available.
- EBU [Response to the European Commission's call for evidence for the evaluation of the Marrakesh Directive and Regulation](#) (pdf document, May 2023) a [word version of this document](#) is also available.

- EBU Focus Newsletter (October 2023): [EBU membership - Making The Voice of Blind and Partially Sighted People in Europe Heard](#) .
- EBU Press release (15 Sept 2023): on Statement on the European elections 2024 '[Stand for a Union more inclusive of visually impaired people](#)'.
- [EBU Member's Newsletter October 2023](#)
- [EBU Member's Newsletter September 2023](#)
- [EBU Member's Newsletter August 2023](#)
- [EBU Member's Newsletter June 2023](#)
- [EBU Member's Newsletter May 2023](#)
- [EBU Member's Newsletter April 2023](#)
- [EBU Member's Newsletter March 2023](#)
- [EBU Member's Newsletter February 2023](#)
- [EBU Member's Newsletter January 2023](#)

Furthermore, the LC e-mailing list interactions between members and between members and the EBU Office during 2023 were also used as an input into this evaluation.

Online/telephone interviews

Online/telephone interviews were organised with a selection of 18 EBU members (23 members were invited) and 6 staff members of the EBU Office (including the Director) to gather opinions and perceptions about the implementation of activities. The type of interview that was conducted is **semi-structured**.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The external evaluation of the EBU 2023 Action Plan work is based on **desk-research and telephone interviews in which in total 18 member organisations participated as well as 6 EBU staff members.**

Furthermore, desk research was carried out based on several key documents and email traffic in the Liaison Committee (LC) in 2023.

Throughout 2023, EBU underwent transformations within its team, extended support to Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict, persisted in lobbying efforts for existing initiatives, engaged in preparatory campaigning work for the 2024 EP elections, started the preparations for a new Strategic Plan, welcomed Latvia as a new member, strengthened its own voice and profile within Europe, and notably, geared up for the upcoming GA in February 2024. This pivotal event will encompass the election of a new Board, approval of a new Strategic Plan, and the commencement of a new four-year implementation phase.

Some of these developments reflect the challenges reported by interviewees in the 2022 evaluation round for 2023.

The developments identified for 2023, will linger on in 2024 and present simultaneously also significant prospects for EBU, including its upcoming 40th anniversary in 2024. They provide an opportunity for introspection regarding EBU's operations and working methods.

3.2. CONCLUSIONS

1. Are the activities of the EBU 2023 Action Plan implemented in an effective and relevant way in achieving the objectives?

The activities of EBU are implemented through various working structures, i.e., Working Groups, Commissions, and a Committee. Some of these structures are more active than others and a review could be considered in the light of the development of the new Strategic Plan. The basis for the implementation of the activities have always been the capacity and expertise of the members of EBU, while the coordination is in the hands of the EBU Office.

The last years (since 2020), the engagement of members has been increasingly a challenge, influenced by various factors, including their capacity, priority setting and alignment of their own work (now and in the future) with what is offered by EBU. It is acknowledged by interviewees that EBU is a key actor in the disability community at European level, but that the relevance for its members needs to be closely monitored.

With the Office team growing in size (currently 7 team members, including the Director, 1 campaigning officer, 2 communication officers, 1 project officer, 1 membership officer and 1 office assistant), an effective and efficient use of resources (more in particular human and financial) is at stake (which tasks to be done best by who). The appointment of a membership officer in 2023 is evidencing the importance given to strengthen the relationship with the members.

Knowing the members, having a good understanding of their needs, expertise, and expectations, and valuing their contribution is key to motivate members to engage with EBU. The expectations towards the membership officer to re-boost membership engagement, are high.

While member engagement is still a challenge, positive developments can be identified, e.g., the interest shown by members to be part of the future Board, the rising attendance in LEF meetings.

Most of the activities part of the 2023 Action Plan have been realised in a satisfactory way.

2. To what extent is there coherence between the various activities of the EBU 2023 Action Plan?

Coherence between activities is mainly determined by the broader framework in which annual Action Plans are defined: activities outlined in the EBU 2023 Action Plan are integral part of a broader spectrum of activities defined in the EBU Strategic Orientation Plan 2020-2023. These activities are formulated on an annual basis and presented in the Action Plans, forming part of a comprehensive longer term strategy whereby each annual Action Plan contributes to its evolution and execution. This approach allows also for the necessary flexibility to address emerging policy changes within the framework.

In 2023 and the preceding years, EBU has been involved in EU-level projects implemented with members and other partners. While these projects fit within the overall Strategic Orientation Plan 2020-2023, the link with the annual activities has not always been clear (as already explained in the 2022 evaluation report). Furthermore, based on the data gathered, the results of these projects are considered as important outputs and outcomes, used by members (e.g., the PARVIS website page was in the top 10 of most visited pages in the first months of 2023. PARVIS material was referred to by various interviewees in the 2023 evaluation round).

3. To what extent have the resources been used in the most optimal way?

The external evaluation is mainly focusing on the use of human resources to implement the activities; a robust analysis of the use of financial resources is out of the scope of this research. The human resources at the disposal of EBU to implement the activities are mainly those available in the network of members and those available in the Office. The implementation model mainly used by EBU in the past relied heavily on the deployment of human resources by network members. This 'choice' was also partly determined by the limited resources

available to the Secretariat. This original model has changed in recent years: the budget EBU obtained through EU funds increased (to a limited extent), and the deployment of human resources by members became out of challenge (driven by several crises and prioritisation of national work, among others). During the interviews, it became clear that both the deployment of human resources in the Office and for the implementation of activities together with members could be improved.

4. Did the implementation of the EBU 2023 Action Plan lead to the expected results/changes?

The work of EBU can be divided into awareness raising, offering opportunities to strengthen capacities of organisations of BPS citizens/members (individual learning and institutional learning) as well as advocacy/lobbying. Results of the latter are not easy to capture and not directly identifiable. For interviewees, the question about results of EBU advocacy/lobby work in 2023 is challenging. Yet, some highlights were mentioned in terms of progress made, e.g., the successful contribution in relation to the European Disability Card, the work done in relation to preparing the European 2024 elections as well as the EBU Handbook for audio-description and the work done on Braille promotion as well as the recommendations formulated for accessible payment terminals.

Various interviewees refer to the use of outputs produced by EBU.

3.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are a combination of proposals for improvements suggested by interviewees as well as suggestions for improvement by the evaluator.

1. Organisation of the work and of the EBU Office

Overall, attention needs to be given to an efficient organisation of the work and of the Office to manage the various challenges and take up the several opportunities of the coming years. While the expectations towards the Office are high, they need to be put into perspective of

availability capacity that needs to be used in an effective and efficient way: what are the tasks to be done in view of the objectives to be achieved and which profiles/functions are needed for this.

In view of the further professionalisation of the Office, having the necessary tools in place is recommended to be part of the new Strategic Plan, i.e. a human resources policy, a diversity and safeguarding policy as well as sustainability policy.

Furthermore, interviewees presented some concrete proposals for a more effective and efficient functioning of the Office:

- An effective and efficient sharing of information between staff members.
- Having a scenario/playbook for the organisation of events and activities.
- Having suitable labour conditions (related to the physical, social, and psychological working climate).
- Having regular team meetings, not only about practical issues, but also about content, especially in a context of teleworking.

2. Facilitating member engagement

Various pleas were made by interviewees to bring the Office closer to the members (which is also part of the task description of the membership officer and which started already in the recent past by visits to members). Having a good understanding of the members and of their involvement in EBU is a basic condition to facilitate engagement: what is the capacity of members to contribute, what are their needs, expectations but also their expertise they can contribute, in which activities do they participate, in which activities could or would they like to participate in the future, etc.? Good communication is key for this, whereby direct contacts (and not only via email) are proposed as the best way to do this.

An analysis of the use of communication channels could contribute to a better understanding of members, e.g. who is downloading the podcasts and the videocasts. Also a more in-depth analysis of participants lists of events, webinars, etc, and e-discussion lists is relevant for this purpose (membership engagement audit).

The possibility to connect with different levels in the organisation is considered to be an effective manner of connecting, i.e., at the level of leadership (LEF meetings), at the level of practitioners (through e-discussion lists, webinars, training sessions) and at the level of specific professionals (e.g. communication officers, advocacy officers, etc.).

3. Strengthen diversity and inclusion

During previous evaluation rounds, the issue of diversifying the participation in EBU events, working structures and governance bodies was mentioned on different occasions. This diversification needs to be approached in terms of age, gender and geographical location of the member. EBU is a European network and not only an EU-level umbrella organisation: how to make EBU more relevant both for EU and non-EU members? How to include the perspectives of non-EU members in issues that are relevant for all members (e.g. accessibility of transnational public transport, the use of a 'disability Card' outside of the EU, etc.). The external evaluator would not recommend in the first place to set up a separate structure as this might strengthen the divide, but to include this issue as a specific agenda item on the governance meetings and meetings of (relevant) working structures, like the LC.

4. Clarify the roles of the working structures

Various working structures have been set up to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan and the annual Action Plans (Working Groups, Commissions, Committee). In view of preparing the next Strategic Plan, reflection is needed on what the role/task is of each of these structures in view of what is needed for implementation.

5. The development of sub-strategies

To support the implementation of the new Strategic Plan, the development of sub-strategies would be useful, more in particular a membership strategy, a financial strategy, and a partnership strategy.

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation findings are presented according to the two priorities in the Strategic Plan 2020-2023, introduced by a paragraph with some overall findings.

4.1. SOME OVERALL FINDINGS

For the evaluation of the EBU 2023 Action Plan, the evaluation criteria have been applied to the various activities implemented. Yet, based on the analysis of the interviews and desk-research, some overall findings emerge, as well as factors that interfered with the work of EBU the achievement of objectives.

4.1.1. Factors that have influenced the results of EBU IN 2023

- **The downside of online meeting opportunities:** the availability of online meeting facilities meant that they were widely used, opening up opportunities for easier participation in meetings as was already the case in the past few years. Yet, it was also broadly acknowledged that face-to-face meetings are needed. The absence of informal interaction has disadvantages that are widely recognised. At the same time, interviewees also express that consideration must be given to the ecological footprint of EBU, whereby an equilibrium needs to be found between the advantages of face-to-face meetings and of online meetings (see e.g. also the reference to the proposal to have a sustainability charter as part of the new Strategic Plan with guidelines for meetings).
- **The war in Ukraine.** The war that started on the 22nd of February 2022, continued in 2023. EBU has undertaken several actions since the beginning of the war to support Ukraine, with the help of the members.

- **The upcoming EP elections.** For some interviewees, this puts EU affairs (again) on the map of individual member organisations, which is a motivator in being more engaged, and this in combination with the **upcoming EBU elections** for a new Board (February 2024), which provides also a stimulating factor for engagement.
- **Language.** This aspect is mentioned annually during the interviews, but is no less of an issue for that. Having information and understanding information is crucial for making decisions. Information in a language one does not understand has little value. The fact that the EBU website provides automatic translation is certainly appreciated by members. Moreover, many EBU materials/outputs are also already translated into different languages.
- **Professionalisation of EBU and a stable team.** The built-up expertise and professional way of working enabled EBU to be more present and making sure its voice is more heard. The current Office team of seven staff members is considered to be a stable team and this after a few changes (replacement of the recently hired project officer, the office assistant changed function to become membership officer). Moreover, interviewees praise the Director for his professionalism and enthusiasm to lead the organisation and the whole team for their continuous engagement.

At the same time, the expectations towards the Office are high, yet need to be put into perspective of available capacity. In the context of the further professionalisation of the Office, interviewees also refer to the need for a human resources policy, a diversity and safeguarding policy, but also to the necessary attention for an efficient and effective use of resources and an efficient organisation of the work in the Office.

- **The new membership officer.** In the spring of 2023, the office assistant embarked on her new position as membership officer. As signalled in various evaluation rounds, including this 2023 evaluation,

engaging members is a major challenge and having a dedicated position in the organisation to liaise with members was an important step. In the EBU FOCUS Newsletter of 2023, the challenges, benefits, and tools of members' engagement were presented.

The tasks of the membership officer mainly consist of:

- Deepening the knowledge, engagement and interaction with members.
- Increasing the EBU members engagement in democratic processes.
- Assisting governing bodies in implementing EBU events and actions.
- Liaising with members through circulating information to and from members, identify good / bad practices.
- Facilitating the functioning of the working structures (networks, Working Groups, Commissions).

Interviewees welcome this new position in the Office. Different expectations were formulated by interviewees in relation to this function:

- to stay in close contact with members.
 - to have soft skills, i.e., interpersonal skills, communication skills.
 - listening skills and empathy.
 - to be proactive and engaging.
 - to take care of the differences between member organisations.
 - to 'tie knots', i.e., to connect members who can learn from each other.
 - to encourage members to engage, e.g., in the annual conference, in the General Assembly, in working structures of EBU.
- **Relocation of the Office:** While the decision about a possible relocation of the EBU Office from Paris to Brussels, was already voted in the last GA (2019 in Rome), the decision was not yet implemented. During the interviews, a number of reactions was given. "The discussion is not anymore whether we will move, but when and how". Moving the Office to Brussels is seen as essential to being

closer to the action. Those interviewed recognised that a significant challenge lies in the human resources dimension. The staff plays a pivotal role in the network's operations, and excessive changes could result in detrimental short-term effects. Interviewees understand the importance of managing this transition with the required care. Clarity (regarding when and how) is crucial for the staff, considering the prolonged period of uncertainty they've endured.

- **EBU as a European network (and not only an EU-level network).** The question was raised again during the interviews on how to make EBU more relevant for EU and non-EU members, e.g., how to use the expertise of non-EU members optimally, how to make sure that the non-EU members can benefit in the same way from EBU? A few members propose to set up a specific Commission dealing with challenges/needs of non-EU members. For other interviewees a separate structure is not an effective way to strengthen the participation of non-EU members as EU and non-EU members can learn from each other.
- **The potential of the EU Disability Platform** connecting the [Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (as one of its flagships), the priorities of the Council of the European Union presidencies as well as the agendas of 14 DPOs (amongst others EBU and EDF). This is considered to be an improvement compared to the previous meetings of the High Level Group on Disability, which makes it a favourable condition for the work of EBU.

4.1.2. Overall findings

- **Membership engagement.** Engagement of members is important for the Office to have a better understanding of needs and priorities of members, but also their capacities. Taking their needs, priorities and capacities into account and building on their expertise, gives legitimacy, credibility and adds relevance to the work of EBU and enables to have a better view on what can realistically be expected from members (taking into account that member organisations are often built around a group of volunteers). Membership engagement

creates community and ownership of the network by its members. It is known that engagement changes over time, depending on needs, priorities, capacities yet also willingness to share. While in the past years, the membership engagement in EBU was very much questioned (and is still recognised as a challenge - see previous paragraphs), members' engagement showed positive developments in the past year. Members also make straightforward proposals to further stimulate their engagement (e.g., sending invitations for events earlier, sending requests for input earlier, sending notes of meetings shorter after the meetings, sending main decisions of governance bodies to all members, etc.).

Value the contribution and expertise of members is considered to be a key factor in the motivation of members to actively engage with EBU. It should be clear for members why feedback is or is not taken up by the Office.

Yet, a distinction needs to be made between personal engagement and institutional engagement in EBU, whereby the latter has a bigger chance to be sustainable. Therefore, involvement of the leadership of the member organisations in EBU is key (see further paragraph on the Leadership Exchange Forum).

To better understand the needs and priorities of members, a survey was launched before the summer of 2023 (one of the first activities of the membership officer). 29 out of the 41 countries responded. Considering that 5 countries did not have the ability to reply or had a limited ability to reply², this is a response rate of 80%. Interviewees referred to this survey as very positive action as it feels to be more involved when priorities and needs are asked. Yet, at the same time it was argued that interviews with members on a regular basis to inventorise specifically needs and priorities are preferred to have a better understanding what is happening at the level of members.

² Russia, Ukraine, Kasachstan, Belarus, Poland.

Strengthening members' ties is also functional towards their participation in the General Assembly (GA) of 2024. As of 17.11.2023, 29 countries have registered for the GA, and about 20 people (organisations) have declared their candidacy for EBU's governing body. This is a big difference with the previous Board elections. These two results are attributed to a convergence of efforts and circumstances.

Reflection is needed on how to engage in a meaningful way with members with less capacity.

- **Direct contacts with members.** In previous evaluation rounds, the importance of direct contacts with member organisations and visiting members was stressed on several occasions. The discussion lists are considered to be a helpful tool but can also unnecessarily complicate the communication. Short online meetings are proposed as a more effective and efficient way to e.g. gather input to formulate EBU's position.
- **Visiting members.** 'EBU on tour' was implemented in 2023, through visits from the Office to four countries: Ireland, Belgium, Spain, and Montenegro³. Members involved appreciated these visits very much as a way of connecting closer with the Office and to feel part of a wider community. The issue was raised whether to involve the future Board members in these visits, whereby the opinions are not uniform. For some interviewees, this is a necessity, while others believe that not everything should be pursued at once. The Office can start with these visits and at a later stage, Board members can join. Building relationships with members is considered to be crucial, e.g., to be able to put a face on a name and not having the feeling of having 'to talk to a discussion list'.
- **New dynamics in EBU.** The plea for involving more young people and women in EBU activities and especially also in governing bodies

³ On invitation by the member or initiated by the Office.

became stronger and stronger during the interviews in the last years. Different views were expressed in the last round of interviews on how to involve more young people in EBU's work:

- Use should be made of all opportunities, e.g. integrating the activities and results of the Youth Working Group into the EBU Annual Conference and GA, disseminating the results of the Youth Working Group during events in which EBU participates, etc.
 - To have a sound dissemination strategy for the results of the EBU WG Youth.
 - The presence of EBU/Youth Working Group in events that are not only addressing a BPS audience in order to break down the barriers.
 - The participation in ICC ((International Camp on Communication and Computers) is considered to be very crucial to make youngsters aware of the importance of self-advocacy at national level. According to interviewees, EBU needs to further stimulate and facilitate the participation in the ICC of young BPS people as this is a way to motivate young people to be active in member organisations.
- Based on organisational development work of the evaluator together with other networks, it can be said that leadership involvement in network activities plays an important role. Not only to strengthen institutional ties (following relationships that individuals within the organisation build with the network), but also to promote learning from each other at the organisational level (in addition to individual learning). This is why the **Leadership Exchange Forum (LEF)** is an important initiative. Participation in the LEF still remains limited in numbers, yet growing (25 participants in 2023, 20 in 2022), while interviewees do stress its importance. At the same time, during the interviews it was stressed that the LEF is an exchange amongst 'leaders' of member organisations, i.e. presidents and/or CEOs. "Chief Executives like to talk to Chief Executives". If this is not complied with, this Forum will take on a different function and overlap with other EBU working structures

- **Strengthened capacity of members: the importance of exchange and mutual learning** in the EBU network is again pointed out by interviewees. Strong member organisations create a strong network. “Immediately when you start to take actively part in services, events, campaigns of EBU, you become more interested in the organisation and its activities”.

Suggestions were given to focus more on **training** initiatives to strengthen knowledge about specific themes e.g., how to involve volunteers, training on campaigning and fundraising (considering this common issue for many members). Through training, multiple staff members from member organisations could be involved in EBU, giving perhaps appetite to become engaged in more activities. Yet also interviewees made the request to have opportunities **to present the own work** to other members “organisations change, and people change”.

- **Role of the EBU Office and the Board.** A few interviewees refer to a division between the political and administrative management of EBU: the Office should take care of the administrative part, while the Board should take responsibility for policy and strategic developments. High expectations are set for the new Board, to be “dynamic and engaged, open to members and flexible in processes”.

Both management and leadership are necessary: management to monitor operations in order to achieve the objectives; leadership to motivate and enable staff and members to contribute to the success of EBU, to have a vision and seize opportunities.

- **EBU as an umbrella organisation and an organisation of BPS.** Interviewees refer to the **importance of the advocacy work of EBU** at EU-level (as an individual organisation and in cooperation with other stakeholders) yet point also to the many topics that EBU is dealing with, trying to link current policy issues on the European agenda, new issues emerging (e.g., AI that impacts more in particular vulnerable groups) and challenges that members face. “We do not always have to repeat that decision-makers need to do this or that, but rather why it is needed. We must convince them and the wider

society that people with a disability are not an exception”. The fact that EBU is contacted by policy makers to express its view (and not only through EDF), is an important sign of being recognised as a significant stakeholder.

At the same time, some interviewees are of the opinion that a **widescale campaign** to involve members of members would be interesting and relevant in view of awareness raising. “EBU is an organisation of organisations, but also an organisation of BPS”.

- The **Latvian Society of the Blind has joined** EBU in November 2023.
- The importance of **cooperation with other EU-level networks and stakeholders** was also again raised in the interviews. The cooperation with ANEC (The European consumer voice in standardisation) was brought forward in the interviews, i.e., EBU is proactively contacted by ANEC, e.g., in relation to the work on accessibility of lifts. Overall, it is felt that there is more openness for the involvement of DPO in standardisation issues at EU level (DPOs not having the same means to lobby compared to the industry sector). Also the importance of cooperation with EDF was stressed again, while there seems to be two ways of approaching this cooperation. On the one hand, some interviewees emphasise the uniqueness of EBU and its profiling as a distinctive umbrella organisation. On the other hand, interviewees argue that strengthened cooperation with EDF makes the united voice of EDF and EBU stronger to achieve common targets.

4.2. EMPOWERING BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED PERSONS

Description

This first priority in the Strategic Plan is composed of the following objectives, which relate to specific areas of work (objectives) in the Action Plan 2023:

1. Improving Braille teaching and literacy (UNCRPD art. 9, 21 and 24 - SDG 4) – relating to Objective 1 (Promoting Braille and Braille literacy).
2. Every blind and partially sighted adult in Europe has the opportunity to have a fulfilling job (UNCRPD art. 27 - SDG 8) – relating to Objective 2 (Employment).
3. Every blind and partially sighted person has access to technologies that meet their information needs (UNCRPD art. 9 – SDG 9) – relating to Objective 3 (Access to Technology).
4. Every blind and partially sighted person has the right to participate in public life (UNCRPD art. 29 - SDG 16) – relating to Objective 4 (Participation in Public Life).
5. Blind and partially sighted persons, including children, are protected against discrimination in all areas of life (UNCRPD art. 5 – SDG10) – relating to Objective 5 (Non-Discrimination).
6. Every blind and partially sighted person has access to inclusively designed goods and services (UNCRPD art. 9) – relating to Objective 6 (Accessible Good and Services).
7. Every blind and partially sighted person has improved mobility (UNCRPD art. 20) – relating to Objective 7 (Mobility).

Analysis

4.2.1. Improving Braille teaching and literacy (UNCRPD art. 9, 21 and 24 - SDG 4).

EBU promotes Braille and Braille literacy as essential tools for the autonomy of BPS individuals. In times of new technologies, learning, promoting and using Braille undergoes significant changes. For 2023 EBU planned to:

- Develop a position paper on Braille in the 21st Century.
- Search for resources to organise a Braille essay contest.

This work is led by the EBU Braille Working Group.

On the World Braille Day in January 2023, EBU presented its [video on 'The Importance of Braille'](#), showing many life situations in which Braille

proves to be a valuable tool, enabling blind people to efficiently access information. The dedicated page on the website was especially in the month of launch well visited and remained in the top 10 of most visited EBU webpages for much of the past year. Besides English, the video is available in seven other languages ([Dutch](#), [French](#), [German](#), [Portuguese](#), [Slovak](#), [Spanish](#) and [Swedish](#)).

In September 2023 (on the International Day for Universal Access to Information) EBU published its position paper on [Access to Reading and Using Braille – a matter of the future](#). In 2022 a website/Forum for information about (the use of) Braille was created and hosted by EBU ([livingbraille.eu](#)). In 2023, 21 new messages were posted.

The Braille essay contest was postponed due to a lack of resources. During the interviews, many members clearly explain the importance of attention that needs to be paid the subject of Braille. Promotion and sensibilisation are important to stay part of the agenda of EBU.

4.2.2. Every blind and partially sighted adult in Europe has the opportunity to have a fulfilling job (UNCRPD art. 27 - SDG 8).

BPS people are disproportionately represented amongst the unemployed and when employed, they are often in precarious jobs. Employment is not only a right, but also an effective means of inclusion of BPS people in society. For 2023 the following activity was on the agenda:

- Contribute to the implementation of the EU package to improve labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities by developing guidelines on reasonable accommodation from the viewpoint of blind and partially sighted persons.

This action is led by the Liaison Committee.

The EBU Working Group “Rehabilitation, Vocational Training and Employment” and some desk-research by the EBU Office provided input into the [EBU Guidelines on Reasonable Accommodation for visually impaired employees and applicants](#), which were published in September

2023. Some interviewees assessed the Guidelines as rather (too) optimistic, yet they acknowledge that it was a challenge to gather the national views. Raising awareness among employers is considered an important issue when it comes to employment of BPS people.

The EC's draft guide on reasonable accommodation was presented in the [EU Disability Platform's subgroup on the Disability Employment Package on the 11th of May](#).

EBU participated in the **EU Disability Platform Employment Package subgroup** meetings in 2023 where:

- National good practices to facilitate the hiring of persons with disabilities were discussed. EBU pointed at the practices, among those presented in the European Platform for Rehabilitation and European Disability Expertise reports, that seem most important to promote EU-wide (January 2023).
- Employment targets were discussed for persons with disabilities as well as targets for participation of persons with disabilities in adult learning (March 2023). The message of EBU was to connect to the Disability Employment Gap indicator for the EU Social Scoreboard (cf. Eurostat metadata structure, which adopts a functional limitation, not medical, approach). EBU asked to eventually distinguish between sheltered employment and employment in public sector, social economy, and business economy, and also recalled its ask to disaggregate per type of disability.
- The EC draft guide on reasonable accommodation at work was discussed (May 2023).

Employment of visually impaired people was part of the discourse at EU level in 2023, e.g. during the [Swedish EU Presidency event "A Union of Equality: Disability Rights and Strategies"](#) (27 June, organised in connection with the EU Disability Platform plenary), the EC DG EMPL representatives referred to closing the disability employment and higher education gaps as one of the two main targets in the implementation of the EU Disability Strategy.

Interviewees referred also this evaluation round to the [ADVISE manual](#) that was produced to provide trainers with the necessary guidance to support young BPS job seekers as a valuable tool.

4.2.3. Every blind and partially sighted person has access to technologies that meet their information needs (UNCRPD art. 9 – SDG 9).

Access to technology is more than ever a key to inclusion in literally all areas of life. For BPS people, technology has opened-up many opportunities, yet at the same time, when designed in an inaccessible way, technology can also lead to further exclusion. Actions for 2023 included:

- Co-organising and supporting ICC camps ([International Camp on Communication and Computers](#)). Including preparatory meeting for 2024 (Action 7).
- Contributing to the development of a training tool on how to use the feedback mechanisms under the web accessibility directive ([UPowerWAD project](#)).
- Organising a test event for that toolkit in France.

These actions are led by the EBU Youth Network for ICC and the EBU Project Officer for the activities under the UPowerWAD project.

The EBU has forged a longstanding partnership with the ICC to foster the growth and representation of young leaders in national associations for the visually impaired. The ICC's objective is to educate and empower visually impaired youth about the advantages of using ICT and assistive technologies. Moreover, these camps aid students in navigating their career choices while providing a platform to connect with peers from diverse national backgrounds. These camps offer a diverse range of training and recreational activities, defining their essence. The 2023 edition of ICC took place from 17 to 23 August in Telč (Czech Republic), with the participation of thirteen EU countries, as well as Japan. The leader of the EBU Working Group on Youth played a role in the ICC by conducting two workshops focused on international mobility opportunities available through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programs, as well as addressing personal development. The ICC is evolving into an increasingly impactful event, thanks to its collaboration with the visually impaired community at both European and national tiers.

Interviewees view EBU's involvement in this event as crucial, highlighting the potential role EBU could assume in enabling member organisations

to participate. This is seen as an effective way to illustrate to young individuals with visual impairments the significance of both national and international advocacy organizations.

In the framework of the [UPowerWAD](#) (Users Power the Web Accessibility Directive) project (coordinated by the TU Dortmund University), EBU co-hosted a webinar on web accessibility together with the French NGO La Fédération des Aveugles et Amblyopes de France (FAF). During the meeting EBU presented a [methodological toolkit](#), comprising a repository of good practices and a model CV for training for users with disabilities to improve their accessibility when using public bodies' websites. During this meeting the Toolkit was tested with more than 25 people.

4.2.4. Every blind and partially sighted person has the right to participate in public life (UNCRPD art. 29 - SDG 16).

Equal participation of BPS people in public life is one of the most powerful means of inclusion and yet at the same time also a prerequisite for it. There are still many barriers to participation, e.g., when it comes to voting.

The activities planned for 2023 are:

- Further develop its AVA (Accessible Voting Awareness raising) activities by extending them to accessible political processes and not just voting (Action 9).
- Contribute to the development of the EC guide of good electoral practice to address the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Lobby for a reform of the electoral law to be in place for the 2024 Elections to the European Parliament (Action 10).
- Ensure that the voice of BPS is heard in the EU high-level event (Q3 2023) on elections, announced in the Democracy Action Plan.

These actions are led by the LC for lobbying activities and the EBU Project Officer for AVA.

First of all, it should be mentioned that besides the [EBU statement for the 2024 elections](#), various materials were produced in relation to accessible elections in the framework of AVA activities as well as the [PARVIS project](#). Interviewees refer to this material and recommend making this more visible (e.g. [brochure](#), [PARVIS video and podcast](#)) and prominent on the website. Furthermore, in 2023 an evaluation was undertaken of the AVA activities in the period (2018-2022) of which a separate report is available.

EBU participated (with various national delegations) in the info-session of the European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities, which is a one-day event hosted at the European Parliament in Brussels and serving as a platform to discuss the rights of persons with disabilities (January 2023). In February 2023, EBU participated in the Young Europeans-France roundtable to present its work on political participation for people with disabilities in the wake of the European elections in 2024. This opportunity was used to give visibility to the [EBU Youth Manifesto](#) adopted in December 2022.

Furthermore, in the run-up for the EP 2024 elections, EBU was invited by the Party of European Socialists (PES) to participate in their Civil Society Consultations by presenting up to three key priorities and ten other complementary measures (June 2023). The preparation of this response coincided with the preparation of the EBU statement for the elections. The first draft of this statement was discussed during an online LC meeting in June 2023. 18 member organisations participated in this meeting. After finalisation of the statement, the preparations started for the outreach campaign that will be built on the statement before and after the elections. The statement was published on the International Democracy Day (15 September), with a [press-release](#). In September 2023, leaders of 10 officially recognised EU-level political parties received this EBU statement, highlighting key issues for the inclusion of visually impaired people. Parties were invited to indicate how they intend to respond in the next European legislature to the expressed concerns of visually impaired citizens. A few reactions were received at the time of writing this evaluation report (amongst others the invitation from the PES

to present three key priorities – see above) and were discussed during the November LC meeting.

Part of this statement is the plea for European elections to set a standard on accessible voting, of electoral information and of post-election procedures as well as equality in the right to stand as a candidate. The European Parliament adopted an own-initiative resolution in May 2022, which is a key result as it is expected that indirectly it will affect elections in all EU countries.

Interviewees consider this EBU statement as an important effort of EBU to raise awareness about the accessibility of the entire election process and see it is a good start to work with it at national level. Yet, before the November EBU LC meeting only a few members expressed their explicit interest in this campaign. During the interviews, member explain that this depends on the strategy of their organisation, i.e., whether it is esteemed to be relevant to contact candidates or whether it is more relevant to address the elected politicians after the elections.

4.2.5. Blind and partially sighted persons, including children, are protected against discrimination in all areas of life (UNCRPD art. 5 – SDG10).

While there is a growing body of legislation in the field of anti-discrimination, including on grounds of disability, many BPS people are still facing discrimination in their daily lives.

In the framework of this priority in the work programme of EBU in 2023, the following activities were planned:

- Identify most problematic aspects revealed by the EU comparative study in the area of social benefits for persons with disabilities in different countries and set the grounds for campaigning about these.
- Continue to lobby for disaggregated data and statistics including in the SDG implementation (Action 24).

- Influence the constructive dialogue between the CRPD Committee and the EU so it reflects EBU's main areas of interest.

These actions are led by the LC.

The EU comparative study in the area of social benefits for persons with disabilities was analysed but did not lead to major issues for which a separate campaign was considered relevant. An identified issue are additional costs of living associated with disability. This issue is part of the EBU statement for the 2024 EP Elections.

In 2023 EBU continued its lobby work for disaggregated statistics. In a recent meeting of the [EU Disability Platform](#) (October 2023) data collection and indicators were on the agenda and EBU asked how to improve this. EBU is considered to be one of the most vocal DPOs in this matter. The Member States have not the same definition (some take only a health/medical approach to disability) and a few interviewees express that more pressure at EU level would be appreciated in order to push Member States to deliver on this. Disaggregated data are necessary to construct arguments.

EBU also contributed together with other DPOs (and coordinated by EDF) to the second review of the EU by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on how the EU implemented the UNCRPD (first evaluated in 2015). EBU also had direct contacts with the rapporteur of the Committee to contribute to the questions to be asked to the EU. Two of the three suggested questions were picked up by the rapporteur, i.e., issue of statistics (use of the Washington Group set of questions by Eurostat, in particular about disaggregating data by type of impairment) and funding of programmes on culture.

4.2.6. Every blind and partially sighted person has access to inclusively designed goods and services (UNCRPD art. 9).

In the vast area of accessible goods and services, often linked with new technologies, the very daily needs of blind and partially sighted people are concerned. Working towards fully accessible goods and services therefore can have such a direct and positive impact on concrete life

situations. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. Against that backdrop, EBU will:

- Release a handbook on audio-description and ensure its follow-up.
- Continue our campaign for conditionality in EU funding to the film industry for audio description and audio subtitling (Action 15).
- Develop recommendations on accessible payment terminals.
- Consider a campaign on accessible household appliances (Action 14).
- Conduct a contest to reward best practices in the area of e-commerce.
- Continue to monitor and promote the implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty within and outside the EU and help the EC assess the Marrakesh Treaty Directive building on feedback from the LC.
- Influence and test the accessibility of the new generation of Euro bank notes.
- Contribute to a possible consultation for the study evaluating the implementation of Art. 30 CRPD (sport, culture and leisure). Not launched
- Ensure EBU participation in the AccessibleEU resource centre.

These actions are led by the LC and sub-groups as well as by the EBU Project Officer for the Audio-Description Handbook and the Board for the e-commerce contest.

In May 2023, EBU hosted a webinar to present its [Handbook for High Quality Audio-Description](#), of which Part 1 was published this year. The aim of this EBU Handbook is to provide (trainee) describers, visually impaired editors, advisors, visual content producers, and individuals looking to engage audio describers with the essential resources needed to deliver top-notch Audio Description. It presents a set of quality standards that outline fundamental principles for achieving and maintaining consistently high-quality standards. Furthermore, this Handbook serves as an educational resource for universities and educational institutions. Many interviewees refer to this Handbook as a major achievement.

Furthermore, EBU responded to the EC public consultation for the three-year evaluation of seven EU Executive Agencies, including the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), the agency that manages the Creative Europe programme. The message contained in the EBU statement of July 2022 ("[Creative Europe 2021-2027: where are the incentives for audio description and subtitling in MEDIA funding to the film industry?](#)") was re-iterated, asking the EC to use the opportunity of this mid-term review to consider introducing some benchmarking in the regulation on how MEDIA funding is used to promotion inclusion.

A group of experts (the EBU 'Pay-Able' Task Group) was tasked by the LC to draft EBU recommendations for making pay terminals accessible. This Task Group met with the company Global Payments, as part of its effort to produce recommendations for accessible payment terminals. In June, the [EDF Microsoft Accessibility Summit](#) was attended by the EBU Task Group leader to announce these recommendations and to gather further input. The draft recommendations were presented in the November 2023 LC meeting. These recommendations are a big achievement, according to interviewees, yet some interviewees are assessing the progress as being too slow.

In November 2023, the results of the contest to reward best practices in the area of e-commerce were revealed. Members questioned during the interviews the added value of this activity. Only a few members participated in the contest, and it is proposed to review why this was the case.

In 2023 EBU continued its efforts to monitor and promote the implementation of the [Marrakesh Treaty](#) within and outside the EU. Albania ratified the Treaty and passed national reform late 2022. Support was offered to members in Ukraine, Turkey, and North Macedonia to further pave the way to ratification of the Treaty. In May 2023, EBU submitted a response to the EC's request for feedback evaluating the Marrakesh Directive and Regulation, drawing from substantial input gathered from its members.

In July 2023, EBU attended the launch event of the [AccessibleEU Resource Centre](#) at the European Union's Economic and Social Committee in Brussels. Funded by the European Commission, this centre is run by a consortium led by [Fundación ONCE](#) alongside the European Network for Accessible Tourism ([ENAT](#)), the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities ([EASPD](#)) Johannes Kepler University Linz ([JKU](#)) and the Spanish Association for Standardization ([UNE](#)). This Centre is considered as a tool for all stakeholders to join efforts to promote accessibility in all key areas of life.

EBU has collaborated with the European Central Bank ([ECB](#)), since the design of the euro in the 1990s to ensure that accessibility features on coins and banknotes were fit for purpose. This collaboration is ongoing. In July 2023, delegates from the European Central Bank (ECB) visited the EBU offices. In this meeting, the opportunity was offered to experiment with potential braille labelling for Euro notes. A series of tests has been implemented in 2023. Some interviewees mentioned that they had to read in meeting notes about the meeting(s) between EBU and the ECB, while they would have like to have a chance to contribute, based on their expertise (e.g., scepticism about tactile marking on banknotes and importance of distinction by colours and features).

The expected consultation for the study evaluating the implementation of Art. 30 of the CRPD (on sports, culture and leisure) was not launched.

4.2.7. Every blind and partially sighted person has improved mobility (UNCRPD art. 20).

Mobility is an area in which many impressive changes can be observed, and this trend will continue. The challenges, obstacles, but also the aids and means to overcome them, are constantly changing. This requires a constant effort to adapt and develop by, e.g., urban planners, public authorities, the industry, and, of course, blind and partially sighted people themselves.

Actions planned for 2023 are:

- Contribute to the development of the EU Disability Card (Action 12).

- Collect good practices on shared spaces.
- Organise its annual conference on the Erasmus exchange programme in Spain.

These actions are led by the LC, the EBU Working Group on mobility and the Organising Committee for the Annual Conference.

In November 2023, EBU hosted its annual conference in Madrid, focusing on making educational and professional experiences abroad fully inclusive. Current programmes available to encourage mobility for BPS people were discussed, as well as the importance of organisations of BPS in promoting accessibility and inclusion within the context of these activities.

EBU has set up a Task Group to inform the EBU position in upcoming consultations and advocacy around the legislative initiative for an EU Disability Card. In the period [10 February 2023 - 05 May 2023 a public consultation](#) was organised by the EC to gather views of service providers and the general public on the initiative, to collect opinions and evidence on the problem and various solutions to address it and to create a robust and evidence-based analysis. A synthesis report is published on the EC's website. It is noteworthy to mention that thanks to EBU, an accessible Word version of the questionnaire for the consultation was provided by the organisers. In March 2023, EBU participated in a related workshop during which EBU could explain its recommendations. The EBU Head of Campaigning wrote [a contribution on the Disability Card initiative](#) for the Social Europe magazine (March 2023).

In September 2023, the EC presented its proposal for a Directive establishing the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card for persons with disabilities. While a single legal instrument is proposed to address both cards, these will remain separate documents, as recommended by EBU. One concrete result of the EBU advocacy is that one of its main issues has been picked up by other stakeholders (EDF, European Economic and Social Committee...), i.e., that the Disability Card should play a role to facilitate the transition for persons

with disabilities moving their residence to another EU country. The matter was discussed in the November LC meeting and participants' engagement in lobbying around the adoption of the proposed Directive was asked. The text of the proposed Directive is assessed as good; whereby EBU suggested some amendments (e.g. extension of the subject matter and personal scope of the proposed Directive, for the Disability Card to transitionally cover persons with disabilities who move their residence to another Member State for longer stays and that the Card also will benefit non-EU nationals who are family members of an EU citizen and travelling/moving with them or if doing so on their own, exercising in that a right under EU law). While the EC may not have been receptive to this message (yet), other stakeholders (e.g., EDF) may pick it up and echo it in their own advocacy.

In March 2023, EBU received an invitation from the EC DG MOVE to address the High-Level Group of Experts on Road Safety. EBU's contribution centered on unresolved matters concerning silent vehicles and AVAS (Acoustic Vehicle Alerting Systems), aligning with recommendations for driverless vehicles outlined in the [position paper of September 2022](#). Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the risks visually impaired pedestrians face in shared spaces ("mixed traffic areas") and emerging urban mobility trends.

Interviewees explain that they would welcome more activity of EBU on shared spaces and that the messages conveyed by some members (reference was made to the work of the UK and Irish members) could be used. The collection of good practices on shared spaces did not take place in 2023 as no members expressed their interest on time to take the lead in this.

4.3. STRENGTHENING EBU AND ITS MEMBERS

Description

This second priority in the Strategic Plan is composed of the following objectives:

1. EBU has improved governance and working processes – relating to Objective 8 (Improved governance and working processes) and Objective 10 (Improved fundraising capacity of EBU and its organisations).
2. EBU and its organisations have improved communication and campaigning capacity – relating to Objective 9 (Improved communication and campaigning capacity of EBU and its organisations).

Analysis

4.3.1. EBU has improved governance and working processes.

Introduction

EBU strives to become more diverse and representative of its constituency at all levels of the organisation and recognises that this requires further action. In parallel, EBU endeavours to continuously improve its working processes and methods in view to increase member's participation.

Actions planned for 2023 include:

- Hire a Membership Officer and give structure to that new position.
- Work with an external consultant to develop a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) frame in parallel to the development of the next 4-year strategic plan.
- Prepare the 12th EBU General Assembly by seeking inputs from all EBU members.
- Encourage diversity in the nomination process for the next EBU Board (Action 20).

- Consider a study with a university on obstacles to diversity and representativeness at different levels of the organisation (Actions 20 and 21).
- Promote the use of the Solidarity Fund including its special section for Ukraine as a lever to support non-EU based members.
- Evaluate GEAR, ADVISE and AVA past activities.
- Hold the second Leadership Exchange Forum (LEF) meeting.
- Conduct webinars, supported by training materials, to encourage participation by people with low vision.

Led by: Board and Executive Director, Low Vision network

In the spring of 2023 a membership officer was employed amongst others to boost the membership engagement. In the Focus Newsletter of EBU, published in October 2023, it is explained that “Member engagement is a stimulating yet challenging mission as there is room for improvement in democratic and participatory processes, fostering mutual understanding, and facilitating joint actions. By doing so, we can truly represent the unified voice of millions of blind and partially sighted individuals across Europe”. The new function will deliver support in:

- Getting to know the members better, to have a better understanding of members’ needs, expectations, priorities and possible contributions.
- Creating procedures for representation, participation and active engagement of members from all geographical areas.
- Fostering efficient communication channels for sharing news and good practices.
- Setting up regular meetings for members to connect (webinars, workshops, training courses).
- Highlighting (outstanding) results achieved by members.
- Promoting cross-members collaborations based on specific interests.

In 2023 the activities of GEAR, ADVISE and AVA were evaluated by an external consultant and separate reports made available. The process of preparing the new Strategic Plan 2024-2027 was launched in 2023, with in parallel the development of an Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Framework to support the implementation of the new Strategic Plan. Both processes were supported by an external consultant. In preparing the new Strategic Plan, in the up-run of the General Assembly, EBU members were consulted through various channels:

- In the spring of 2023, EBU reached out to its members through a survey amongst others to gather input for the upcoming 4-year Strategic Plan. The survey aimed to get a more in-depth knowledge of the members' local structure, specificities and expectations. Among the questions in the survey, one focused on the priorities that the EBU should focus on in the future.
- During the LEF meeting (4-5 October) a first version of the strategic orientation was presented, based on the analysis of the survey data. Based on this discussion, version 2 of the document was drafted.
- During the Board meeting (14 October), this second version was presented and debated. A new version 3 was developed based on input from the Board members during and after the meeting.
- After further refinement of the content by the EBU Office, version 3 of the document was sent to all EBU members for their comments.

The study on obstacles to diversity and representativeness at different levels in the organisation was not implemented in 2023.

At the time of finalising the evaluation report, many applications for the new Board functions have reached the EBU Office, composed of a diversity of candidates (geographical spread, gender, age).

With the help of members, through the Solidarity Fund, whereby a special section was earmarked for support to Ukraine, EBU could undertake a number of actions, since the beginning of the war in 2022. The collective efforts could make a real difference, as evidenced through [testimonials](#) on the EBU website. Overall, the Solidarity Fund needs some revision as part of the new Strategic Plan. So far, it has been hardly used and not sufficiently advertised. The aim of the Solidarity Fund needs to be clear for all members. The statutes of the current Solidarity Fund were agreed in the GA of 2016 and phrase that the fund is intended to provide a mechanism for organisations of BPS people to seek support/relief if they experience financial difficulties in, among

others, paying their membership fees, developing projects, organising or participating in meetings.

Early December 2023, a series of three events was organised (coordinated by the Slovenian member) on low vision.

4.3.2. Improved fundraising capacity of EBU and its organisations

Introduction:

Growing and diversifying its funding resources, in order to implement and sustain its ambitious agenda is an obvious goal for EBU and its members. In this competitive, fast-changing and complex market, facilitating exchange of good and bad practice is considered very important.

For 2023 the following actions were planned:

- Assess, with the new Project Officer, the potential to attract private sector funding or other sources that are not EU funding (Action 29).
- Prepare and submit the 2024 grant application to the EC.

These actions are led by the EBU Project Officer.

There is consensus that diversification of funding is necessary for the future, also in view of ensuring the active engagement of non-EU members in EBU. Approaching the private sector was suggested by some interviewees, whereby ethical codes need to be considered. Also increase of the project work was suggested by interviewees. Herewith reference is made to EU-level projects, which might be implemented together with members. Furthermore, the system of fee calculation was raised in the interviews whereby the suggestion was made to connect the membership fee to the GDP of the country where the member is located.

Fundraising demands a specific set of skills (“Fundraising is a science”) and there is agreement amongst interviewees that it needs to be put on the agenda of the new elected Board. The suggestion was made to get the help of an external consultant in this. “It is an important but everlasting subject”.

4.3.3. EBU and its members have improved communication and campaigning capacity.

Introduction

Effective campaigning and advocacy go hand in hand with effective communication, both internal and external.

For 2023 the following activities are on the agenda:

- Release up-to-date information about EBU work and achievements through an EBU podcast, member's newsletter, thematic focus publication, regularly updated website, and social media channels (Actions 26 and 27).
- Increase the external outreach of EBU by strengthening our network of media contacts and journalists.
- Develop communication materials such as an EBU presentation in the context of the 40th anniversary and GA in 2024.

These actions are led by the external Communications Officer as well as by the Information and Communication Officer.

Analysis

Overall, members are (very) satisfied with the current communication work of EBU; both the external and the internal communication have improved (e.g., swift replies to requests from members, a more consistent stream of communication, more activity on social media).

In October 2023 the EBU **Focus Newsletter** was published online on the theme of membership engagement. Throughout 2023 11 members' **Newsletters** were published as well as 1 **press release** (on the Statement on the European elections in 2024) and 6 **position papers/statements** on various topics:

- EBU position paper on '[Analysis of the Proposed Directive for a European Disability Card and a European Parking Card for persons with disabilities](#)' (October 2023)
- EBU Statement on '[European Parliament elections 2024 'Stand for a Union more inclusive of visually impaired people'](#)' (September 2023).

- EBU statement on the European Commission proposal for a European Disability Card - '[Free movement for disabled citizens: the European Commission puts its cards on the table](#)' (September 2023).
- EBU position paper on [Access to Reading and Using Braille – a matter of the future](#) (September 2023).
- EBU [Response About using Braille for operating buttons of lifts](#) (pdf document) (May 2023).
- EBU [Response to the European Commission’s call for evidence for the evaluation of the Marrakesh Directive and Regulation](#) (May 2023).

The Newsletters are mentioned by interviewees as a good way to be informed about developments at EU-level and in member organisations.

At the end of 2022, a new series **Podcasts** started 'EBU in Action'. 4 episodes were released about social media (September 2023 – 98 downloads as of 06.12.23), challenges and opportunities of Artificial Intelligence for persons with disabilities (June 2023 – 149 downloads as of 06.12.23), accessibility of information of consumer products (March 2023 – 167 downloads as of 06.12.23) and connected and autonomous vehicles (December 2022 – 147 downloads as of 06.12.23).

Between December 2022 and July 2023, a series of 9 **videocasts** was produced by the Austrian broadcaster ORF Connect, called 'Views of Life' and [presenting interviews with members](#). The views about this series of interviews are mixed in terms of the added value they offer.

Overall, a large majority of members is positive about the external communication of EBU and report their use of the material provided as well as reposting on social media. Yet, at the same time some interviewees commented that the social media post need to have a strong content in order to create impact. "The focus should be on quality and not on quantity of posts".

Some members propose some additional actions:

- To organise experiments with informal online communities for e.g., quick questions.

- To have a regular (monthly) short update on what is happening in the Office, e.g., in what meetings did staff participate? With what results? What are staff members working on?
- To have an overview of the activities in each of the working structures (Working Groups, Committees and Commissions).
- To join Mastodon as many BPS moved to this platform.
- To have a more frequent but shorter overview of developments; currently a lot of emails are sent, and interviewees suggest to better structure this information (to avoid the risk of an overkill).

The use of social media has increased:

- In 2022 EBU opened a [LinkedIn](#) account with 128 followers on 02.12.2022. In 2023, the number of followers increased to 577 followers on 06.12.23.
- In 2022 EBU relaunched its [Facebook](#) page with 60 followers on 02.12.2022. In 2023 the number of followers is 271 on 06.12.23.
- The EBU [Twitter](#) account (X since the summer of 2023) was very active in 2022 (5.205 followers on 02.12.2022) and continued its growth in 2023 (5.327 followers on 06.12.23)

The number of total pages viewed on the EBU website varied throughout the year:

- 10.617 in January.
- 9.303 in February.
- 10.585 in March.
- 8.654 in April (with a migration of Google Analytics whereby there might have been more visitors than shown).
- 8.706 in May.
- 8.656 in June.
- 7.580 in August.
- 9.240 in September.
- 8.082 in October.
- 9.431 in November.

The most visited page throughout the year was the EBU homepage.

The Facts and Figures page was the second most visited page in 7 out of the 10 months for which figures are provided.

Furthermore, various Op-Ed pieces in Media Outlets were published in the past months:

- December 2022 – Social Europe: “[Accessibility can improve everyone’s lives](#)” – Jakob Rosin (president of Estonian Member).
- March 2023 – The Parliament Magazine: “[In Europe’s energy price crisis those with disabilities must be considered](#)” – Lars Bosselmann (EBU’s Executive Director).
- March 2023 – Social Europe: “[Equal citizenship for persons with disabilities](#)” – Antoine Fobe (EBU’s Head of Advocacy and Campaigning).
- June 2023 – Social Europe: “[Cultivating inclusion through EU film funding](#)” - Antoine Fobe (EBU’s Head of Advocacy and Campaigning).
- August 2023 – The Parliament Magazine: “[How extended reality tech could help visually impaired people](#)” - Jakob Rosin (president of Estonian Member).
- October 2023 – Social Europe: “[Equality for persons with disabilities on the move](#)” - Antoine Fobe (EBU’s Head of Advocacy and Campaigning).

In 2023, the EBU Director was contacted twice by journalists about EBU’s activities:

- February 2023 – BBC In Touch: “[Financial Aid to Ukraine; the Royal College of Ophthalmology on the Delivery of Medical News](#)”.
- March 2023 – Vivre FM: “[European Blind Union: L’Union Européenne des Aveugles](#)”

4.4. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2024

The main **challenges** for 2024 are related to

- Strengthening the **engagement of young people** in EBU in general, in delegations to EBU events and in governance and working structures more specifically.
- A **new Board** mirroring the group of BPS citizens in society (diversity in its composition). Furthermore, the new Board needs to be visible and known to other organisations.
- **Everything the GA represents:** the election of a new Board, the voting of a new Strategic Plan defining main issues, actions and clear directions for the coming 4 years.
- **Engagement of members** in the light of representativity, legitimacy and ownership. It needs to be avoided that EBU needs to rely on the capacity of a few (larger) members and that the expertise available in the membership is not fully used. Members do recognise that their engagement is important yet, they try to find ways to make this happen in practice (e.g., earmarked resources).
- **Avoiding endless repetition of problems** but focusing on finding solutions.
- **Prepare participation of members (and BPS citizens in general) in the EP 2024 elections.** It would be useful to have an overview of what the different political parties have in their programme in relation to BPS citizens and on which issues they have worked on in the current legislative period affecting the lives of BPS citizens. Cooperation with EDF on this is suggested.
- Yet also the **participation of members in the EP 2024 elections campaign** is considered as a challenge. Members explain in the interviews that the leadership of their organisation took the decision to approach elected politicians after the elections to influence the policy agenda, and not so much focus on pre-election campaigning.

The **opportunities** identified by interviewees for 2024 are:

- **Cooperation in projects** by EBU Office and members is mentioned by several interviewees. The example of PARVIS was mentioned on several occasions, also in terms of material/outputs produced that are still used by members. Furthermore, interviewees also propose that the EBU Office would inform the membership about possibilities to participate in European programmes (to send out call alerts).
- The **EBU Office as a broker** to foster cooperation between members. Therefore, a good knowledge and understanding of the membership is a key condition.
- The organisation of **regional meetings** between members operating in similar settings.
- The **offering of services** to members and to a wider public, e.g. consultancy on how to navigate Europe (EU and beyond).
- Offer a **combination of face-to-face meetings** (e.g. LEF) **and online meetings** (e.g., thematic exchanges, ad hoc exchanges) and revitalise working structures (making them more agile).
- The 40th Anniversary of EBU to be used to restate the position of EBU as key stakeholder in the disability community.

END OF TEXT