



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

SUMMARY REPORT

EBU Access to Culture Survey 2012

Mapping current levels of accessibility to cultural venues and activities in Europe

SURVEY OUTCOME SHOWS:

***(visually) disabled people's right to culture
poorly implemented***

Date: May 2012

Summary Report
EBU Access to Culture Survey 2012
‘Mapping current levels of accessibility to cultural venues and activities in Europe’

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Introduction: right to culture poorly implemented

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (UNCRPD) is one of EBU's guiding documents. Article 30 says:

“States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life ...”

On European Level, the Council of Europe Action Plan (2006-2015) on "Full Participation of People with Disabilities in Society reads:

"The right of people with disabilities as individuals to be fully integrated into society is dependent on them being able to participate in the cultural life of that society..."

EBU Access to Culture Survey of 2012 maps the current level of accessibility in Europe of cultural venues and activities. The survey results show that the Right of (visually) disabled persons is poorly implemented.

High time for action to improve the situation. This report provides the background for the EBU Survey, the political context of cultural rights and the results of the Survey. It calls for significant change and provides practical steps for stakeholders to take in order to make culture a truly accessible shared space for all.

1. Aims of EBU Access to Culture Survey 2012

1.1 EBU purpose

The European Blind Union (EBU) is the united voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe, protecting their rights and promoting their interests for full participation in social, economic, political and cultural life (www.euroblind.org).

1.2 EBU cultural beliefs

EBU believes that:

1. full participation in society requires full participation in cultural life (as much as in social, political and economic life)
2. full participation in cultural life is therefore inseparable from the implementation of the UNCRPD
3. adoption of Design for All principles for all cultural buildings, spaces, activities, programmes, events, exhibitions, services and information is the right and most creative; response to a world in which diversity is the norm.

1.3 EBU Access to Culture Project 2012

The EBU Access to Culture (ATC) Project is a small scale pilot project, which aims to improve the accessibility to cultural venues and activities for blind and partially sighted people in Europe.

As part of the EBU ATC Project, the EBU ATC Survey findings and recommendations will be widely disseminated in Europe and serve as a tool for advocacy and lobbying. The ATC Survey Report is a tool for societal change and organisational change in cultural organisations. It supports:

- disability organisations with advocacy and lobbying for the cultural rights of people with a disability
- culture sector policy makers, decision makers, funders and managers to take strategic action for the implementation of the cultural rights of people with a disability.

1.4 EBU Access to Culture Survey 2012

The EBU ATC Survey Report is the main output of the EBU ATC Project 2012. It provides highly relevant Europe-wide insights into:

- current levels of accessibility for blind and partially sighted people to cultural sites, events and activities,
- good practice
- national legislation and policies for access to culture ;
- barriers and scope for improvement;

1.4 EBU Call for Action

The EBU ATC Survey concludes with a **Call for Action for cultural policy and strategy change at European, national and local levels** in order to urgently address the over-riding conclusions of the EBU ATC Survey 2012, namely:

- the cultural rights of people with a (visual) disability are poorly implemented
- many cultural sector funding and project development practices discriminate against people with a disability.

2. Policy Context

2.1 Access to culture is a human and cultural right

International policies, including the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 27)** (www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/), clearly establish the cultural rights of people with a disability. These **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (article 30)** and **Council of Europe Recommendation R(92)6** (chapter VIII - section 8.5, www.coe.int) for:

- participation in culture *on an equal basis* (UN Convention, 2006)
- *lasting and significant improvements* (Council of Europe, 1992).

2.2 Progress in cultural accessibility is not being monitored at European and national levels

The cultural rights policies of people with a disability are hardly beginning to be implemented. The **Council of Europe**, the **European Union** and **most national governments** do not monitor progress in cultural accessibility for people with a disability.

2.3 The Council of Europe, the European Union and most national governments do not meet their commitments to monitor progress in cultural accessibility

These commitments have been made in:

- **Council of Europe Action Plan (2006-2015) on "Full Participation of People with Disabilities in Society"** (chapter 1.5, p 8 and chapter 3.2, page 13, www.coe.int)
- **European Council Resolution of 6 May 2003 on accessibility of cultural infrastructure and cultural activities for people with disabilities** (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu>, or search).

Such neglect is unacceptable and consigns people with a disability to the status of second-rate citizen.

2.5 Cultural funding discriminates against people with a (visual) disability

Most cultural funding pays little attention to the cultural equality of people with a (visual) disability. For example billions have been spent over the last decade in Europe on new museums and major extensions, most of which offer extremely poor intellectual and sensory access to collections to people with a sensory disability or with learning disabilities. With many of its most prominent new cultural buildings, collections and services, Europe is failing people with a disability.

2.6 Cultural sector research excludes people with a (visual) disability

Research in the cultural sector hardly takes persons with disabilities into account, making this group invisible. This invisibility in turn results in low levels of investment in cultural accessibility and design for all (also known as inclusive design) solutions. On innumerable occasions cultural funding is being spent without there being a commitment to high quality inclusive cultural experiences by people with a disability. This re-enforces the existing cultural exclusion of people with a disability.

3. Findings and Recommendations of the EBU Access to Culture Survey

3.1 ATC Survey Findings

1. Many countries do not have disability rights legislation that explicitly covers the right of access to culture.
2. 82.5% of EBU member organisations state that the cultural rights of blind and partially sighted people are being poorly or very poorly implemented.
3. There is a clear correlation between the existence of disability rights legislation and dynamism for cultural accessibility.
4. 65% of EBU member organisations state that key accessibility features are missing in cultural places.
5. At least 65% of EBU member organisations rate the impact of cultural accessibility on the quality of life highly.
6. People with a disability remain largely invisible cultural sector research. This hinders e.g. skills development needed in the cultural sector to set high professional standards for cultural accessibility.

3.2 Recommendations made by respondents for cultural policy and strategy change to significantly widen cultural accessibility

The respondents were national EBU member organisations and cultural organisations with a history of commitment to cultural accessibility. There was a strong overlap of views.

1. **Put rights legislation in place to guarantee cultural accessibility**
UNCRPD based legislation has to be in place to ensure the implementation of lasting and significant improvements in access to cultural places and cultural activities by people with a disability.
2. **Make accessibility a condition for cultural funding**
Cultural accessibility for people with a disability is to be a criterion for all cultural funding.

- 3. Adopt an inclusive budget policy**

Budgets of cultural organisations are to be inclusive of accessibility features for disabled people - and visually impaired people specifically.
- 4. Take responsibility for the right to culture**

Cultural policy and decision makers, cultural funders and culture sector Awards schemes are to take responsibility for bringing about lasting and significant improvement in cultural accessibility
- 5. Involve all concerned**

The involvement of all stakeholders is needed: public and private sector cultural bodies and organisations, disability NGOs and, crucially, people with a disability themselves, as well as cultural accessibility professionals.
- 6. Apply an inclusive organisation policy**

Cultural organisations need to transform into inclusive organisations, which involve disabled people and visually impaired people specifically at all key stages of project development also employ people with a disability.
- 7. Apply the Design For All principles**

Design for All (also known as inclusive design) principles are to be adopted for the design of all cultural buildings, spaces, events, programmes, exhibitions, products and information and marketing should be promoted.
- 8. Inform on accessible activities**

Information about the accessible cultural offer should be easily available in accessible formats locally, nationally and Europe-wide.
- 9. Campaign for cultural rights**

Advocacy for the cultural rights of people with a disability needs to be developed.
- 10. Raise awareness in society**

Societal change should start with raising awareness of disabled people's equality in schools.

The findings and recommendations of the EBU ATC Survey complement and strengthen previous needs analyses about cultural accessibility for blind and partially sighted people. In particular, the **Resolution of the St Dunstons/EBU international “In Touch with Art 2010” Conference “on equal access to museums, galleries and heritage”** (October 2010, Victoria and Albert Museum, London), developed by multi-disciplinary teams of experts identify the need to:

- Build and professionalise the skills involved in creating cultural accessibility for people with a disability
- Undertake qualitative and quantitative research, guidance and good practice examples about all aspects of the accessible museum and heritage experience for blind and partially sighted people, including audio description onsite and online; touch and multi-sensory opportunities; tactile models and images onsite and accessible online; easily accessible, reliable, concise, yet comprehensive information on the accessible museum and cultural offer; the power of technologies to provide accessible cultural experiences and inclusive exhibition design.

4 EBU Call for Action

4.1 Cultural rights: time for action is now

Time for strategic action is now. For too long have the cultural rights people with a (visual)disability remained a low priority, in spite of them being expressly mentioned in

Council of Europe and **European Union** policies and action plans.

People with a disability and older people must be part of the design solution. They are not the problem. Institutional attitudes are the problem. To break this vicious circle of exclusion, real change in the attitudes, culture, policies and funding of cultural organisations is required.

EBU calls on **European and national cultural policy, decision makers, funders and Award schemes; local authority cultural services and public and private sector providers of cultural services** to take rigorous action to implement the cultural rights of visually impaired people specifically and of people with a disability.

4.2 EBU Principles for Action

All strategic policies, plans, programmes and actions to be developed by cultural bodies and organisations at European, national, local levels are to:

1. be based on the fundamental belief that full participation in society requires full participation in cultural life.
2. adopt Design for All principles (also known as inclusive design principles) right from the start of every project development process, including the development of policies and actions plans
3. involve people with a disability and specifically people with a visual disability at all key stages of project development, as well as disabled and non-disabled cultural accessibility experts. “Nothing for us without us” is the EDF’s motto.

4. aim at the implementation of article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which recognises the right of people with a disability to take part in cultural life 'on an equal basis'.
5. identify concrete targets designed 'to bring about significant and lasting improvements in access to culture for all people with disabilities', as called for in Council of Europe Recommendation R(92)6 in 1992.
6. make cultural accessibility by disabled people and Design for All principles an essential criterion for all cultural funding.

4.3 At European level EBU urges action

1. The **Council of Europe** and the **European Commission** to develop a common evaluation tool for cultural accessibility of people with a disability. That this provides an analysis of strategic development needs, the barriers to cultural accessibility faced by people with a disability and existing and new solutions for providing cultural accessibility.
2. The **European Council** of the European Union to take stock of the current levels of cultural accessibility for people with a disability, which it was expected to undertake already in 2005, as stated in the **European Council Resolution of 6 May 2003** on accessibility of cultural infrastructure and cultural activities for people with disabilities. That this be of a strategic nature and be undertaken in conjunction with the **European Commission**.
3. The **Council of Europe** and the **European Commission** to monitor progress in cultural accessibility for people with a disability at regular intervals, publish findings in all relevant progress monitoring reports, such as the monitoring of the **Council of Europe Action Plan (2006-2015) on "Full Participation of People with Disabilities in Society"** and the **European Disability Strategy 2010-20**.
4. The **Council of Europe** and **European Union** to call on all their member countries to implement Council of Europe Recommendation R(92)6, as a follow up to the publication of cultural accessibility monitoring reports.

5. The **European Commission** to specifically mention the cultural rights of people with a disability and art. 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in any future **Accessibility Act or Directive**. Full participation in society requires full participation in cultural life.
6. The **European Commission Directorate General X (Culture)** to pro-actively promote the cultural rights of people with a disability and make a strategic contribution to **European Disability Strategy 2010-20** to enable its implementation.

4.4 EBU calls on national governments

1. To put legislation in place to ensure the social, economic, political **and cultural rights** of people with a disability are being implemented, and specifically article 30 of the UNCRPD.
2. To work with the **European Commission** and the **Council of Europe** to develop a common tool for monitoring progress in cultural accessibility by people with a disability.
3. To monitor progress in cultural accessibility for people with a disability, which is an intrinsic part of the implementation of **Council of Europe Action Plan (2006-2015) on "Full Participation of People with Disabilities in Society**.
4. To develop strategic policies and programmes designed to implement Council of Europe Recommendation R(92)6, closely involving national Disability Councils for national and equivalents where they exist on their development, implementation and monitoring.

5. To develop, fund, support and promote cultural accessibility research and evaluation tools for the benefit of users and for cultural organisations, with a strong focus on user experiences.
6. To develop, fund, support and promote programmes for the professional skills in all aspects of cultural accessibility for people with a disability, including design for all.

4.5 EBU calls on local authority cultural services; public sector, independent and commercial sector cultural services providers:

1. To undertake access audits of the physical, sensory and intellectual accessibility of the buildings, spaces, events, workshops, programmes, exhibitions and information; onsite, online, in outreach work with schools and with groups of adults, in outdoor performances.
2. To make an assessment/audit of the (local, national, global) cultural significance of their buildings, spaces, services, activities, performances, events, programmes and collections, so as to identify ways of providing an high quality accessible cultural offer which truly reflect their cultural significance.
3. To develop strategic policies and prioritised plans based on the audits/assessments mentioned above with clearly identified targets and aimed at implementing Council of Europe Recommendation R(92)6.
4. To provide disability awareness and equality training to all staff, so they develop the skills needed to implement the access plan.
5. To put in place all appropriate policies, procedures, practices and processes to becoming an accessible and inclusive cultural organisation:
 - Director and senior managers to champion the cultural accessibility of people with a disability,

- cultural accessibility to be an integrated part of strategy, budget and work plans and staff appraisals on all levels
 - involvement of people with a disability and specifically people with a visual disability at all key stages of audits and strategy, processes and project development
 - staffing policy to include a pro-active commitment to the employment of people with a disability, as employees, artists and consultants
 - work in partnership with other cultural organisations, with disability organisations and places where older and disabled people live, such as care homes and residential centres
 - be committed to being a learning organisation regarding cultural accessibility.
6. To use their enormous creative skills and knowledge to push the boundaries of Design for All (also known as inclusive design) solutions in everything they do.
 7. To write intellectual, sensory and physical access into every project and design development brief/description.
 8. To require from tenders for public procurement of services that they demonstrate their experience and understanding of inclusive design (also known as Design for All) for people with a disability and specifically visually impaired people, both in their submissions and in interview.
 9. To make the funding of cultural accessibility for people with a disability and specifically people with a visual disability, as well as Design for All an integral part of all budgets.
 10. To develop a professional culture of evaluation of cultural accessibility and share the learning with others in the cultural, disability and social care sectors.

5. Conclusion: cultural rights a shared responsibility

Cultural accessibility for all has to become an every-day reality for well over 80 million people with a (visual) disability in Europe (EDF figures for EU alone, www.edf-feph.org) and over 40 million people with sight loss (WHO figures for geographical Europe, www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets).

The EBU Access to Culture (ATC) Call for Action sketches out a roadmap for change. It asks that we as stakeholders take pro-active steps to ensure lasting results in the short-term and medium-term for the long-term. Only this way can Significant and lasting improvements in access to culture for people with a (visual) disability be achieved. The result will be an inclusive society in which culture is a shared space for all.

Blind and partially sighted people clearly state that full participation in cultural life is an essential aspect of life and a condition for full participation in society:

"Life without culture is like food with no spices. Culture adds flavour and pleasure to my life."

"Being able to enjoy art and culture in an accessible way is so important to feel truly included in society. Art and culture are great to be shared and enjoyed together with others."

Only by taking joint responsibility and making joint efforts can we achieve an accessible and inclusive society with equal opportunities for all to full participation in all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life.

Support and join the EBU call for action - make a difference today.

 EBU - The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

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End of EBU Access to Culture summary report 2012